



# The Raft of the Medusa

The story of a painting, the painting of a story

Scheme of Work  
Suitable for KS4 pupils

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[Image of *The Raft of the Medusa* available at  
<[www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/raft-medusa](http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/raft-medusa)>]

[For copyright reasons some visual images included  
in the original Resource Pack have been omitted  
here.]

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## Introduction

This scheme of work has been written and designed to fulfil various requirements of most KS4 Drama specifications. However, it should be noted that it does not link specifically to any assessment units. The essence of the scheme is to give the students a platform on which they can take control of their own exploration and development through the use/power of drama.

The first time he taught this scheme, it was for Paper 1, Unit 1 of the old Edexcel GCSE. As a suggestion, he has included the criteria from this specification as a method of assessing the work. You can easily adapt the tasks to suit your own exam board criteria if required. Similarly, he has also used the terminology 'explorative strategies', 'elements of drama' and 'medium of drama' from Edexcel. Regardless of the collective noun, the techniques will be familiar to all drama specialists.

One of the strengths of this scheme is that it has been written by David Herbert a drama teacher who has developed it with his students so we know it works. We hope that reading this gives you the opportunity to take ideas from another expert working in the field so that you can develop the activities in your own way and that it sparks off ideas for new activities.

The other strength of this scheme is the resources it is built around. A great story and a great painting and we are talking literally big as well as fantastically interesting. We hope that the show inspires you to use this material with your classes in the future and that the scheme gives you enough information to find your own resources. Begin with typing in "Raft of the Medusa" into Google.

This programme was created by The Company of Teachers which is an ongoing professional development project for English and Drama teachers in Rotherham to develop expertise through making theatre in education for schools. It also enables teachers to share their expertise with each other, so we would welcome any feedback on this scheme of work so that we can to share and continue developing this scheme of work as well as making new work.

## Aims of the scheme

- a) to introduce students to a fascinating, true story with multiple genres of sources
- b) to encourage students to consider universal human traits in different times and cultures
- c) to develop students' ability to generate ideas from a wide variety of sources
- d) to give students the opportunity to explore the link between historical/social context and performance

## Tasks

### 1. Stimulus: The word 'trapped'.

Explorative Strategy: **Still image**

Give out stimulus of the word 'trapped'. Groups of 3 create images of what it means to them to be trapped. Each takes responsibility for one image and physically sculpts others without telling them what the image is. Other groups evaluate and discuss effectiveness of image. Take photos of images. Students note down which images (3 in total) they found particularly interesting and why.

**Mark using criteria:** Clearly focus their ideas and suggestions on aspects of form and they will be shaped with originality

### 2. Stimulus: Outline of the story.

Explorative Strategy: **Spontaneous still image**

Whole class activity. Students are asked to imagine that there has been some kind of disaster and they are trapped in a confined space. Some may have fallen, etc. In 60 seconds students are to build this image. It may be appropriate to number students and to have them enter the image one at a time or, if a smaller group, say 'Go!' and see what happens! Relax the image but keep students where they are and read out the details of the story. Students must then re-create the whole group tableau but this time as the raft survivors, without discussion, one by one entering the image. Share ideas and discuss what has been created.

### **3. Stimulus: ‘Stages of Degeneration’, the summary of the story and Gericault’s painting “The Raft of the Medusa”**

Explorative Strategies: **Still image, thought-tracking.**

Drama Medium: **Use of voice, movement, spoken language.**

Elements of Drama: **Forms, climax/anti-climax, conventions, symbols, contrasts**

Discuss the story of the raft survivors’ physical and mental degeneration. Hand out ‘Stages of Degeneration’ resource. Students must select one Stage that interests them and create a moving tableau for it. They should first create a still image then bring it to life using any or all of the following techniques: thought-tracking, repetition, symbolism, soundscape, narrating or slow motion. N.B. students can feel free to interpret the Stage title either literally or in an abstract way (for instance they may want to depict someone’s head exploding!). However, their moving tableau must interpret the Stage title fully, rather than just depict one word. Students will ideally be placed into groups of 4 to create 4 images but each member must take full artistic responsibility for one stage. So each student creates and directs one stage and is used as actor in the other 3. They are only marked for the one they create. Take photographs of all of the still images and these can be used in the written portfolios.

**Mark using criteria** – ‘I demonstrate my ability to explore issues and ideas in an expressive, reflective and personal way’ and ‘I experiment creatively with forms, genres and approaches as a central part of the development process’.

### **4. Stimulus: Props.**

Explorative Strategies: **Role-play**

Drama Medium: **Use of props, sound, lights, movement, voice, language**

Drama Elements: **Action/plot/content, forms, climax/anti-climax, pace, contrasts, conventions, symbols.**

Introduce notion of the debris that fell/was taken from the pockets of the dying or was washed into the beams of the raft. For instance, it has been suggested that the red material shown in the painting in the hands of the highest waving figure could have come from the wardrobe of one of the rich women on board the Medusa. Organise students into groups of four or five. Give out bag containing memorabilia from the

raft (various bits of material or clothing items, half a tin as drinking vessel, pewter tankard, little trinket box/snuff box, etc, lock of hair, unopened letter, belt buckle, etc). Choose 2 items per group and students must create flashbacks of the moments in the owner's life when these items became important to him/her and then show how they came to be on the raft. This encourages huge amounts of creative thinking, since the owner of the item may not have ever been on the raft. They can either create separate moments or they can combine both items into one longer scene.

**Mark using criteria:** "Clearly focus their ideas and suggestions on aspects of form and structure and they will be shaped with originality"  
**and criteria:** 'I demonstrate my ability to explore issues and ideas in an expressive, reflective and personal way'

### **5. Stimulus: Lyrics to the song "Wake of the Medusa" by The Pogues.**

Explorative Strategies, Drama Medium and Elements of Drama: **It would be possible to include any and all of the listed skills into this task.**

Using the first two verses of the Pogues "Wake of the Medusa", students should consider three elements of the story: the horror of the reality facing those on the raft, the dreams and nightmares they experienced both on the raft and after they were rescued, and the dispassionate and critical viewing of the painting in the gallery. Organise students into groups of 4 – 6. Students must try to create a dream/nightmare-like piece that blends these 3 scenarios.

For instance, they might start the piece with the survivors lying on the raft, uncomfortable and barely conscious. They might create a soundscape of the moaning, the creaking of raft, snippets of conversation, etc. From the reality of the raft, they might decide to move seamlessly into fantasy so as one lies moaning, he might start to smile and laugh and wake up as if he is on the floor at home under his Christmas tree, trying to steal the last chocolate on the tree which is difficult to reach. The others on the raft become brothers/sisters/parents who laugh along/scold. The scene is happy and conversation and action is about family, presents, lavish food. Perhaps a piece of food is dropped on the floor during the meal and he drops to the floor to reach it. At this point the Mother says "leave it, it's rotting flesh" but in a loving voice. This is the beginning of the return to reality. The line is repeated as they all return to the floor/raft and the voice(s) becomes gradually harsher until the protagonists reawakens and realises what is really happening. As he picks up the scrap of food and looks up, he might be greeted by the sight of the others, now viewers in The Louvre, making derogatory remarks about the quality of the picture and how unrealistic it is.

The work would typically encourage students to use many explorative strategies, mediums and elements of drama such as role-play, thought-tracking, freeze frames, imaginative use of voice and movement, use of sound and lights, and a variety of conventions and forms. There are opportunities here to encourage students to explore differences in time and cultures, particularly if the viewers of the painting in the gallery are modern viewers.

See Task 6 for further detail.

**Mark using both criteria:** ‘I demonstrate my ability to explore issues and ideas in an expressive, reflective and personal way’ and ‘I experiment creatively with forms, genres and approaches as a central part of the development process’.

## **6. Stimulus: News report of plight of prison inmates in New Orleans.**

A BBC report can be found at

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/this\\_world/5241988.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/this_world/5241988.stm).

Explorative Strategy: **Cross-cutting**

Drama Medium, Elements of Drama: **It would be possible to include any and all of the listed skills into this task.**

This is the story of the inmates of a New Orleans jail left for 103 days whilst the rest of the population were evacuated. Using cross-cutting, students are to highlight the similarities and differences between the plights of those abandoned on the raft and of those in the prison. Students should feel free to use any of the resources previously used across the scheme, and thus encouraging them to meet the criteria about connecting texts in ‘Response’. Within the cross-cuts, action can be as stylised or as naturalistic as is desired. Typically each student should devise one of the cuts so that it is clear who should be marked for which ideas. Inevitably though, there will be much ‘organic’ development. Whilst this task will draw on skills that could be readily marked using Development criteria, the use of a clear form, multiple texts and an emphasis on structuring makes this ideal fodder for Response marking. Equally, this is one of the most obvious places in the scheme to really acknowledge differences in time and cultures. Students should consider differences in spoken language, references, prayers/songs, costume and/or symbolic props/costumes, etc. It will be equally important to give students the opportunity to discuss and evaluate this in order to meet the criteria about social, cultural and historical influences in the evaluation criteria.

**Mark using both criteria:** “Recognise and articulate a range of connection between texts and compare them in a knowledgeable way” and “Clearly focus their ideas and suggestions on aspects of form and structure and they will be shaped with originality”.

## Evaluation

Certainly it is possible to create whole session evaluations but it is equally viable to dedicate smaller amounts of time to on-going oral evaluation within each task, as well as the more formal written evaluations. Below are some suggested methods of evaluation:

1. Whole group discussions where teachers annotate students' comments
2. Whole group discussions where students record their own contributions
3. Teacher visits individuals/groups as they are working and asks them to justify their decisions/characterisations/ideas
4. Performances are recorded/ photographed and played back through PC and screen/interactive whiteboard. Worksheets are distributed and students self-evaluate according to the content of the task
5. Students are given workbooks and are asked to evaluate each lesson's input as a diary and on-going homework.

### Explorative strategies used

1. Still image
2. Thought-tracking
3. Narrating (possibly)
4. Role-play
5. Cross-cutting
6. Marking the moment

### Drama Mediums used

1. Use of costume
2. Use of sound/ music
3. Use of lighting
4. Use of space and/or levels
5. Use of props
6. Use of voice
7. Use of movement and mime
8. Use of spoken language

### Elements of Drama explored

1. Action/plot/content
2. Forms
3. Climax/anti-climax
4. Pace
5. Contrasts
6. Characterisation
7. Conventions
8. Symbols



# The Written Portfolio

## Contents

It is impossible to be too prescriptive here because each school/teacher will have their own way of designing the portfolios. Below are suggestions that I have used successfully and for which worksheets are provided. Feel free to use and discard as appropriate.

### **Final response to the scheme and ‘Stages of Degeneration’**

Final Response: The majority of the marks will be awarded here for the ‘Stages’ task. However I always encourage a brief piece of prose from students, responding to the connections between the texts explored. It gives them the chance to talk in general terms about their feelings towards the content and also to the variety of strategies we have used. Half a side to a side of A4 is normally ample.

Stages of Degeneration: This has been a consistently successful portfolio task that I have used for years in a variety of different schemes. Students annotate the photographs of their still images and then describe how the still image came to life. They must use subject-specific language and, if as reader you can envisage how the scene progressed and why, top band marks are justifiable. This task is especially popular with students who struggle with writing and the blank page!

### **Storyboard from props exercise or hallucination exercise.**

I only ever get students to produce one task in this section, since what I ask them to produce is sizeable. A fully annotated storyboard is a time-consuming and paper-consuming project but is one that invites good marks if done thoroughly. By splitting the storyboard into clearly delineated sections, students are less likely to omit vital information and lose unnecessary marks. In particular, the final box encourages students to consider technical elements as a vital part of the creative process. This can be a useful reminder if students have not been fortunate enough to carry out their practical work in a space where technical elements are present.

### **Written essay response done in examination time**

Much as I’ve scratched my head over the years and tried to devise a successful alternative to the long, written evaluation, I really believe that there is no substitute. In recent years, I have used a slot in the mock examination timetable so all students have been forced to work silently for an hour and a half on it. This has produced good results, especially for the reticent home workers. The provided essay plan/prompt questions are not rocket science and I suspect that most teachers will have their own equivalents that are at least as good as mine.

## Sources

### **“The Raft of the Medusa” – the story of a painting, the painting of a story**

In the summer of 1816, a fleet of four French ships set sail for Senegal on the West coast of Africa. On arrival, the passengers would start up a new colony. In charge of the fleet’s flagship, The Medusa, was Hugues Duroy de Chaumareys. Loyal to the nobility throughout the revolution, he had been rewarded with this prestigious post even though it had been many years since he had undertaken any naval responsibility.

After many weeks of apparently uneventful sailing, life on The Medusa was tense. Feeling threatened by his more experienced and accomplished officers, de Chaumareys had appointed a passenger as his right-hand man. The Governor-to-be of the new colony, Julien-Desire Schmaltz, was also exerting much influence on the voyage, eager to reach Senegal as early in the season as possible.

As the fleet approached the much-feared Arguin sandbank, off the West coast of Africa, de Chaumareys made a fatal mistake. All advice and logic stated that ships should take a course wide out into the Atlantic, sail well past Senegal and then navigate back up the shore; in this way, any contact with the Arguin bank would be completely avoided. However, due to Schmaltz’s harrying and de Chaumareys’ incompetence, the passengers and crew watched in horror as they kept on the most direct route and sand started to appear in the water. The ship ran aground.

Immediate panic subsided as they realised that, whilst the ship was letting water in, it was not sinking. After unsuccessfully trying to re-float it, evacuation procedures began. There was room in the lifeboats for only half of the assembled passengers and crew. De Chaumareys devised a plan to build a raft from the timbers of the ship, which would be towed behind the lifeboats to the shore, only a dozen miles away.

Embarkation proved immediately treacherous and once the 149 men and 1 woman (consisting mainly of soldiers and sailors) were aboard, the raft was so overloaded that it floated one metre below the surface: they were stood up to their waists in water. With some fifty people still left on the stricken boat, the lifeboats began to tow the raft. Progress was painfully slow and within two hours the order came for the tow rope to be cut – “we abandon them!” Those on the raft were adrift with no means of propulsion or steering. The barrels of biscuit flour were contaminated on contact with the sea water and they were left with a few barrels of drinking water and wine.

On the first night there was a mutiny, as those on the extremes of the raft tried to attack the officers and steal the provisions. The second night was the same and, as a result, all the drinking water was lost. Many men were killed and this, at least, allowed the increasingly lighter raft to rise to the surface of the sea, allowing them to sit and lay down at last. Soon the rationing of the wine became desperate and only on the fourth day, the survivors resorted to cannibalism. At first, they ate the dead but, as the wine levels grew alarmingly low, they began to kill off the weakest.

After more than two weeks and with only fifteen remaining alive a ship was spotted on the horizon – the moment depicted in Gericault's painting. It sailed by. The men crawled into their shelter to die. After a few hours one of them left the shelter and there was *The Argus*, one of the original fleet, and they were rescued. Three of the men died quickly, but the others were luckier.

Savigny and Correard wrote down their tale and Gericault, a young and passionate painter heard of it. He invited them to his studio and undertook the task of telling their story. It took nine months and pushed him to the edge of sanity. When it was first displayed in the Louvre, it was greeted with howls of anger and outrage. It still hangs in The Louvre today.

# Stages of a survivor's Degeneration

## Stage 1

- Enormous anger at others
- Intense anxiety and agitation
- Outraged at lack of control
- Terrified his mind would blow up
- Mistrustful of the motives of those trying to help him
  - Ashamed that others saw him distressed
  - Feared he would not be able to regain control
  - Felt he was failing at being a human being

## Stage 2

- Accepted his plight and grew comfortable with it
  - Felt he was failing at being distressed
  - Jealous of others, regardless of their condition
  - Ashamed that he looked forward to things
- Failed to see that those guiding him were doing so to see him less distressed
- Reality struck as to what his fate would be if not rescued

## Stage 3

- Found himself unable to think clearly
- Lost all dignity in front of fellow survivors
- Began to wish harm on other survivors
- Completely lost his normal moral code
- His distressed state was lessened and he became more delirious
  - Accepted death and made peace with it

## Portfolio Worksheets

### **1. Drama Coursework – ‘Stages of Degeneration’**

The aim: to communicate to the examiner exactly how you brought the tableaux to life and why

The quantity: 2 sides of A4. You should write about your own moving tableau on 1 page and the moving tableau of one other member of your group on the other page.

The layout:

Title (the exact wording of the Stage – for instance, ‘Began to wish harm on other survivors’)

Box 1: Draw a box of 15cm wide by 10cm high (the photograph will be stuck on here and can be annotated with speech if desired)

Box 2: This is the box in which you write most of the vital information. You must describe how the tableau came to life. Who said what, and why? Who did what, and why? Which drama techniques did you use, and why? (Repetition, soundscape, mime, symbolism, etc) What types of body language, tone of voice and facial expressions did the actors use, and why?

Box 3: In this box you should state how the moving tableau was structured – did it build to a climax, how was it paced? You should also explain how the use of the still image and the other explorative strategies enhanced your understanding of the conditions of those on the raft.

## **2. Storyboarding**

The purpose of a storyboard is to demonstrate understanding of how effective drama is created. By isolating images you have the opportunity to show when and how drama works.

A storyboard should contain either 8 or 12 images.

Each frame should be split into 3 sections:

**Section 1:** A diagram of how the stage was set, where people were stood and what was being said – stick people and speech bubbles are fine

**Section 2:** You should write in here. Describe which elements of drama are being used and how. For instance you might write in here about how voice was being used, how people were moving, explaining why a tableau was used or describing how the repetition was working.

**Section 3:** You should write in here. Describe how you would use technical elements and why. For instance you might describe that someone would be lit by a spotlight in order to show how isolated she felt. You could also comment on costume, sound, props and set.

For this task you must concentrate on the work you did for either the props exercise or the dream sequences. Using 8 or 12 images you must indicate what happens, what is said, which drama techniques are used and how the piece builds the tension to a climax. You do not have to stick to what you did in the lesson. If you can think of improvements, better ways of telling the story, interesting technical devices or better uses of language, feel free to use them. Remember that this is not a film storyboard – you have a stage and all characters must be either on it or off-stage.

### **3. Trapped Evaluation**

#### **Section 1 – The whole “Raft of the Medusa” scheme of work**

1. Which was your most successful task (the one that produced your best practical work) Why?
2. Which was the weakest task you did? Why?
3. You were introduced to a variety of different stimulus materials. How did they relate to each other? Were there links between the texts – how did they relate to each other?
4. What did you learn through the workshop: about the topic? About yourself?

#### **Context of the work**

1. You have explored the lives of people who are both mentally and physically trapped? Which of the stories related most closely to your life? Why?
2. Throughout most of the scheme, we explored the lives of people from different times and places. How did some groups make it clear that some of their characters were from other times or cultures? How did this work change the way you thought about people from other times or cultures?
3. In what ways are we all trapped? Write down any ways you can think of that your or anyone you come into contact with are trapped in their day-to-day lives?

#### **Section 2 – Evaluation of a particular task within the scheme**

**Your own work – choose a task you particularly remember doing. (If this task is the same as the one you have talked about in the first section, ignore questions 2 and 3 below)**

1. What was the purpose of this particular task?
2. What were the strengths of your group’s work? Why were they strengths?
3. What were the weaknesses? Why?
4. How did you try to communicate the story within this task? (drama techniques, use of language, body language, etc)
5. How did you use (or could you have used) technical elements to help communicate your drama?

**The work of others – concentrate on evaluating the work of one other group (you should have notes from this task – if you haven’t due to absence, just do your best to remember!)**

1. What were the strengths of their work? Why were they strengths?
2. What were their weaknesses? Why?
3. What did their work communicate to you about being trapped? How did they achieve this? (drama techniques, body language, use of language, etc)
4. Did they use technical elements (lights, sound, costume, props) to help communicate their drama? How did they help? If they didn’t, can you suggest ways that they could have used them? How would these suggestions have helped the drama?

## **Drama Coursework – Response – “Cross-Cutting”**

- 1. Draw a simple diagram/picture of each of your scenes within the cross-cutting sequence.** You may change/enhance/add to them if you wish.
- 2. Add key lines of dialogue in speech bubbles around them**
- 3. Describe how and when the cross-cut happened** (e.g. Bill said, “I can’t take any more of this; wherever I look all I can see is...” and then he froze and his brother, in Jamaica, came to life, mimed rowing his boat and said “...the open ocean. This is the life!”)
- 4. Describe how the use of cross-cutting added to your understanding of the plight of immigrants who feel trapped in their new country.** (E.g. As we cut from Bill in his car in London to his brother in his boat, I realised that previously I tended to pity people without cars. However seeing Bill stuck in traffic in the rain immediately followed by his brother looking peaceful and happy in the sunshine made me realise that not everything is great about our world and that immigrants might often dream of their former homes.)

**You may use a maximum of 4 sides of A4 paper**



## Skills teachers could use to allow the students to explore in more depth

The essence of the scheme/Edexcel unit is to give the students a platform for which they can take control of their own exploration and development through the use/power of drama. The following list of skills can be used by the students/teacher to further investigate the issues and characters...

**Hot-seating**

**Still images**

**Teacher-in-role**

**Thought-tracking**

**Improvisation**

**Music**

**Flashbacks**

**Conscience alley**

**Role on the wall**

**Marking the moment**

**Slow motion**

**Mime**

## Reading list

***Medusa, The shipwreck, The scandal, The Masterpiece*** by Jonathan Miles pub by Jonathan Cape 2006 (This came out after we had devised the programme. It is very good)

***The Raft***, a novel by Arabella Edge pub by Picador 2005 (not a great novel but interesting insight in to Gericault)

***Narrative of a Voyage to Senegal*** by J.B. Henry Savigny and Alexander Correard pub by The Marlboro Press, Vermont 1986 (original text written by survivors from the raft)

***Death Raft*** by Alexander McKee pub Readers Union, Group of Book Clubs 1976 (we used this a lot in our research, can only get it second hand on internet)

***The History of the World in 10.5 Chapters*** by Julian Barnes pub Jonathan Cape 1989 (one very good chapter on the raft and the artist)

***Gericault's "Raft of the Medusa"*** by Lorenz Eitner pub by New York Phaidon 1972 (the best art book to get on the subject)