

**National
Theatre**

The Book of Dust

Learning Guide

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About

This learning guide supports the National Theatre's production of **The Book of Dust** directed by **Nicholas Hytner**, which opened on **30 November, 2021** at the **Bridge Theatre**.

Our packs are designed to support viewing the recording on the **National Theatre Collection**. This pack provides links to the UK school curriculum and other productions in the Collection. It also has a plot synopsis with timecodes to allow you to jump to specific sections of the play.

Here you'll find all the information you need to enable you to study the production and write about it in detail. This includes notes about all the key elements from performance style to design. You'll also find pointers for further research.

Background Information

Recording Date – 7 February, 2022

Location – The Bridge Theatre

Age Recommendation – 12+

Cast:

Hyena / Stelmara (Asriel's Daemon) / Sister Paulina.....Julie Atherton

Mrs Polstead / Sister Maria Therese / Witch.....Holly Atkins

Mother Superior / Professor Cluny Wendy Mae Brown

Gerard Bonneville Pip Carter

Malcolm Polstead Samuel Creasey

Alice Parslow Ella Dacres

Marisa Coulter Ayesha Dharker

Asta (Malcolm's Daemon)..... Olivia Le Anderson

Dr Hannah Relf Naomi Frederick

CCD Man / Drunk / Gold Monkey..... Richard James-Neale

Lord Asriel / George Boatwright..... John Light

Sister Fenella / Doris Whicher Dearbhla Molloy

Eric / CCD Man / Professor Papadimitriou....Tomi Ogbaro

Robert Luckhurst / Jesper (Hannah Relf's Daemon) / Charlie Boatwright
..... Sid Sagar

Lord Nugent / Envoy of the Magisterium / Headmaster...Nick Sampson

Ben (Alice's Daemon) / Andrew Sky Yang

Lyra.....Adiya, Khalil, Rowan, Zakhai and others

Creative Team:

Director Nichloas Hytner

Co-Director..... Emily Burns

Co-Director and Movement Director James Cousins

Designer Bob Crowley

Puppet Designer and Director..... Barnaby Dixon

Video Designer Luke Halls

Associate Video Designer Zakk Hein

Lighting Designer Jon Clark

Sound Designer Paul Arditti

Composer Grant Olding

Fight Director Kate Waters

Illusions Director Filipe J. Carvalho

Puppetry Director..... Glenn Holberton

Teaching Information

This production is particularly suitable for:

- Anyone with an interest in adaptations of novels for the stage.
- Anyone who is studying, or has an interest in, the novels of Phillip Pullman.
- Drama students who are studying Nicholas Hytner as a contemporary theatre practitioner as part of an A Level course.
- Anyone with an interest in puppetry.
- Production Arts students with an interest in lighting and video design.

In particular, you might like to explore:

- The use of projection to create the many different scenes and locations in the play.
- The use of puppets to represent daemons in the production.
- This production alongside other productions directed by Nicholas Hytner. There are several available on the NT Collection, including *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *One Man, Two Guvnors* and *London Assurance*.

Production Notes

The following notes have been compiled to help guide you through the significant design and performance aspects as you watch the production, or to remind you of them after you have watched it. You may also want to make your own notes and form your own opinions on the effectiveness of these aspects as you explore the production.

Contextual Information:

- Nicholas Hytner directed an adaptation of *His Dark Materials* when he was Artistic Director of the National Theatre. This new production of the prequel to the *Northern Lights* trilogy took place at Hytner's new theatre, the Bridge Theatre in London.
- Puppetry has become a significant part of mainstream theatre with a number of literary adaptations adopting puppetry as a key storytelling tool. This includes *Life of Pi*, the NT's *Ocean at the End of the Lane*, and a number of different productions at the National Theatre including *War Horse* and *The Light Princess*.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Set

- The design uses a thrust configuration, which means that many of the audience are very close to the action. This would be an exhilarating experience because the action is so fast paced.
- The stage design is non-naturalistic. This reflects the style of the performance but also the fantasy-based genre of the original novel.
- An important item of set is Malcolm's canoe, which is full size. It generally operates remotely, but it is sometimes manipulated by puppeteers and members of the ensemble, for example when it gets caught in the storm. Two operators use ropes (one stage right and one stage left) to move the canoe as if it is caught in a current. The canoe also provides another surface on to which images, such as fast-moving water, are projected.
- There are a number of flats, both stage right and left of the upstage area. These are highly versatile as they provide a surface on which scenic images and videos are projected. This prevents the transitions between the many different locations becoming too slow. Instead, it mirrors the speed at which a reader would have moved through the novel on which the play is based.
- The Trout Inn includes a number of small round tables with small table lamps, and stools placed at intervals on the stage. These are carried on and off stage by members of the ensemble.
- Hannah's home is created using a leather chair with a red cushion, and a small side table with a lamp. Bookshelves are projected on the upstage flats. Later in the play, minimal set changes, such as placing three piles of large cardboard boxes, suggest the pharmacy that Malcolm and Alice loot in Act 2.
- The kitchen of the Priory is created by using a small freestanding range which is placed centre stage.
- The scene in Westminster, which we see in the second scene of Act 2, appears cavernous, with archways and lanterns shown via projection. Haze is also used to create a sinister sense of mystery.

- At Lord Murdstone's house (Act 2), the table is dressed with a roast turkey, and a lit candelabra. It suggests luxury, and a house whose owner has only left temporarily.
- The refugee camp where Malcolm finds George Boatwright, is suggested by a large metal brazier, with grey blankets and a thin mattress on the floor on which Malcolm settles to sleep.
- Small splashes of colour are used to brighten scenes in which the main colour palette is grey. For example, when Lord Asriel is in Greenwich, a pink umbrella is used to provide a spot of bright colour.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Costume

- Malcolm wears a knitted tank top with patterned red and grey stripes, brown trousers and a brown shirt underneath the tank top. He also sometimes carries a brown leather satchel, reminding us that he is actually of school age (he is played by an adult actor). He also has a brown anorak coat.
- Mrs Polstead, Malcolm's mother, wears a brown dress and a pale apron. Her hairband matches her dress. She wears flat lace-up shoes.
- Alice wears a blue headscarf, blue jeans and a white button-up shirt, with a khaki jacket.
- Hannah wears brown high waisted and wide-legged trousers, a burgundy $\frac{3}{4}$ length-sleeved blouse and brown brogue shoes. Later, she also wears a brown overcoat. She wears her hair in a chignon and looks stereotypically 'academic'.
- Bonneville wears a black polo-neck jumper with grey trousers, black boots and a grey patterned scarf. To suggest that he is carrying something important and that he travels regularly/widely, he uses a khaki canvas rucksack.
- Nugent wears a white shirt, with burgundy scarf and tie. His overcoat is long and grey.
- The puppeteers wear dungarees and grey long-sleeved t-shirts. They also wear grey beanie hats. Whilst the puppeteers do not need to be hidden from the audience's sight, their costume means that they do not distract from the action of the puppet, which is often a lot smaller than them.
- Lord Asriel wears a wool-lined leather flying coat, with a green scarf. His trousers are brown, with a grey shirt and grey boots. Later in the play, in Greenwich, he wears a white shirt with cream trousers.

Mrs Coulter's costumes appear highly tailored and much more structured than those worn by the regulars at The Trout Inn. Such structure makes her appear imposing, as do her black leather gloves. This is a typical way in which costume design suggests a character is a villain. The textures of her clothes are also suggestive of being intimidating. At Westminster she wears a fitted dress with a

small dog-tooth check, with a black fur coat (which, as well as suggesting harm to animals, enlarges her silhouette), and a hat with a small veil. She sometimes wears a woollen cape-style coat when visiting Hannah. When she is found with Lord Asriel, she wears a red silk dress/negligee with a man's shirt over the top (the suggestion is that it belongs to Asriel, with whom she is spending the night). She still wears her black high heeled shoes here, and, although her hair is now worn loose, she is still imposing because of this choice.

- In the scenes that take place in a school, Malcolm and his fellow students only need a black blazer with red piping on lapels and cuffs, to suggest uniform. This is in keeping with the non-naturalistic style of the production. Costume choices such as these also support the set design in the suggestion of where scenes take place and is used again with basic choices of religious gowns and round wire glasses for Wharton when he meets Mrs Coulter at Westminster.
- The Nuns at the Priory of the Sisters of Holy Obedience wear severe black robes, with stiff, angular cornette (a style of nun's wimple which has upturned corners). These are illuminated by very small lights within them. The white bibs over the nuns' robes are also very angular. It is not a welcoming place.
- Tilda Vassara makes a brief appearance towards the end of the play: she wears a tall crown of red berries. She wears a grey, long-sleeved and textured dress. The stage directions are that she "seems to walk on water". It is important that the length and movement of the dress helps achieve this effect.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Lighting

- In this production there needs to be a careful balance between lighting and video/image projection. Flats, the cyclorama, and the floor are all surfaces on to which video and images are projected. The lighting therefore needs to complement that, ensuring that the details are fully visible to the audience and not washed out by overly intense lighting.
- One of the main locations is The Trout Inn. The projection for the external part of the pub is an ivy-covered wall, with a traditional pub sign. Another indication of the Oxford setting is the projection image of window frames and the spires of Oxford for which the city is famous. Godstow Priory is represented by projections of a building stage right, and the exterior of a chapel stage left. There are also tree branches and a blue sky.
- The texture of the floor can appear to change due to the projections: for example, at one point it looks like a cobbled street, whereas at other points we can see the water in which Malcolm is rowing his boat.
- Follow spots are used when Malcolm is talking to Bonneville about the approaching CDC boats. At other times, harsh spotlights are used to suggest search lights. These lights move and can be very intense for the audience sitting in the auditorium who may feel that they too are in danger of being caught in these lights!
- Birdies are used around the edge of the thrust stage – you will see these in particular during the refugee camp scene. This scene also uses a dark indigo hue of lighting to suggest nighttime in a hidden location.
- In the Priory of the Sisters of Holy Obedience, the boxes in which babies sleep are also lit from within, suggesting the optimism of new life. There are also strong white spotlights from above, in this scene.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Sound

- Recorded sound effects assist high-paced transitions and create mood and atmosphere. Storm sound effects (rain, thunder etc.) are used to complement the projections, for example when the floods happen and the audience can see fast-running water projected on to the stage. Recorded sound is also used to suggest Lyra and other babies are crying in the Priory, as well as the sound of trees hitting people and boats during the storm. Gyrocopters (a similar concept to helicopters) can also be heard as recorded effects.
- During the storm, we hear water rushing, the sound of wooden building structures creaking and the noise of rafters collapsing and glass breaking. This is also combined with the sound of the hyena daemon laughing, which makes it even more disturbing for the audience.
- Whilst the dialogue is amplified through radio mics, the use of microphones also assists in creating tension – for example the sound of the CDC boats looking for people and issuing instructions over a loud hailer/speaker.
- One of the most disturbing uses of sound is the echoing, clanging sound that is used when Bonneville attacks his own daemon (the hyena). This makes the notion of harming something that is connected to one's own self even more uncomfortable for the audience.
- Music is used to create drama too: underscoring is used to highlight tension and danger, for example the discordant sounds during the scene with Bonneville at Lord Murdstone's house.
- The instrumental score of this production is very filmic – it is particularly rousing during dramatic storm scenes. The score is used right from the beginning to create setting, with a gentle piano and strings score.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Wigs, Hair Make-Up

- Natural hair and make-up is used for all of the characters. Considering that this is a highly visual production in terms of projection and puppetry, overtly stylised hair and make-up could be a distraction to the visual aesthetic of the piece. Villainous characters tend to have sterner, more severe hair styles but nothing is extreme or unnatural.



Production Notes

Key Design Elements: Puppetry

- Puppets play a vital role in this production, with all of the daemons represented by puppets. Several different kinds of puppets are used, some use elements of Bunraku puppetry to operate larger puppets (such as the hyena and snow leopard).
- Smaller daemons, such as Malcolm's (called Asta) are operated by hand, with a puppeteer operating it at floor level as well as allowing the puppet to move higher and interact physically with the human character. These puppets appear to be paper (they are 3D printed), with a small light inside which lights up the head of whichever animal-form the daemon takes. They are like paper lanterns in their appearance – at once appearing delicate but also robust and highly animated. Many of the smaller puppets (for example Hannah's daemon) are handheld, and operated with rods, or by the actor moving joints with their fingers.
- The puppeteers ensure that their gaze is directed at the puppet, which is a key element of successful puppeteering. Because the puppeteer is intentionally on view to the audience, the puppeteer helps direct the audience's focus to what the puppet is doing, rather than the person operating it.
- Lord Asriel's puppet is a snow leopard. Mrs Coulter's daemon is a golden monkey. At the beginning of the play, we see that Malcolm's daemon, Asta, has not settled in her true form, so we see her as a mouse (a very small finger puppet), a lizard (operated by Malcolm by holding it in both hands) and a kingfisher, with wing mechanisms.
- Mrs Polstead's daemon is a badger. The people operating the puppets provide the voice for the daemon.
- There is a puppet version of the canoe which suggests the boat rushing on even stronger waves than we have previously seen in the play, after Tilda Vassara has vanished.

Production Notes

Performance Style

- Notice that many of the Oxford-based characters have the regional accent of the area. Other characters, such as Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter, have an accent which might be considered Received Pronunciation, or at least a 'high-class' or authoritative accent.
- Throughout the play there are a number of moments of comedy, for example some of Malcolm's reactions. Comic timing is extremely important, particularly when it is used to create comic relief in contrast to the high drama and peril of other scenes in the play.
- There is some direct address to the audience, particularly by Malcolm. In act one scene two Malcolm talks about his canoe, which is named 'La Belle Sauvage'.



Production Notes

Key Moments

- The opening scene of the play establishes the 'rules' needed for the audience to engage with the style of the play. This is particularly important in performances which include puppetry, when the audience needs to suspend their disbelief. The use of projections rather than physical pieces of set also requires acceptance from the audience and so the opening scene, which starts at 00.00.01 and ends 00.12.51, is a helpful scene to explore.
- The moment where Gerard Bonneville begins to develop a relationship with Alice begins at 00.26.55. Alice's monologue about her family background is followed by Bonneville's attempt to charm her. 00.37.30 is where the scene transitions to Malcolm visiting Hannah. Another interesting aspect of this extract from the production is how the daemons are animated to show reactions to events *and* to demonstrate their relationships with their human forms. For example, look at how Malcolm and Asta interact, Bonneville and the hyena, and the way in which Pantalaimon interacts with the (live) baby. The full extract ends at 00.42.06 as Malcolm leaves Hannah.
- Mrs Coulter's visit to the Priory takes place from 01.02.05 and finishes with the interval at 01.12.25. This is an excellent extract to watch to see how the various design elements are integrated and to note how tension and suspense are created, particularly with the highly dramatic storm and the movement of the canoe. There are moments of comedy in this section, as Lyra is discovered in the oven at the Priory.
- The storm continues at the beginning of Act 2 – the placing of the canoe upstage suggests that the canoe has continued to move during the time the audience have had their interval!
- The interaction between puppets, particularly the rivalry of daemons at Westminster, can be seen between 01.12.27 – 01.22.49. We also see the developing relationship between Alice and Malcolm in the early parts of this
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extract, and the way in which projections help the audience follow the transition between scenes.

- Andrew's betrayal scene begins with Alice and Malcolm in the canoe at 01.32.35 and finishes 01.45.02. Note in this scene how the relationships between Alice and Malcolm, Malcolm and George, and the ensemble work as the betrayal becomes apparent. You can also see the way in which the lights within the puppets must be balanced carefully against the stage lighting.



Plot Synopsis with Timecodes

Act 1, Scene 1: 00:02:07

The Trout Inn.

A typically British “traditional” pub. Rain pours down. We are introduced to 12-year-old Malcolm Polstead, and his daemon, Asta. His mother, Mrs Polstead, runs the popular pub for all the local residents. A new election result has unsettled the residents, and the crowd debates. We learn that a daemon is an animal extension of its person, but it is debated whether the daemon reflects the person’s character, or if a daemon is an external manifestation of the person’s soul.

Two strangers enter the pub, Lord Nugent and Robert Luckhurst, with their daemons. Everyone knows who they are, they are men of importance, though they are looking for an inconspicuous place to have a private conversation. Malcom overhears them talking about the arrival of a dangerous delivery, taken in by the nuns at the Priory. They worry that Malcolm has overheard their conversation, but given that he is so young, they dismiss their worries. But though Malcolm is young, he is not stupid, he is incredibly bright for his age.

Enter Alice, a 15-year-old at the pub who loathes Malcom, and teases him about not having had a girlfriend, she calls him “professor.” They fight until Mrs Polstead breaks them apart, and closes the pub. She sends Malcolm to the Priory to check to see if they need any supplies.

Act 1, Scene 2: 00:08:05

Canoe.

We are introduced to Malcom's canoe, which he has named "La Belle Sauvage". Malcolm is a proud boat owner and uses his canoe for his travels from the Trout Inn. We are introduced to Benedicta, the Mother Superior and head nun at The Priory. She is praying for help in these troubled and challenging new times.

Act 1, Scene 3: 00:09:25

The Priory

The nuns are working in The Priory gardens. Malcolm bursts into the garden, hoping to have arrived just in time for dinner. The Nuns are on edge, hoping that Malcom will not notice their hidden secret. Malcolm, however, blindly walks over to one of the garden wheelbarrows, where he discovers a baby, the perfect baby Lyra, and her daemon, Pantalaimon. The sisters huddle around, scared that someone else might notice the commotion. Malcolm guesses that the baby was brought to the sisters by Lord Nugent, the Lord Chancellor. Sister Benedicta makes Malcolm swear on his life that he keeps this a secret. She reveals that baby Lyra was in the care of the courts, but Lord Nugent had removed her, and made the sisters swear not to tell anyone, but they themselves do not know why. It seems that no one can be trusted. Malcolm promises not to tell their secret.

Act 1, Scene 4: 00:14:45

Canoe.

Malcolm climbs back into his canoe and goes birdwatching on the river. He spots Luckhurst and his daemon under a tree. They are being watched by two members of the CCD. The CCD are dressed in long black overcoats with red arm bands with bold CCD lettering. Luckhurst's daemon climbs into the tree to retrieve something, the size of a nut, but drops it by accident. The CCD overpower Luckhurst and his daemon and drag them away. Once the coast is clear, Astra flies to retrieve the lost item. A carved wooden acorn. Inside the acorn, is a message:

MALCOLM There's a paper rolled up inside it. It's a message.

[reads] "Urgent. Top priority. Please enquire through the alethiometer if there is any connection between the particle Rusakov has discovered and the phenomenon called *Dust*. The other side are taking a significant interest. Tread carefully".

No signature.

Malcom and Astra note that "the other side" must mean the CCD, and "Dust" cannot mean regular dust. They need to find out more information and decide to ask a teacher at school.

Act 1, Scene 5 00:18:25

School.

Malcolm's plans to find more information are interrupted by an important visit to the school. Enter Mrs Coulter, beautifully dressed, with her golden monkey daemon, from "The League of Saint Alexander".

Mrs Coulter explains that the Holy Church, which has many parts, together make up "The Magisterium". Mrs Coulter is the founder of the League of Saint Alexander, founded upon the story of a boy named Alexander, who became a Christian, and used a lantern as a beacon to guide soldiers to find those who were not Christians, including his parents and those they sheltered, who were put to death, and later continued his quest to hunt down those who opposed Christianity.

Mrs Coulter reminds the children that there continues to be enemies of the church, ones that write books against the church, ones that speak out and become famous. But more dangerous, she says, are the ones they don't know about; friends, family, neighbours. She incentivises the children to join the league, with the promise of a badge showing the emblem of St. Alexander's lantern, in turn, the children must inform the league of these persons "to continue Alexander's brave work".

The children rush to join the league. Malcolm does not rush to join and is conflicted about the knowledge of the events he has recently witnessed. Politics and the church are combining, and lines between the police and the CCD are blurring.

Malcolm decides that he wants his mother's opinion.

Act 1, Scene 6: 00:23:25

The Trout Inn.

The CCD arrive and interrogate Malcolm on his knowledge of former Lord Chancellor Nugent and his secret discussion with Luckhurst at the pub. Terrified, Malcolm gives nothing away. They tell him that Luckhurst has drowned in the river. They interrogate him further and threaten him with violence if they think Malcolm is lying to them. A pub regular, George Boatwright, steps in to defend Malcolm against the brutish DCC members. They try to drag George away, but he fights them off and flees the scene. The CCD leave.

Dr Hannah Relf, an Oxford professor, has been watching the situation carefully. She secretly passes Malcolm a book with her address. She knows about the wooden acorn and asks Malcolm to deliver it to her at Oxford University as soon as he can. They both leave.

Alice has issues with two male customers while she brings drinks to their table, when one puts his hand up her skirt. Alice reacts and threatens to break his fingers. Mrs Polstead throws them out of the pub.

Act 1, Scene 7: 00:28:50

The Trout Inn.

Alice re-enters the pub, and lights a cigarette. She explains of the challenges she has faced growing up with little support, how Mrs Polstead found her begging, and took her in to work at the pub.

Bonneville emerges from a dark corner of the pub, and apologises for the behaviour of the two customers earlier. He asks to borrow a cigarette. Enter Bonneville's daemon, a laughing hyena, who is missing a leg due to Bonneville's smoking.

The Hyena makes a jump at Ben, Alice's daemon, startling him. Ben refuses to talk. Bonneville states that he is a big talker, except to the CCD. He asks Alice why she thinks

that Nugent was in the pub. Alice does not know and states that she is not a talker either.

Enter Malcolm, who tells Alice she must take bread to the nuns. They exchange insults and she refuses. Malcolm leaves. Bonneville asks Alice what time her shift finishes.

Act 1, Scene 8: 00:32:55

The Priory.

Malcom arrives at The Priory kitchen, with bread for the nuns and a small wooden gift that he has made for Lyra. He is met by Sister Fenella, who nervously thinks he may be another person snooping around, asking questions. Malcolm tells her that Mrs Coulter came to his school to tell them about the League of Saint Alexander. In her worry that Malcolm has told them that Lyra is here, clever Malcolm guesses that Lyra is in fact Mrs Coulter's baby. She reveals that Lyra is the daughter of Mrs Coulter and Lord Asriel, the arctic explorer. She goes on to tell Malcolm that Mr Coulter, her lawfully wedded husband, found Mrs Coulter and Lord Asriel together in bed, and a fight broke out, leading to Mr Coulter's death. Out of this mess, Lyra was born, out of wedlock, and Mrs Coulter abandoned her. Lord Nugent had put her in The Priory with the safety of the nuns, as a *Sanctuarium*. She explains how words ending in "arium" is the Latin for keeping something in.

FENELLA Jordan college in Oxford is a *sanctuarium scholasticorium*. If you're a scholar in need, you can knock on their door, say "*Secundum me legem de refugia scholasticorum protectionem tegimentumque huius collegii.*"

And they'll give you 'scholastic sanctuary' - The college has to keep you safe and no one, not even the Magisterium, can touch you - just because you said those Latin words.

Act 1, Scene 9: 00:39:40

Oxford University.

Malcolm arrives at Hannah's book-lined office. He returns her book, and watches her unscrew the acorn, which she opens correctly, the first time. He therefore repeats the message, which he has memorised. In return, she answers his questions.

An alethiometer is a compass-like device that tells the truth, through a series of symbols, dials and hands. It led Hannah to find Malcolm when Hannah asked it for help. There are only six alethiometers in existence, owned by universities, though one is mysteriously missing.

Rusakov is the man who discovered "Dust": a substance, "something that enriches us and, in turn, is nurtured by us", which Malcolm guesses has something also to do with the Uncertainty principle, which he overheard being discussed at the pub.

Hannah asks Malcolm to tell her should he overhear any more interesting conversations in the pub. Asta reminds him that this sounds very similar to the work of Mrs Coulter and the CCD. He ignores Asta and agrees. The rain continues.

Act 1, Scene 10: 00:44:00

Bonneville and Alice sit together on a bench underneath a bridge to shelter from the rain. Bonneville questions Alice as to whether or not she has ever been to The Priory, and how she gets in past the nuns.

Alice talks about how she hates water, that once, in London, she saw creatures in the water, that whispered to her, and were waiting to reach out and pull her under "I know what you really are, Alice". Bonneville places a hand on Alice's shoulder and advances closer to her. He tries to convince Alice to take him to The Priory, but she refuses as she should be getting back, and says that she will take him tomorrow. Bonneville promises to protect Alice from whatever it is that wants to pull her underwater.

Enter Malcolm and Astra in La Belle Sauvage. Alice insults him and uses this interruption to leave. Bonneville teases Malcolm about the confusion of puberty in an attempt to bond. Across the river, CCD boats patrol, moving upstream towards The Priory. Malcolm heads to The Priory, to warn the sisters.

Act 1, Scene 11: 00:48:02

The Priory.

Malcolm gets out of his canoe at The Priory. As CCD lights search the night, he is suddenly seized from behind. A snow-leopard daemon pins Asta. It is Lord Asriel, who has been spying on Malcolm, and uses him as a bargaining chip to get into The Priory, to meet his daughter, Lyra. He reveals that he is not here to harm Lyra, but he believes that she is in danger from her mother, Marisa Coulter, who is searching for her.

Witches have prophesised great change, and Marisa believes that Lyra is the subject of that prophesy and is therefore searching for her, to hand her over to the Magisterium. He implores the nuns not to indulge her.

The Nuns bring Lyra to Lord Asriel, who spend time together for the first time. Their time is cut short, as the CCD are approaching. To escape, Malcolm lends his canoe to Lord Asriel, who promises to get La Belle Sauvage back to him.

Act 1, Scene 12: 00:53:05

School.

The school's headmaster has disappeared without warning, and the students who have joined the League of Saint Alexander are publicly punishing the teachers that disagree with their religious practices. The students use threats of violence and threaten Malcolm with being reported if he does not join the league.

Act 1, Scene 13: 00:55:30

Oxford University.

Hannah puts the alethiometer back in its cloth. Mrs Coulter is frustrated, as the reading it gave was not helpful. Malcolm enters, and is startled at the sight of Mrs Coulter, who recognises his school blazer. To cover Malcolm's arrival, Hannah elaborates a story of how they know each other, revealing that Malcolm lives at the Inn near to the Priory,

and that he brings back books that she lends to him. Mrs Coulter leaves and Malcolm, being stressed and believing that Lyra is now in grave danger, confesses all to Hannah. Hannah apologises for her mistake, for not realising the danger she has put Malcolm and Lyra in. Malcolm runs to warn the nuns.

Act 1, Scene 14: 01:00:00

The Botanical Gardens.

Bonneville approaches Nugent in the gardens at Oxford. It is revealed that Bonneville has previously spent time in prison for abusing young girls, and now he is free, has sought scholarly sanctuary at St. James' College. Nugent grants Bonneville two minutes of his time, as they cannot be seen together.

It is revealed that Bonneville was previously a scientist working towards understanding "Dust", alongside Marisa (Mrs) Coulter. They both lost their positions for their various wrongdoings. Alone in his prison cell, Bonneville has been working on his theory of Dust, in the same way that Coulter has. His theory could revolutionise the way the world understands matter, and it could wipe away the power of the Magisterium. But this knowledge comes at a price; Bonneville asks for funds and research resources. Nugent cannot help, as he has been removed from office. Bonneville begins to unravel and seizes Nugent by the lapels. Hannah runs in just in time to break the pair up.

It is revealed that Nugent and Hannah are meeting to form "the resistance". As Bonneville unravels, he beats his own daemon, and swears that if Nugent won't help him, he will find someone who will. Hannah tells Nugent that Marisa Coulter now knows that the baby has been hidden at the Priory.

Act 1, Scene 15: 01:04:00

The Priory.

Heavy rain pours. Malcolm's canoe has been returned, painted and restored. Malcolm arrives at The Priory with a teddy bear for baby Lyra, where he meets Alice, standing with a basket of apples in the kitchen. The CCD, alongside Mrs Coulter, are searching for baby Lyra, which the nuns deny all knowledge of. Mrs Coulter and the CCD begin to

leave when they hear crying coming from the oven. Mrs Coulter opens the oven, to find a cot with baby Lyra inside. Alice runs forward, claiming the baby to be hers, and that she had not mentioned it, as she thought child services might take her baby away, being so young. The sisters confirm the story, and they leave.

The nuns have had quite a fright. Alice volunteers to look after Lyra for the evening, and all the nuns and Malcolm are dismissed. When she is alone, Alice welcomes Bonneville to the kitchen. She reveals to him that it is Marisa Coulter's baby, and he thanks her, and reveals that he will be taking the baby to Switzerland, as a bargaining chip for his research scholarship. Malcolm runs into the scene, just as the river bursts its banks. The water is rising rapidly, and The Priory begins to crumble down around them. Alice seizes the baby away from Bonneville. Alice and Malcolm escape, running towards the bridge, but the bridge collapses. The CCD fly overhead in a helicopter, claiming that they will be taking the baby. The pair and their daemons climb aboard La Belle Sauvage with baby Lyra, the canoe rises with the flood waters, and the canoe is swept downstream.

INTERVAL

Act 2, Scene 1: 01:14:50

The flood water rages. Malcolm and Alice re-enter on La Belle Sauvage. The waters calm as Malcolm steers them towards slower waters, Alice is terrified. They see the body of a dead woman floating through the water, with no daemon. Asta asks what happens to daemons once humans pass away. They do not know the answer. The current picks up and they are carried away.

Act 2, Scene 2: 01:16:45

Westminster.

Mrs Coulter and Governmental men/women in dark suits listen to an emissary from the Magisterium in Geneva - Michael Wharton, Chairman of the Committee for the Propagation of the True Faith. His snake daemon corners the Golden Monkey.

Wharton calmly yet firmly berates Mrs Coulter for her sins against the Magisterium, for producing Lyra, and for pursuing her research of “Dust”, and that she has failed to deliver Lyra to them. She reveals that Lyra has been rescued by Malcolm, and Wharton grants her further resources to capture Lyra and deliver her to them.

Act 2, Scene 3: 01:19:10

A Pharmacy.

A loud hailer announces that, due to the flooding, emergency governmental procedures have been put in place, and all must register at their local emergency station. All citizens without ID will be arrested.

Malcolm and Alice come across a pharmacy, abandoned in the flood, where they find nappies and other supplies for Lyra. Meanwhile, Malcolm devises a plan to get Lyra to Lord Asriel, using the address he left on a postcode when he returned the canoe. He does not trust Alice since she invited Bonneville into The Priory. Alice intercepts this plan, and the two argue. They are discovered in the pharmacy, and they give false identities and a cover story to explain why they are there. They get back in the canoe and set off.

Act 2, Scene 4: 01:25:07

Oxford University.

Nugent, Hannah and other Oxford Professors are collecting intelligence on the Magisterium and the current new “emergency” procedures in place. They find that anyone who is a “person of suspicion” and anyone investigating “Dust” shall be arrested. They are also aware that Mrs Coulter has been granted a high-speed boat and officers from CCD to search the rivers on the hunt for the children. Hannah receives a reading from the alethiometer, Lyra is alive. They set out to look for her.

Act 2, Scene 5: 01:26:20

Mrs Coulter announces to all on the river that all vessels carrying unaccompanied children must be reported immediately, “for their own safety”. A hyena laughs hysterically in the distance. Malcolm and Alice spot a house in the distance and

dismount the boat. The owner, a man who has fought and “won” this house, is a drunk with a shotgun. Malcolm convinces the man to protect the house as “there’s bad people after our baby.” Alice and Malcolm take Lyra inside.

Act 2, Scene 6: 01:29:00

Inside the house is a grand kitchen and dining table, laid for one. Alice holds Lyra and imagines a life there. A gunshot offstage. Malcolm runs to find out what has happened while Alice goes to search for warm blankets.

Malcolm re-enters, shouting for Alice, he is followed in by a hyena and Bonneville, carrying a rucksack and a shotgun. Bonneville reveals that this house was once owned by a man who became known as “Lord Murderer” who would bring children to the house, torturing them while still alive, before killing them.

Malcolm attempts to wrestle the shotgun off Bonneville. Bonneville, not being a fighter, convinces Malcolm to stop fighting, and to talk “like scholars”. Malcolm asks him what he knows about “Dust”. Bonneville explains that “Dust” is “a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself” and reveals that he is carrying all his research on Dust with him, in his rucksack. Meanwhile, Alice approaches Bonneville silently from behind, with a knife.

Bonneville spots Alice and there is a fight to wrestle the gun off Bonneville. Bonneville holds Malcolm at knifepoint while Alice holds the gun at Bonneville. Rather than shooting Bonneville, Alice shoots his daemon hyena, and the pair escape with Lyra and the rucksack. Bonneville and his daemon writhe.

Act 2, Scene 7: 01:35:00

Canoe.

The children cry on La Belle Sauvage about the fact that they have murdered Bonneville. Alice reassures Malcolm that he did good. They rifle through Bonneville’s rucksack, which is full of papers, and the missing althiometer.

Suddenly, the CCD search lights are upon them, and they freeze. In a very quick turn of events, the pair are pulled into hiding under the trees by George Boatwright and

others, including Malcolm's school friend Andrew, who are also currently hiding from the CCD.

Act 2, Scene 8: 01:35:50

Refugee Camp.

The refugees give Alice and Malcolm food and shelter. George Boatwright tells of how the storm, and the flood, even the magical creatures in the water, witches and mermaids, are on their side. They lie down to rest when Malcolm realises that Andrew is missing. Suddenly, the CCD burst into the camp, with Andrew, who has reported them as a secret member of the League of Saint Alexander. The CCD seize Lyra and take her away.

Malcolm fights Andrew in a rage. He reveals that the CCD are taking her to Wallingford to the The Sisters of Holy Obedience, a mile downstream, in the convent with the spire. The camp disbands.

Act 2, Scene 9: 01:46:40

Canoe.

On the flood water, Malcolm and Alice approach the convent of The Sisters of Holy Obedience. It looks impenetrable. Malcolm insists that he goes alone, and that Alice stays to look after the boat. She tells him to take care in a tender moment.

Act 2, Scene 10: 01:47:20

The Priory of the Sisters of Holy Obedience.

Inside the cold walls of The Priory nursery, there are hundreds of cots containing children. Malcolm is caught by one of the sisters and pretends to be a child who has gotten lost in the night. She scolds him and orders him back to bed, and leaves. Malcolm and Astra have trouble finding Lyra in amongst the hundreds of other children. Hearing voices approaching, they hide. Mrs Coulter enters with two CCD

officers and Sister Paulina. Mrs Coulter demands that Sister Paulina allows her to take her daughter with her immediately and threatens further action from the higher powers of the Magisterium if she does not. Sister Paulina allows them to leave with the baby. Malcolm and Astra are about to begin to follow them, when they notice a cot containing Lyra. Sister Paulina has deliberately given them the wrong baby. They escape with the real Lyra.

Back at the canoe, Alice talks to her daemon, Ben, about their fears of being abandoned again. Malcolm and Astra return with baby Lyra in arm. They climb aboard La Belle Sauvage and hand Lyra to Alice, who compliments him on his brave work. "We think he is the cat's pyjamas". Malcolm, falling for Alice, leans over to kiss her while she is sleeping. She wakes with a start and berates him.

Act 2, Scene 11: 01:54:55

CCD helicopters are heard in the distance overhead. They pull over to a graveyard, where Alice, insisting she goes alone, goes to find firewood.

Alice and Ben stumble across the opening to a mausoleum. Suddenly, she is surrounded by Hannah Relf and the professors, who are looking for a boy looking after a baby. Hannah thinks that she recognises Alice but is not sure why. Not trusting them, Alice gives a false identity, denies all knowledge and sends them off in the wrong direction.

It starts to rain and Malcom re-enters with Lyra. They are about to enter the mausoleum, when the hyena bursts through the entrance, and pins Astra to the floor. Malcolm now cannot move. Bonneville comes out of the mausoleum and holds Alice at knifepoint.

She surrenders Lyra to him, and he threatens to rape Alice before killing them both. With all his might, Malcolm leaps up and strikes Bonneville with his rowing oar. They fight, and with one final blow, Malcolm kills Bonneville. His daemon hyena vanishes into thin air. They run.

Act 2, Scene 12: 01:59:20

Across the water, walks Tilda Vassara, a witch. She appears to Alice while Malcolm sleeps. Tilda means no harm, she simply wants to meet Lyra, the prophesised child, for herself. She names Lyra, “Eve the second, mother of all the living, the source of all sin”. She will change the world. The waters surge. Tilda stirs up the water and tells Alice to trust the boat, and the water will take them where they need to go.

Act 2, Scene 13: 02:02:00

October House.

La Belle Sauvage floats via the major London landmarks, which are all submerged by the flood. On the terrace of October House, Lord Asriel spots the boat and the children, and brings them inside. Lord Asriel offers them food and shelter, but when he realises Lyra is with them, tells them that they must leave immediately. Mrs Coulter emerges from the bedroom in Lord Asriel’s shirt, the pair are still lovers.

Mrs Coulter demands that they hand Lyra over, but they refuse. Lord Asriel persuades her to let the children take her, rather than the CCD, but notes that they will reunite when she is older. She exits.

Asriel takes them to Jordan College, Oxford, where they aim to seek scholarly sanctuary.

Act 2, Scene 14: 02:07:45

The flood is receding as the children and Lord Asriel ride to Oxford in Lord Asriel’s Gyrocopter. Alice notes that her daemon, Ben’s, form has settled as a dog. There is a rainbow, a sign of hope. Alice and Malcolm vow to be friends.

Act 2, Scene 15: 02:09:40

Jordan College.

Nugent, Hannah Relf and the other professors greet the children at Oxford College. Lord Asriel demands scholarly sanctuary for Lyra at the college, and Alice is to be

given a room at the college to look after Lyra. Malcolm hands over the missing alethiometer. Hannah congratulates Malcolm on a job well done. Alice vows to regularly visit Malcolm and his mother back at the Trout Inn. They talk affectionately while Asta and Ben nuzzle.

END.

Find out More

- Watch this [video](#) where actors summarise the plot in one minute. Once you have watched this and the recording of the performance, give your own one-minute speech about an aspect of the production, for example how lighting design, set design, puppetry, music or costume design was used. This can be the basis of your work on live production reviews.
- Watch this [video](#) about daemons and design your own! You can also find additional puppetry resources on the National Theatre Learning Hub.
- Having a live baby on stage can be problematic! Discuss why you think that the directors had a live baby at some points, and a puppet at others. How does that help the relationship develop with a character who has no speech at any point.
- The National Theatre staged an adaptation of *His Dark Materials* directed by Nicholas Hytner in 2003. You could explore this production by visiting the National Theatre's Archive, to see a recording and research design and production details. You could also read the script which was written by Nicholas Wright.
- Nicholas Hytner writes about the process of directing *His Dark Materials* in his book *Balancing Acts: Behind the Scenes at the National Theatre*. After reading the relevant sections you could consider how much you think the use of puppetry in mainstream British theatre has changed since that production. This includes other productions at the NT, and other plays you will have seen in West End or regional theatres.
- Gain an insight into the puppet-making process here:
<https://aub.ac.uk/latest/aub-modelmakers-collaborate-on-philip-pullmans-the-book-of-dust>
- NT productions that you could explore to research puppetry include *Treasure Island*, *Peter Pan*, (both available on NT Collection), and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *War Horse*, *The Light Princess*, & *The Elephantom*. You can research these productions online -and many have accompanying learning guides to accompany them – or visit the NT Archive to find out more.

- You can find production images here, which you could print and annotate as part of your live theatre review work: <https://bridgetheatre.co.uk/whats-on/the-book-of-dust/>
- Find photographs of Oxford and the locations in which the story takes place. The Trout Inn and Godstow are real places. Once you have found some images, design your own projections for a new production of *The Book of Dust*.



**National
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Thank you