

DRAMA: THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE REVISION GUIDE

SYNOPSIS

It Begins Like This

In an Australian suburb, Bob Price, a former car factory worker in his 60s, stares at a phone, while his four adult children narrate his fears. At the end of the scene, the phone rings and he answers it.

Berlin

Bob's daughter, Rosie, is on a train platform in Berlin after travelling alone around Europe for three months. When she video-calls home, she pretends to be having a great time because she doesn't want her family to be disappointed. She describes (to the audience) meeting a beautiful boy, Emmanuel. They spent three days and, just as she begins to imagine a future with him, he steals from her and disappears. She makes a list of all the things she knows. One of these is that she needs to go home.

Home

Bob's wife, Fran, a nurse, reminds him to pick up their grandchildren. Unannounced, Rosie arrives. Fran calls Rosie's siblings to tell them to come over as Rosie is back. Fran guesses that a boy has hurt Rosie. Rosie's married sister, Pip, and brothers, Ben and Mark, arrive. They squabble about family issues: Mark breaking up with his girlfriend and how much Fran helps Ben and Pip. When left alone in the garden with Bob, Rosie says that she fell in love with the wrong guy and that she tried to 'grow up'.

Autumn

Pip reflects on all the important things that have happened in the garden. She remembers seeing her mother cry and bash her head against a tree. Rosie and Fran find her. Pip tells Fran that she is leaving her husband, Steve.

Pip remembers a time when she was 14 and baby Rosie was hurt when she should have been looking after her.

Fran was so angry she tore out some of Pip's hair. Fran tells Bob that Pip is leaving Steve. Pip says she doesn't love Steve. Fran accuses Pip of having another man. Pip announces she is taking a new job in Vancouver and leaving the children with Steve. Pip and Fran argue. When Fran goes inside, Pip denies to Bob that she has another man.

Bob encourages her to grab the new job opportunity with both hands and that he will help with the children. When Pip leaves, Fran tells Bob that Pip was lying, but he says all the children know that a lie to his face would 'kill' him. Fran and Bob embrace for an 'unforgiving moment'.

As Autumn Turns

Bob is tending the garden while Rosie and Fran work in the kitchen. Fran encourages Rosie to get a job and suggests nursing. Fran is worried that Bob seems forgetful. She would like to take him on a trip and admits she has a secret stash of money. Fran feels that Bob's world and sense of self-worth have shrunk since he was made redundant. Ben arrives to drop off his laundry. Bob disapproves of Ben's flashy new car. Bob and Ben argue and Ben leaves. Fran tells Bob that he should notice that Ben is doing well for himself. Bob says that by Ben's age he had children and a mortgage. Rosie says that she is planning to move out. In a letter from Pip to Fran, Pip reflects on mother-and-daughter relationships and confesses that she has gone to Vancouver to be with the married man she is having an affair with. When Bob asks her what Pip says, Fran replies, 'It's cold in Vancouver.'

Winter

Fran is smoking in the garden. Mark remembers that when he was younger, he would sit up in a tree and observe his family. The garden was where his mother would sneak a cigarette, usually when she was trying to solve one of the children's problems. Fran tells Bob that Mark is coming over. She wonders if Mark is gay.

Later that night, Mark arrives, soaked by a rainstorm. Fran and Bob fuss over him. Bob jokes that the only thing that would shock them would be if Mark said he had 'decided to become a woman'. In the silence, they realise that a truth has been revealed. Mark is beginning the process of living as a woman. Bob retreats to the garden and Fran says they hadn't seen this coming. Mark says he is moving to Sydney as there is 'no place for me here'. Fran angrily says she wishes she had never had children. Bob tells Mark that he is 'a beautiful man' and that he shouldn't 'mess' with that. Mark says he loves them, but that is too much to ask. Fran tells him to become the person that he needs to be, but she doesn't want to see it, as she will mourn the son she has lost.

Interval

As Winter Turns

Mark packs as they discuss his move to Sydney where his new name will be Mia. Mark describes the trip to the airport with Rosie and Bob. When they part, his father weeps. Mark says that his father's grief 'is a price I am prepared to pay' and that, by the time he lands in Sydney, he will be a new person.

Spring

Bob and Fran are dancing while their children watch. Ben describes how, in the daily chaos of their busy household, when a favourite song came on the radio, he would grab Fran to dance. Bob breaks away from the dancing and wonders if life has passed him by. Fran suggests they go away together and that they need to remember 'who we are'.

Home That Night

An agitated Ben arrives looking for his parents. Rosie says they are out celebrating their anniversary. When Fran and Bob return, they suspect Ben has taken drugs. Bob goes to attack Ben, but is stopped. Ben explains that he has stolen some money. Over a period of time, he has taken a large amount of money from his company. He wanted to keep up with people from more affluent backgrounds. Bob again goes to attack him, but Ben hits himself. As Fran and Rosie try to stop him, Ben raises his fist to Fran. Fran says that they will remortgage the house to help Ben pay back the money. When Bob disagrees, she says she will use her secret stash. Bob insists that Ben must tell his employers and go to jail. Bob confronts Fran about her secret money. She also confesses that there was another man who wanted her, but she chose Bob and the family. Bob says he knew she was unhappy and that he was glad Rosie was born as that kept Fran with them. Bob says she can give money to Ben, but she has to give an equal amount to the other children.

Summer

A year after Rosie's return from Europe, she tells her father she is going on a creative writing course in Brisbane. Bob is distressed that she is moving so far away and that all of the children have chosen lives so different from his and Fran's.

Life Goes On

Fran wonders if she drove the children away. Bob says they 'made their own choices'. Fran suggests they tear up the garden and start all over again.

And It Ends Like This

The phone rings and Bob answers it. The children narrate what it is like to receive bad news. Rosie describes Fran's last journey from the hospital when she died in a car accident. In despair, Bob tears up the rose bushes in the garden. Pip, Mia and Ben, dressed in their funeral clothes, tenderly wash and dress Bob. Rosie breaks off from her journey and reflects on the things that she knows, including that the day her mother died her childhood ended. She joins the others and they leave for Fran's funeral.

TASKS

1. What are the 10 most important plot points in the play?
2. Describe your setting for the play.
3. What are play's main themes?
4. How are you going to portray each character?



CONTEXT

Things I Know to be True is set in a contemporary working-class Australian suburb. This context will influence your understanding of the play and the possibilities for its design.

The play was written by award-winning Australian writer Andrew Bovell, who also co-wrote the screenplay for the popular 1992 film *Strictly Ballroom*. began working on the script in June 2014. The premiere was in Australia in May 2016.

The play is set in a suburb of Adelaide, South Australia, and deals with many issues recognisable to an Australian audience, from the younger generation's urge to travel abroad to the familiar barbeque 'most Sundays' and the garden being central to family life. However the original directors also realised also realised that the play addressed universal concerns. For example, many countries suffered under the financial crisis of 2007—08 and the subsequent loss of factory jobs. This had a profound effect on the lives of working- and middle-class families. The tensions between the generations and the rivalries within the family are also widely recognisable themes. parents around the world have made sacrifices to give their children advantages they did not have themselves only to realise that their children have different hopes and plans. The co-director Scott Graham has written that the play is about 'family, love, loss and dreams that are exposed to be nothing more than that' (Things I Know to be True Comprehensive Guide). The play is set in Hallett Cove. It has a reputation for being a safe, comfortable place to live, popular with families and retired people. Houses here are usually single storey with generous gardens. In the script, Bovell describes the setting as 'not unlike any other working-class suburb... in the Western world'. Bob's dream is that their children will settle down near them and have lives which are 'better versions of us'. Bob left school at 16, never travelled abroad and worked most of his life for the same company. His children have been given more opportunities in terms of education and travel, but, despite their advantages, are dissatisfied. Over the course of the play, three of the four children move away. Mark/Mia relocates to Sydney, 1162 km from Adelaide, Rosie goes to Brisbane, over 2100km by road, and Pip leaves Australia entirely for Canada.

Cars are the main means of transport, which is reflected in the discussions about the best roads to take and whether to call home for a lift or take a taxi. Car manufacturing was once an important industry in Australia, but by 2009, production had drastically reduced and most cars now are foreign imports. Bob is made redundant from his job at a car factory, where part of his final deal was a car at cost 'and a bit more'. He is irritated by Ben buying an expensive European car. The action of the play takes place over approximately a year, the seasons appearing in most of the section titles. The climate in Adelaide is pleasant most of the year. The Australian summer is December to February. Winter is June to August. As the weather is usually warm, lighter fabrics, such as cotton, are often worn. The stereotype of Australian fashion is very casual, such as shorts and flip-flops, but those working in the city and most other jobs would dress more formally.



Many Australians enjoy spending time outside. As Pip says, 'This garden is the world' and it has been the site of many key events in the Prices' lives. Mark recalls climbing up the gum tree to hide, while Pip remembers her mother bashing her head against it. Bob also plans roses and spends time clearing away garden debris, such as leaves. Fran would like instead a garden 'full of chaos and mess' with 'vines and creepers, and herbs'.

Geoff Cobham, the designer of the first production, was influenced by *Stop Making Sense*, a 1984 film of a Talking Heads concert, which starts with an almost bare stage, with musicians and design elements added throughout the concert. Another influence were the photographs of Gregory Crewdson, whose intricately staged images of American suburbs turn ordinary places into locations that are eerie and unsettling.

Question 1 in the exam will ask you to describe how a specific design skill could reflect the context of *Things I Know to be True* set in a contemporary working-class suburb and how they could reflect the context of the play.

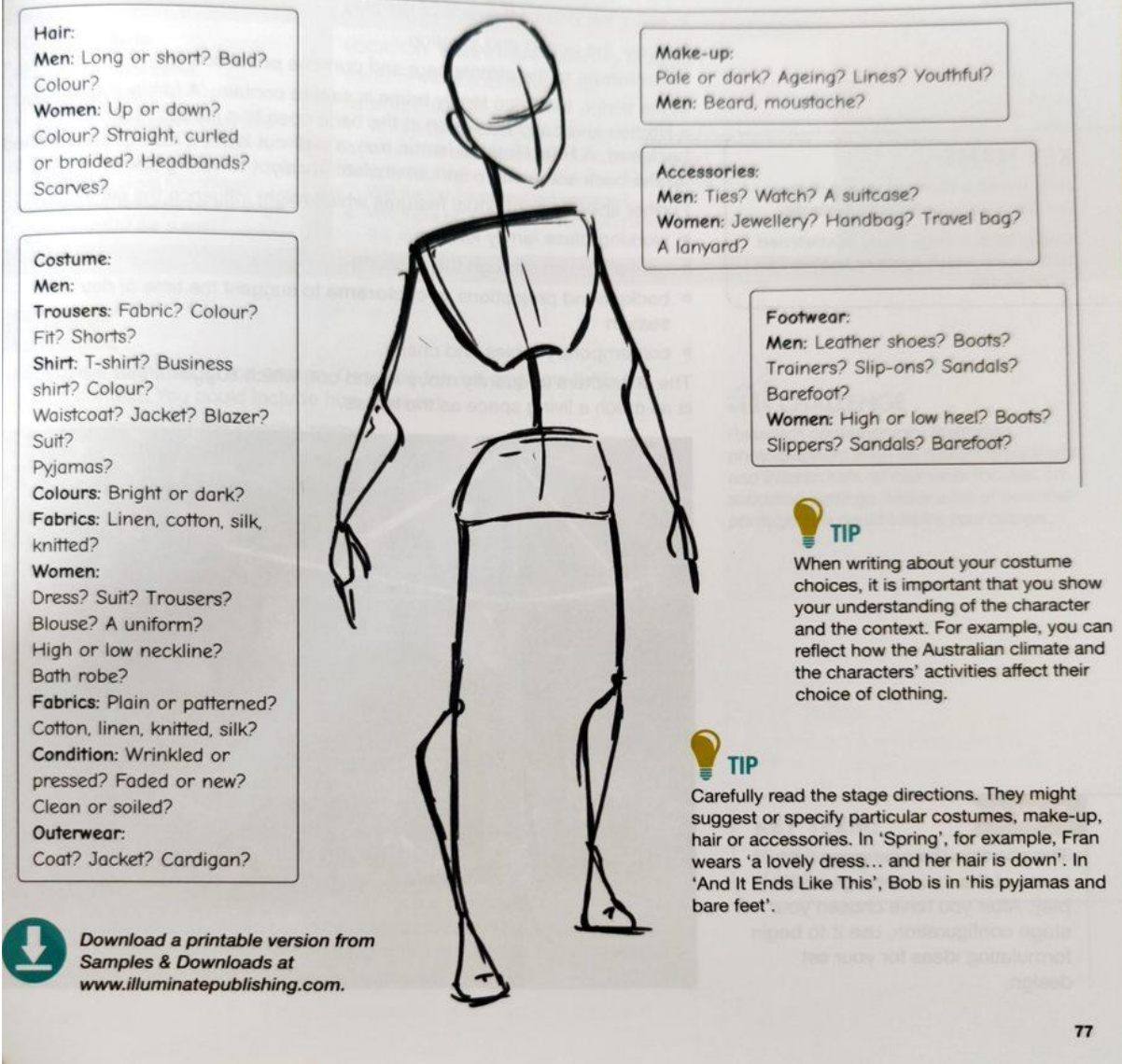
TASKS

1. Research the Stop Making Sense video and the photography of Gregory Crewdson.
2. Collect images for contemporary Australia – houses, gardens, clothing, families etc.

Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context

The contemporary Australian context will influence the style of costumes. The costumes need to suit the characters' ages, occupations and personalities. The older Prices' costumes may suggest their working-class background, more than their children, who have different life experiences. Pip is a working mother with a responsible job in an education department, so she might dress with a certain practical formality Rosie is a teenager who has been travelling, so her clothes could be colourful and informal.

There are also opportunities for the characters to change costumes, such as the anniversary evening out, the funeral and, significantly, Mark's transition to Mia. The condition of their clothes might also give hints about a character's mental state and priorities, such as when Ben returns home distressed.



Hair:
Men: Long or short? Bald?
Colour?
Women: Up or down?
Colour? Straight, curled
or braided? Headbands?
Scarves?

Make-up:
Pale or dark? Ageing? Lines? Youthful?
Men: Beard, moustache?

Accessories:
Men: Ties? Watch? A suitcase?
Women: Jewellery? Handbag? Travel bag?
A lanyard?

Footwear:
Men: Leather shoes? Boots?
Trainers? Slip-ons? Sandals?
Barefoot?
Women: High or low heel? Boots?
Slippers? Sandals? Barefoot?

Costume:
Men:
Trousers: Fabric? Colour?
Fit? Shorts?
Shirt: T-shirt? Business
shirt? Colour?
Waistcoat? Jacket? Blazer?
Suit?
Pyjamas?
Colours: Bright or dark?
Fabrics: Linen, cotton, silk,
knitted?
Women:
Dress? Suit? Trousers?
Blouse? A uniform?
High or low neckline?
Bath robe?
Fabrics: Plain or patterned?
Cotton, linen, knitted, silk?
Condition: Wrinkled or
pressed? Faded or new?
Clean or soiled?
Outerwear:
Coat? Jacket? Cardigan?

TIP
When writing about your costume choices, it is important that you show your understanding of the character and the context. For example, you can reflect how the Australian climate and the characters' activities affect their choice of clothing.

TIP
Carefully read the stage directions. They might suggest or specify particular costumes, make-up, hair or accessories. In 'Spring', for example, Fran wears 'a lovely dress... and her hair is down'. In 'And It Ends Like This', Bob is in 'his pyjamas and bare feet'.

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TASK

1. Design a costume for one male and one female character considering personality, context, colours and fabrics.
2. Choosing a new character, design a costume for them for a key scene. Consider: hair, makeup, fabric, fit, accessories, headwear and shoes
3. Write a paragraph on how the costume suggests the character's role in the play and the effect their external presentation will have on the audience.

Set design inspired by context

One of the challenges of designing for this play is capturing different settings, seasons and moods. As there are quick changes of location, you will need to think about how can suggest these without long, impractical scene changes. Consider how your design will:

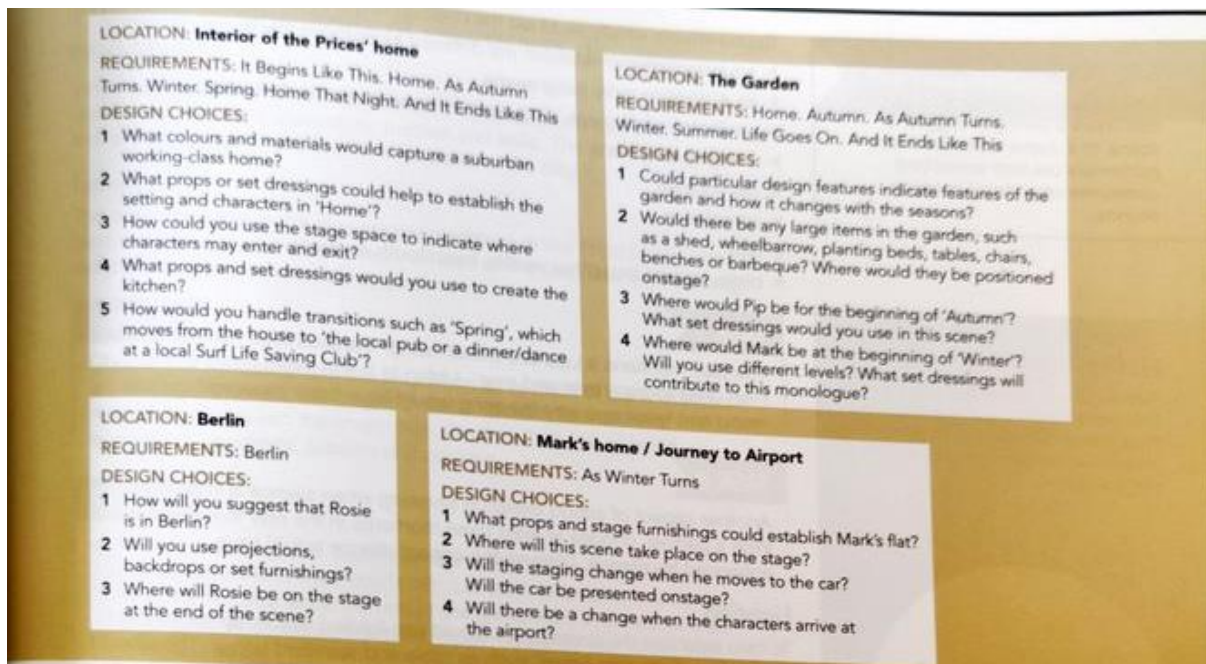
- Serve the practical needs of the play
- Show the period and location
- Contribute to the atmosphere and purpose of the scene

In the script, the Price family home is said to contain: 'A family room, a kitchen and patio extension at the back open to a classic Australian backyard. A Hills Hoist (a brand of rotary clothes line common in Australia), a lemon tree, a well-cut lawn, a rose garden, a shed up the back somewhere and an ancient eucalypt towering above.'

Further specific contextual features which might influence the set might include:

- Working-class family kitchen
- Garden shown through the seasons
- Background projections of cyclorama (a large piece of stretched fabric upon which lights or images can be projected) to suggest time of day or season
- Contemporary tables and chairs

The characters frequently move in and out, which suggests that the garden is as much as living space as the house.



TASK

Choose a scene set in the garden. Describe the set and how it fits the play's context. You could include how your set:

- Is appropriate for the chosen scene
- Reflects the working-class suburban Australian setting
- Functions practically in terms of the action and other key moments
- Research contemporary Australian photographers such as William Broadhurst and Warren Kirk. How could their photographs influence your design?

Sound and lighting design inspired by context

Sound and lighting design can be used to suggest the various locations and the contemporary period in a number of ways:-

- Use of contemporary music
- Sound effects of cars or aeroplanes
- Lighting to suggest different times of the day, geographical areas or seasons
- Lighting to create moods or to act metaphorically for the play's themes

The original production used music by Nils Frahm, a German composer and pianist, throughout the play. Music could be used in many other ways, however, such as pop songs to support certain scenes or a musical motif or instrument associated with each character. The seasons could be introduced with appropriate musical excerpts. A sound designer might research the music the older Prices like and decide what tunes they might dance to.

MOTIF

A repeated image, idea or phrase of music.

TASKS

1. What would be your soundtrack for Things I Know to be True? Could you give a key song for each scene or character?
2. How many times is music referenced in the play? What is the significance of that?
3. Identify 3 moments when silence would be used for impact.
- 4.



Lighting

To help establish the context, you could use lighting which replicates a suburban Australian home such as standard lamps and tables lamps (practicals). There could also be garden lighting such as fairy lights or outdoor lanterns. Your lighting design could convey the different times of the day or seasons and locations. For example, would you use different coloured gels for the scene in Berlin compared to those in Australia? Using gobos and other specialist equipment, it is possible to create effects such as leaves and trees, clouds, rainfall and other architectural features. Think about how lighting could create a sense of movement when travelling in cars or planes.

TASK

1. Work through the opening scene of the play. What effects would suit the opening mood? Consider lighting, sound, music and transitions.



Style: realism versus stylisation

The play combines mostly realistic dialogue with opportunities for stylised movement. Scott Graham co-director, is one of the founding members of Frantic Assembly, a theatre company known for its adventurous and innovative use of movement and music. Examples from the original productions can be found online, but are not described in the script. You might choose to create a stylised production, or it could be more rooted in naturalism. The movement choices you make should be there to help create the mood of the scene, tell the story and engage the audience.

One technique used by the directors was using photographs as inspiration, such as Mohammed Ali knocking out Sonny Liston to inspire the scene between Bob and Ben. After studying the image, the actors studied how Bob and Ben could move so that Bob would be similarly 'dominant of a prone Ben' (*Things I Know to be True Comprehensive Guide*).

TASK

1. Find some images which could inspire movement scenes in other key moments of the play.





TIP

It is helpful to write in the first person ('I') so you can fully imagine your own performance. Do more than just describe vocal and physical skills: think about how your choices will add to the audience's understanding of the play, its characters and their relationships.

Performing choices

In Question 2, you will discuss in detail how you would perform a particular line as a given character. For example, from 'Berlin':

You are performing the role of Rosie.

Describe how you would use your vocal and physical skills to perform the line below and explain the effects that you want to create.

Rosie: But I know that at 25 Windarie Avenue, Hallett Cove, things are the same as when I left and they always will be.

In this scene, Rosie has suffered a devastating experience of not only being left by a boy she thought she loved, but also having him steal her belongings. Alone in a foreign city, she is desperate to return home, so, as Rosie, my posture at the beginning of the line is slumped and defeated. 1 I will briefly pause and look down at the ground before I speak because Rosie is at her lowest point. However, as Rosie makes her decision to go home, I will raise my head and, with clear, precise diction, announce my exact address. 2 I will use an Australian accent and make my voice youthfully high-pitched. 3 I will plant my legs in a wide stance and my facial expression is soft, gently smiling as I fondly remember my parents. This is an emotional moment, so my voice will break when I say 'they always will be'. 4 From this, the audience will see that Rosie is young and naive and finds comfort in the idea of home. 5

Vocal skills (accent, pitch)

Understanding of character and context of line, mention 'posture'

Vocal skills (pause and diction) and physical skills (looking down, raises head)

Physical skills (stance, facial expression), vocal skills (breaking voice) and justification

Effect on audience



TIP

You should write about both physical and vocal skills, but you can write about them in combination rather than physical and then vocal, if that helps you to express your ideas clearly.

CHALLENGE

If you choose to write about Australian dialects, you could explore online examples. Decide what features of the dialect or accent you would emphasise.

TASK 20

- a Choose one line from the play spoken by each of these characters:
 - ▶ Bob ▶ Mark ▶ Fran ▶ Pip ▶ Ben.
 Experiment with different ways of using your vocal and physical skills.
- b Answer the following question for each character's line:

Describe how you would use your vocal and physical skills to perform the line and explain the effects that you want to create.
- c Check your work by marking or highlighting:
 - V** for each vocal skill you mention
 - P** for each physical skill
 - E** for an effect on the audience.



TIP

In a UK production, the actors used their own British dialects. This emphasised the relevance of the concerns for a UK audience, rather than distancing them with an accent which might be uncomfortable for the actor to maintain.

Character Revision

Create one sheet for each character.....

Character and importance to the play (for example position within family and effect on other characters).	
What do they want? (who do they love? Where do they want to go? What do they think will make them happy?)	
What obstacles do they face? (who or what keeps them from achieving what they want?)	
What are their key scenes/speeches?	
How might they be costumed? <i>Colours, fabrics, shape, fit, personality, background, status</i>	How might their hair and makeup be done? <i>Length, colour, style, type of makeup (character time and period)</i>
How might they use body language? Posture Gait Facial expression	
How might they use their voice? Emotional range (angry, happy, irritated...) Pitch and volume Accent or other distinctive features	
Choose one important line and analyse how they might perform it	

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