



**ADELAIDE  
FESTIVAL**

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Deanne Bullen 2020.

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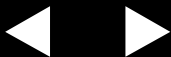
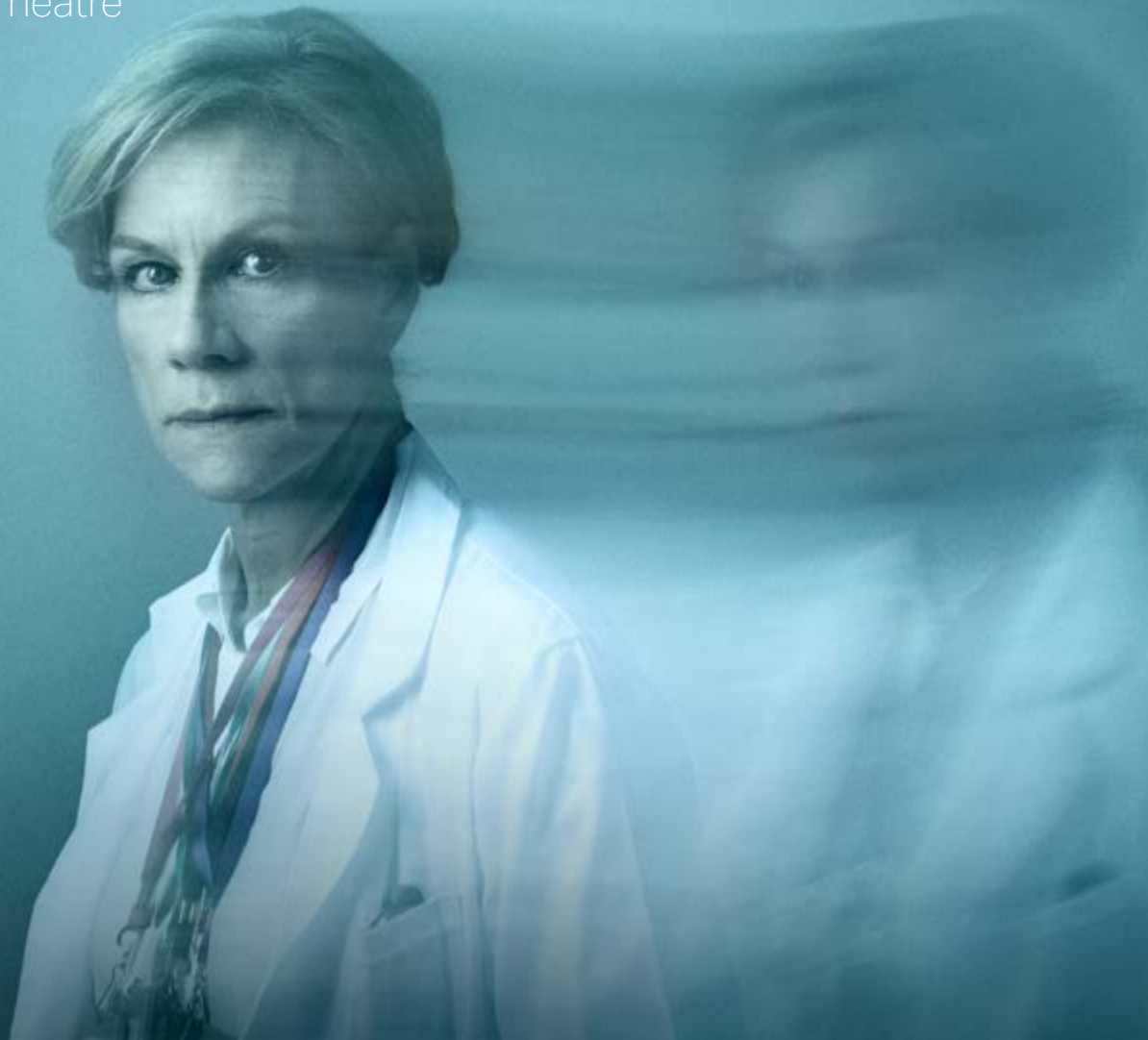
# The Doctor

By Robert Icke

*Very freely adapted from Arthur Schnitzler's Professor Bernhadi*

## EDUCATION RESOURCE

Almeida Theatre



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# Show rundown

## Australian Premiere

2hr 45mins, including interval

"The idea," Icke writes in a note to the script, "is that the audience are made to re-consider the characters (and events) as they learn more about who the characters are."

Robert Icke has made a name for himself by re-writing classics in radical and often deconstructive ways. The Brit has often been described as one of the brightest directing talents the country has seen in a decade.

*The Doctor* was Icke's final production for London's Almeida Theatre 2019 as the theatre's Associate Director.

*The Doctor*, an update of Arthur Schnitzler's 1912 Viennese drama *Professor Bernhardt*, poses questions about the human view on identity, perception and bias.

**doctor** (noun) *one who mends or repairs; in popular current use, applied to any medical practitioner. Also a traditional healer or diviner.*

**doctor** (verb) *to treat so as to alter the appearance or character of; to falsify, tamper with, disguise.*

---

## The Almeida Theatre

*The Almeida Theatre exists to launch the next generation of British artists onto the world stage.*

*They bring together the most exciting artists to take risks; to provoke, inspire and surprise audiences; to interrogate the present, dig up the past and imagine the future.*

*Whether new work or reinvigorated classic, whether in our theatre, on the road or online, we make live art to excite, enliven and entertain.*

**ALMEIDA  
THEATRE**

## WARNINGS

### Content

*The Doctor* includes the discussion of suicide and the description of suicide methods.

Suicide is discussed twice in *The Doctor*. Once approximately half way through the performance and then again nearer the end when a suicide method is discussed in detail.

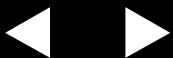
If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this production, you can get free support.

Contact details for support in South Australia can be found at [SA Mental Health](#).

The play also includes the discussion of abortion.

### Production

The show utilises strobe effects.



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## Themes

Icke's *The Doctor* takes on religion, race, gender, sexuality and class. Other critical issues addressed in the play include:

- does medical ethics displace all other considerations
- the peril of playing identity politics – white, Jewish, godless, a woman
- the role of identity by birth and what we build for ourselves by choice
- what happens when professions are judged by social media



## Production

### Style and Conventions

*The Doctor* has a preoccupation with language as problematic—its power, avoidances, deceptions. The question of who owns a given language and who acts as the guardian of its rules dominates the work.

The production of *The Doctor* demands a clinically minimal and practical stage and runs smoothly through scene after scene on a gently revolving stage. It includes:

- A set of benches and table on the stage
- Faux wooden furnishings
- Steely floor
- A vending machine
- Sliding rear entrance and side exits that compel focus

The lighting of the stage has an accent on clinical neon white, reminiscent of hospitals. Softer amber lighting is also used along with TV projections in the television panel debate scene.

### Music and sound

A drum kit, which is suspended above the stage, provides the soundtrack. It implants a pulse in the play that quickens and slows building or evening out the suspense.

**Sepsis** literally means putrefaction - the process of decay or rotting in a body or other organic matter.

### Set and Costume Design

#### Costumes

for the production are designed with a monochrome palette.

#### Characters

Every one of the characters in *The Doctor*, except for perhaps Dr. Ruth Wolff the doctor, differs in a significant way from the character they are playing. The actors' racial and gender identities are intentionally at odds with their characters.

Juliet Stevenson has received rave reviews for her performance as the central protagonist in Icke's *The Doctor*. As Dr. Ruth Wolff she is the founding and brilliant physician of the Elizabeth Institute. She is also an atheist, culturally but not religiously Jewish. However, when a priest comes to administer the last rites to a 14-year old dying from sepsis after a botched abortion attempt and she refuses him admission, the institute and its funding comes under threat.

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# Theatre Etiquette

The French word etiquette, and it's second meaning, was adopted by English speakers in the middle of the 18th Century – "requirements for proper behaviour."

This can sound a bit formal but having an understanding of "theatre etiquette" helps an audience know what to expect and how to get the most out of their theatre experience.

### Why does it matter?

It respects other audience members attending the performance.

It shows respect to the performers. Don't forget – you can see them, and they can see you!

It acknowledges the hard work that it takes to bring a live performance together, by everyone.

It often includes a long list of people.

### What are theatre etiquette expectations?

Depending on the age of an audience the expectations can vary. Theatre designed for very young audiences, think 2 to 8 year olds, will have different expectations. Often the theatre experience for younger audiences will invite and encourage participation. However, as the content becomes more complex and audiences mature, think 9 years and older, there is an expectation that students will have developed an understanding of enthusiastic participation and deliberate disruption.

### What makes going to a live performance different to going to the cinema?

Many audience members have probably been to see a movie but might not have been to a live theatre performance. The BIG difference is that the actors are live and are there with you in the moment. Don't forget to show your appreciation. If it's funny, it's okay to laugh. If the actors invite you to respond, then it's okay to respond. Sometimes it can also be sad so if you know it's going to be sad don't forget to bring a tissue or two.

### What to expect:

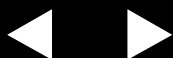
An usher will help you find your seat and you need to follow their directions. You will know the performance is about to start and that you need to settle and be quiet when the lights begin to dim or you hear a voice over or sounds.

Turn off your mobile phone. Avoid eating or rustling food packaging.

Try to cover coughs and sneezes. Go to the toilet before you go into the theatre.

### Photographing and filming is not permitted and here are a couple of reasons why:

- It can disturb the actors on the stage and break their concentration
- Intellectual property is paramount. The production on stage is intellectual property of the theatre, therefore you are not allowed to take photos of it
- You will be missing out on the detail you can't see through the viewfinder





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# Performance Literacy

Art is a means of expressing emotion, a way of transmitting feelings, culture, beliefs and values between the creators and performers of the work and the audience. There is some art, which is created for the explicit purpose of eliciting a strong emotional response from the audience. There are a myriad of emotions that students can experience when they are viewing live theatre from happiness to anger, surprise, annoyance, just to name a few.

Students might ask - but how is live theatre different from watching films in a cinema?

The difference is that actors are real people telling stories on stage, the audience is with the actor in the moment. [Recent research from the University of Arkansas](#), published in Educational Researcher, which spanned two years and followed school groups who attended live theatre performance or a movie version of the same story revealed significant differences. Students attending live performances experienced an increase in tolerance as well as a greater understanding of the plot and vocabulary of stories.

### [Live Theatre Improves Learning and Tolerance](#)

As students engage with and watch live theatre they develop a deeper understanding of the language of the theatre. They develop literacies allowing them to 'read' the gestures and movements of a performer, develop an understanding of the intention of the set, costume, or lighting designer, or reflect on what the playwright or directors intended meaning of a setting or character could be. The [Before the Show](#) activities, for the Adelaide Festival show you are attending, are designed to support students to develop these literacy skills, knowledge and understanding.

The [After the Show](#) activities are designed to provide students with the opportunity to discuss, analyse and comprehend their responses to the show. Having a strong knowledge and understanding of theatre terminology will support students.



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# Before the show

## THINKING ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING: some background history

*The Doctor* is very freely adapted from Arthur Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardt*, which was banned from Austrian stages until December 1918. Schnitzler struck a nerve with his portrayal of the contemporary political environment in Austria. The protagonist in *Professor Bernhardt*, a male doctor, falls victim to an anti-Semitic smear campaign that costs him his career.

The protagonist in *The Doctor* is now a female, Dr. Ruth Wolff played by Juliet Stevenson. A priest arrives to save the soul of the dying 14-year-old. Dr. Wolff refuses him entry. The ensuing argument ignites a social media storm; a society takes sides.

Icke's production navigates ideas of freedom of religion, identity, medical ethics, gender and class. Icke, just as Schnitzler grapples with the philosophical dilemma of whether medical ethics should take precedence over religion. Icke stretches his audience even further as he questions identity politics and whether we can only ever belong to one 'tribe'. The framework for this reasoning is underpinned by the ethics of idealism and utilitarianism.



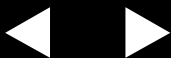
Idealism judges whether an action is right or wrong based on a moral code. Kant, the proponent of these ideas, posits that when you make a decision you should consider what would happen if everyone took that course of action. For example, if everyone lied then no-one could ever be trusted – so – you should never lie. Simple – not really – in the real world, it is challenging to always meet the terms of those ideas. What happens when you have to choose between two evils? What happens when we can't be objective? What happens when the situation is not black and white? What happens when some people's voices are not included? What happens when you can't keep your promise?

Utilitarianism on the other hand states that a course of action should be taken by considering the most positive outcome and the moral right or wrong of the action is dependent on its effect, i.e. the result it produces. A common criticism of this idea is that it can produce the "wrong" answer to moral questions. For example, if I make a promise but then break that promise because it will bring slightly more well-being than if I keep the promise. Consider the dilemma of whether it's morally acceptable to actively hurt someone if it means that overall more people will benefit as a result.

**Whoa!** Let's back-up on those ideas for a moment and explore what they might mean for students. Students are going to need to engage in thinking and examining their values and beliefs because *The Doctor*, constantly flips the audience's perspective as the debate of the play charts its course. What happens when the rug is pulled out from underneath us and we need to re-evaluate what we are seeing and need to question our assumptions?

## Curriculum Links & Activities

This education resource has been developed with links to SACE Stage 1 and 2 and the International Baccalaureate. The resources are created with links and in relation to the subject outlines. The resource aims to provide teachers with information to help prepare students before attending the performance, as well as structured learning activities for the classroom after viewing the performance.



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# Examine, research and apply

Being able to engage in philosophical debate can help us better understand each other's perspective and why we might disagree about issues.

#### As a whole class:

View ethical dilemmas from the ABC show [Ethics Matters](#), aired 2 years ago. The presenter talks with philosophers, and helps place ideas in a real world context.

**Episode 1 – Consequences** - explores consequentialism and asks could you kill someone in order to save others?

**Episode 2 – My rights** - unpacks the rights of an individual and explores intended and unintended consequences.

**Episode 8 – Injustices** - explores the effect past injustices have on present generations.

**Episode 9 – Religious Diversity** - how we can live in a society with competing moral codes and differing religious views.

#### Ethical Dilemma

An ethical dilemma or ethical paradox is a decision-making problem between two possible moral imperatives, neither of which is unambiguously acceptable or preferable. The complexity arises out of the situational conflict in which obeying one would result in transgressing another.

[Wikipedia](#)

View animated ethical dilemmas from HarvardX.  
Animated Ethical Dilemmas

1. [Do you owe loyalty to a cheating friend?](#)  
(1minute 16seconds)
2. [Casey Martin and walking in golf.](#)  
(1minute 59seconds)
3. [Lifeboat ethics: Would you sacrifice one life to save many?](#)  
(2minutes 24seconds)
4. [Does the value of life depend on age?](#)  
(1minute 21seconds)
5. [How should inequalities be governed?](#)  
(1minute 22seconds)





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# Examine, research and apply

## Small groups:

Students discuss their reactions to the moral dilemmas with the following questions in mind.

What is the right thing to do?

What moral obligations does an individual have?

Does society have a moral obligation?

## As a whole class:

Discuss the issues raised in the group discussions.

What were the areas of tension?

Did you always agree?

If not – why not?

If yes – why?

## Small groups:

Develop a short role play based on either one of the animated ethical dilemmas they have watched or research other examples.

Following is another example.

Students should decide where in the scenario they will begin their role play and how they will resolve the dilemma.

Is a salesperson ethically obliged to reveal a product's weakness?

You work in a mobile Xphone store and you provide information about that phone. A customer is deciding between a new Xphone and a Yphone. They tell you that their number one priority for choosing a phone is reliability. They think the Yphone is more reliable than the Xphone. You think they're wrong but you aren't sure. You're thinking of doing some research and letting the customer know what you find. Great idea – but it isn't going to be good for business because what you find out suggests the customer is right. Telling them what you find out puts you at risk of losing your job. What do you do?

Change the gender/age/ethnicity of the customer – how does this alter how you approach the issue.

## Perform

Students perform their role plays with the class providing specific feedback, to support their responses, on how the meaning was conveyed and the conflict was resolved.

Performance groups share their experience with the class.

- How did they approach their ethical dilemma?
- What did they need to change when they altered gender/age/ethnicity?
- What internal dilemma did they encounter?

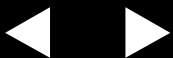
**SACE PA1** Expression and communication of ideas relevant to the program focus.

**II2** Interpretation of the ideas of creative arts practitioners.

**R2** Reflection on personal creative arts ideas, opinions, and skills relevant to the program focus.

## IB – Theatre Standard Level

Participate in at least one production of a collaboratively created piece of original theatre, created from a starting point, which is presented to others.



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# After the show

## WHAT DID YOU THINK?

The overriding question of Icke's *The Doctor* is – how do we make our judgements?

### In small groups:

Drawing on the discussions and role play undertaken before the show, students now discuss and record their reactions to:

- Was the doctor right to protect the patient?
- Was the priest right to insist on a religious ritual?

Students need to ensure they start from the point of asking themselves what standpoint they are taking to these questions in regards to the beliefs and values they hold.

Would their answers to the two questions be any different if they:

- Had grown up in a different culture?
- Were a different gender or sex?

### As a whole class:

- Individual groups share their responses with the whole class.
- Discuss the similarities and differences.

*Woke - aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice).*

Miriam-Webster dictionary

## BIG QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- Who are we, and what defines us?
- How free we are to define ourselves and choose our own identities?
- Is it possible to defend the “truth” when no one agrees what it is and there are many who have reason to undermine it?



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## CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THEATRE

Drama is a dynamic practice and responding to live theatre supports students to become better dramatic artists.

### Students individually:

- write down as many adjectives to describe *The Doctor*
- write two sentences to describe *The Doctor*
- list the colours they think of when reflecting on the production
- make a list of the themes they noticed
- describe what message(s) they thought the playwright/director wanted their audience to receive?

### Thinking about Juliet Stevenson as the character of Dr. Ruth Wolff

Dr. Ruth Wolff is an authoritarian and not a particularly likeable doctor. Describe the changes the character of Dr. Wolff undergoes as she is put increasingly under pressure as the drama evolves. This should include changes in:

- voice
- gestures
- movement
- relationship to other characters

### Thinking about Robert Icke as a playwright and director.

"Would the kids I went to school with be excited?"

So how might you achieve that quality of "liveness" for a 21st-century audience? For Icke, it has to do with fostering the intensity of the engagement between spectator and actors. It's partly about "clearing out unnecessary literalism."

### Students individually:

Read the articles:

[If you think theatre is boring, you haven't seen a Robert Icke play](#)

Laura Barton December/January 2019

[Get to know Robert Icke](#)

Edinburgh International Festival, July 2019

Consider how Robert Icke's play relates to the students as they read the articles.

### Writing the review to *The Doctor*

Students will use the information they have generated from the tasks they have completed to write their review of *The Doctor*.

The framework provided, [Guide for Writing a Theatre Response](#), will support students to plan and develop their critical responses and organise their information.

**SACEKU1** Knowledge and understanding of core concepts specific to relevant creative arts discipline(s).

**PA4** Development and application of practical skills, techniques, processes and technologies.

**I12** Interpretation of the ideas of creative arts practitioners.

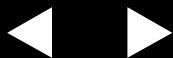
**R1** Appraisal of creative arts products in terms of practitioners' ideas, processes, and decision-making.

**IB** – Theatre Higher Level. Practically examine the performance conventions of at least one world theatre tradition and apply this to the staging of a moment of theatre.

*I am made to cry with those who cry, and laugh with those who laugh. But the theatre-goer in the epic theatre says: I would never have thought that. You can't do that. That's very strange, practically unbelievable.*

*That has to stop*

Bertolt Brecht, On Theatre



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## Meet the company

### Robert Icke Director and Writer

Writer and theatre director Robert Icke was born in Stockton-on-Tees and educated at the University of Cambridge. Since 2013, he has been associate director of the Almeida Theatre in London, where his productions have included adaptations of the *Oresteia* (2015), for which he won best director at the 2016 Olivier awards, *Uncle Vanya* (2016) and *Hamlet* (2017). His final production for Almeida Theatre was *The Doctor*.

### Hildegard Bechtler Set and Costume Designer

Hildegard Bechtler has designed for major theatre and opera companies, including the National Theatre UK and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and for film and TV. Recent productions include *Top Hat the Musical*, for which she was Olivier-nominated; and *Roots*, which opened at the Donmar, London.

### Natasha Chivers Lighting

Natasha Chivers has been the lighting designer for many of Robert Icke's productions. For the past 20 years, Natasha has designed lighting for some of the most visually exciting theatre, dance and live gigs. She can take the audience from a nightclub or a garden to a torture room, just by changing the colour filters.

Chivers started out working with companies Frantic Assembly and Paines Plough and today her CV takes in everything from the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House to site-specific venues, warehouses and wastelands.

Article – The Stage – August 2019  
[Lighting designer Natasha Chivers lighting supports and guides the audience](#)

### Tom Gibbons Sound and Composition

Tom Gibbons has worked on some of the biggest, most dynamic pieces to come out of British theatre in the last few years, according to director and longtime collaborator Robert Icke: "He's an artist who happens to use sound." In recent years, Gibbons, whom Icke calls "Gibbo", has designed the sound on shows including *1984* at Almeida Theatre, *People, Places and Things* at the National Theatre, and *A View from the Bridge* and *Life of Galileo* at the Young Vic.

He has forged a particularly strong bond with Icke – "I treasure him more than I would ever let him know," the director says.

Article – The Stage – October 22 2018  
[Sound designer Tom Gibbons interviews Almeida's Robert Icke](#)

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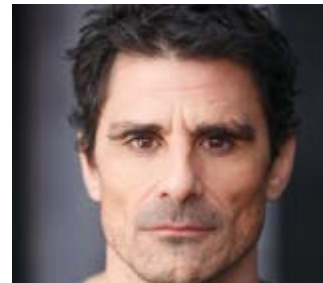
## Meet the cast



Anni Domingo as Cyprian



Chris Colquhoun as Copley



Daniel Rabin as Murphy



Hannah Ledwidge as Drums



Joy Richardson as Charlie



Juliet Stevenson as Ruth Wolff



Liv Hill as Sami



Mariah Louca as Roberts



Millicent Wong as Junior



Naomi Wirther as Hardiman



Jamie Parker as Father



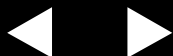
Shelley Conn as Flint



Jack Hardwick as Junior /  
Murphy / Roberts understudy



Sabina Cameron as Copley /  
Cyprian / Flint understudy





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## Additional resources

### Reviews of *The Doctor*

[Robert Icke offers brilliant diagnosis of modern ills](#)

[Robert Icke's "The Doctor" at the Almeida Theatre](#)

[Read Reviews for Robert Icke's \*The Doctor\* in London](#)

[Juliet Stevenson Shines In 'The Doctor' At The Almeida Theatre](#)

[The Doctor at the Almeida review: Robert Icke signs off with a masterful medical ethics drama](#)

[The Doctor, Duke of York's Theatre](#)

### Interviews with Robert Icke

[Robert Icke and Andrew Scott in conversation](#) (58 minutes)

Almeida Associate Director and director of *Hamlet*, Robert Icke talks to Andrew Scott about playing the Danish prince, the rhythm of Shakespeare and his advice to actors.

[Interview with Robert Icke – why setbacks are normal](#)

[Interview with Robert Icke – cruel to be kind the radicalism of Robert Icke](#)

[It's not impossible that theatre will die out](#)



# Guide for Writing a Critical Response

## Opening Paragraph

When	
What	
Where	
Plot  Overview of the production and the intent of the playwright...  The artistic contributors – director, set designer, lighting, costume	

### Language Features:

- Usually in past tense
- Uses subject-specific language
- Descriptive language
- Third person voice
- Analytical language
- Modality (how certain we are about something)
- Cast and crew referred to by their full names or last name
- In text references (quotes or specific moments)

## 1st Paragraph - Who

How theatrical elements are communicated through the actors...	
Actor's name	
Character they played	
Discuss how they engage the audience - movement, voice	
Give examples	

## 2nd Paragraph - What else

Describe a key moment or scene from the production	
How were the theatrical elements combined to communicate meaning to the audience?	

## 3rd Paragraph - Technical aspects

Describe a key moment or scene from the production.	
How were sets, lights, props and costumes used to communicate meaning to the audience?	

## Concluding Paragraph - Summarises the viewers opinion

Your overall thoughts about the production. <b>Note:</b> This is not a rating of the production.	
What made it stand out?	
What did it make you think?	