

What is Set Design in Drama?

Set design (also called **scenic design**) is the process of creating the physical surroundings where the action of a play takes place. It's everything you see on stage — the background, furniture, props, and sometimes even lighting — that helps tell the story.

Set Design :

- Helps show **where** and **when** the play is set (e.g. 1920s New York or a fantasy kingdom)
- Supports the **mood** and **atmosphere** (e.g. dark and scary vs. bright and cheerful)
- Helps the audience understand the **characters** and **story**
- Makes the performance more **realistic** or **stylised**, depending on the style of the play

Key Elements of Set Design

Location – Where does the scene take place? Indoors or outdoors? A bedroom? A street? A castle?

Time period – Is it set in the past, present, or future?

Mood/Atmosphere – Is it dramatic, funny, scary, magical?

Style – Is the set realistic (naturalism) or symbolic/stylised (expressionism)?

Levels – Using platforms, stairs, or different heights to add interest and meaning.

Space – How actors move around the stage, and how the set allows for this.



YEAR 9 Drama KO TERM 3 THEATRE DESIGN - SET

Staging configurations

- **End-on**: Audience is on one side of the stage.
- **Proscenium arch**: Like end-on, but with an arch framing the stage.
- **Arena stage**: Audience surrounds the stage on all four sides.
- **Traverse**: Audience sits on two long sides of a rectangular stage.
- **Thrust**: Stage is T-shaped, with the audience on three sides.
- **Promenade**: The audience walks between different set pieces.

Stage elements

- **Flats**: Lightweight timber frames, often covered with canvas and painted to create a backdrop, like walls.
- **Platforms**: Stationary flat surfaces to create different levels.
- **Rostra**: Portable platforms with adjustable legs, often used for speeches.
- **Cyclorama**: A large, often curved cloth at the back of the stage for backdrops or projections.
- **Gauze/Scrim**: A see-through material that can become opaque when lit from the front and transparent when lit from behind.
- **Stage stairs/Ramps**: Structures that allow actors to move between different levels.

Effects and movement

- **Trucks**: Wheeled platforms on which scenery can be built and moved easily.
- **Revolve**: A turntable built into the stage floor that rotates to bring different scenes into view.
- **Hydraulics**: A system where parts of the stage can move up, down, or tilt.
- **Flying**: Using a rigging system to raise or lower scenery or lighting.
- **Pyrotechnics**: Using controlled explosions, smoke, or flashes for special effects.
- **Projections**: Using slides or video to project images onto the backdrop or other surfaces.

Style and design

- **Realistic**: A believable and naturalistic set.
- **Stylized**: A non-realistic, symbolic, or abstract set.
- **Minimalistic**: A very basic set with minimal furniture.
- **Props**: Any portable, movable object used by actors on stage.
- **Colour palette**: The range of colours used across the set and costumes.
- **Texture**: The surface quality of the materials used in the set.