Oleanna
by David Mamet

Background information on the Spring 2007 touring production of the play from the Nuffield Theatre Southampton, with suggestions for areas of discussion and analysis.

Notorious for dividing audiences with its focus on gender politics, David Mamet’s compelling play also forces us to re-examine the purpose of education; the fragile boundaries between teacher and pupil – and the catastrophic failure by humans to communicate.

Reviews of previous productions
“There can be no tougher or more unflinching play… It’s dramatic ice.” Harold Pinter

“Experiencing David Mamet’s play "Oleanna" on the stage was one of the most stimulating experiences I’ve had in a theater. In two acts, he succeeded in enraging all of the audience - the women with the first act, the men with the second. I recall loud arguments breaking out during the intermission and after the play, as the audience spilled out of an off-Broadway theater all worked up over its portrait of . . . sexual harassment? Or was it self-righteous Political Correctness?” Roger Ebert Chicago Sun-Times

“.. it is not a good play to take a first date to...” Lindsay Posner The Guardian

“During the pause for breath that separates the two scenes of Mr. Mamet's no-holds-barred second act, the audience seemed to be squirming and hyperventilating en masse, so nervous was the laughter and the low rumble of chatter that wafted through the house. The ensuing denouement, which raised the drama's stakes still higher, does nothing to alter the impression that "Oleanna" is likely to provoke more arguments than any play this year.” Frank Rich The New York Times (1992)

“As someone who loathes our current obsessions with Top 10s and Worst 100s, I would not use the phrase 'America's greatest living playwright' lightly, but having now worked on five of his plays, I have no hesitation in granting this accolade to David Mamet.” Lindsay Posner The Guardian
Why are we doing this play?

*Oleanna* was famous in the early 1990s for causing outrage amongst its audiences, principally for its apparent focus on gender politics. In the decade since its first divisive performances, however, it has gained a certain respectability in its notoriety. It has been much discussed and written about, and many theatregoers will now know the substance of the piece before they arrive in the auditorium. As a consequence, it is not anticipated that feminists and male chauvinists (and even people with no strong opinions) will stand to voice their objections as they did the first time round. For this reason, some would say that the play has lost its bite; it is not so relevant. So why do it now?

In 1992 in New York, and 1993 in London, almost the only issues in *Oleanna* that the majority of audiences were concerned with - or aware of - were the sexual ones. The play was evidently about a man versus a woman; or a woman versus a man. Whose side would people take, and would they switch allegiance according to what the characters did in their defence or their attack? It became the main reason for seeing the play. The Royal Court Theatre, where it was first staged in London, even based its publicity on this debate: “You can’t discuss it if you haven’t seen it.”

Of course, gender politics are at the forefront of the play. But, as Camille Paglia noted in the Los Angeles Times, “Mamet is using sex war to explore a much larger subject.”¹ And that subject is education. In *Oleanna*, the student confronts her professor with her difficulty in understanding his teaching - a common enough occurrence in a college or university. But it is when the professor begins to question the purpose of higher education, and his student’s belief that it is an “unassailable good”, that the play’s argument really begins to take shape.

Communication – or the lack of it – fuels the power struggle in *Oleanna*, but it is the questioning of the pursuit of knowledge that makes it as relevant today, in this politically heralded era of “education, education, education,” as when it was first produced. As Mamet’s professor states of education: “… we espouse it, as a matter of right, and have ceased to ask, “What is it good for?”² Re-visiting *Oleanna* now, nearly fifteen years on, it is hard to see how this potentially explosive element of the play has been all but ignored.

How are we doing this play?

*Oleanna* is an American play; possibly an obvious statement for those who have read the script or seen the film. However, since its arrival on the British stage, some subsequent productions have converted it to a British setting, in an attempt to highlight the parallels with this country’s gender politics and education. It is our belief, in this particular production, that this interpretation diminishes the drama of the piece. The language and the situation in this play is wholly, essentially American. Draw your own parallels, if you so wish.

To quote the play’s author: “My plays don’t really call for, nor will they support, a lot of invention. I always think of something Stanislavsky said – that any director who has to do something interesting with the text does not understand the text. So that would be my dictum, along with Stanislavsky. Don’t be ‘interesting’. If you are doing Shakespeare, it does not make any difference if you put it in evening dress or the Wild West to the audience’s enjoyment of the play. Because what they’re following are the actions of the characters.”³

---

Idiom

With American film, television and computer software providing a large proportion of broadcast entertainment in the UK, American idiom is relatively familiar to a British person. Most of us now know that ‘pissed’ for an American, does not necessarily mean ‘drunk’. And ‘rubber’, though it might prevent a mistake, is not something that corrects one. However, there are still the odd areas of confusion for Britons and Americans: like in Oleanna, when John mentions ‘public’ school, he is not referring to a ‘private’ school.

There are a couple of other American terms used in this play it would be useful to understand:

Realtor:
The professor asks his wife, at the other end of the phone, if the ‘realtor’ is with her. Basically, this is an American term for an estate agent. John and his wife are about to purchase a house. If you’ve ever bought, or been associated with anyone who has bought property, you’ll know what an anxious process this can be. Alongside divorce and bereavement, purchasing a home is considered one of the most stressful events a person can undergo in life.

Tenure:
This is the really important one. If you know what ‘tenure’ means to an American professor, you’ll be aware of what’s at stake in this play.

In many American universities, tutors are engaged, in the first instance, on provisional (or casual) contracts. These contracts are subject to renewal, and are the terms under which most university and higher education tutors are employed. The appointment, for the majority, remains ‘temporary’. However, after a prolonged period of teaching at an establishment, (anything up to ten years), tutors can apply (in some cases, by invitation only) for ‘tenure’, which would give them the security of permanent employment.

Applicants are interviewed by a panel of senior members of faculty, referred to in the play as the ‘Tenure Committee.’ This panel would take into consideration the tutor’s academic performance. One element of criteria, in appraising the tutor’s status within his or her field – and of some significance in Oleanna - would be the reputation of the applicant’s published academic work.

In this play, John has been invited to apply for tenure. If he achieves it, not only will his income increase, along with his academic profile, but he will also secure his position at the university for life.

If he fails to achieve tenure, however, not only would John have no right to appeal, but he would also be expected to quit the university immediately. With evidence of his failed application, available to any subsequent employer, his career would effectively be in ruins.
Oleanna – background to the play

The play’s title

Oleanna takes its title from a failed Utopian project of the 19th century, commemorated in an American folk song. In the foreword to the original British programme for the play, the song’s opening lyrics are printed as:

“Oh, to be in Oleanna – that’s where I would rather be.
Than to be bound in Norway and drag the chains of slavery.”

There are countless other versions of this song, but it originally alluded to the Utopian dream pursued by a virtuoso violinist from Norway called Ole Bull. In 1852, whilst touring America, he bought land in Pennsylvania in a naïve attempt to create ‘Ole Ana’, a settlement where people would live and work in idyllic harmony. However, the land was totally unsuited to the venture. The dream having failed, and his fortune lost, Ole Bull returned to Norway.

You can find out more at: http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/ppet/olebull/page1.asp?secid=31

Gender politics and Political Correctness

Oleanna is evidently inspired by both the rise of ‘political correctness’ and the escalating debate on sexual politics in university and higher education in the early 1990s.

At about the same time as Oleanna received its first performance, in 1992, a collection of essays was published in the US examining political correctness on college campuses. In one of the essays, Paula Rothenberg, Professor of Philosophy and Women’s Studies at an American college, and a self-styled Marxist-Feminist, wrote the following:

“The traditional curriculum teaches all of us to see the world through the eyes of privileged, white, European males and to adopt their interests and perspective as our own. It calls books by middle-class, white, male writers ‘literature’ and honors them as timeless and universal, while treating the literature produced by everyone else as idiosyncratic and transitory. The traditional curriculum introduces the (mythical) white, middle-class, patriarchal, heterosexual family and its values and calls it ‘Introduction to Psychology.’ It teaches the values of white men of property and position and calls it ‘Introduction to Ethics.’ It reduces the true majority of people in this society to ‘women and minorities’ and calls it ‘political science.’ It teaches the art produced by privileged white men in the West and calls it ‘art history’.”

Things may (or may not) have improved in the intervening 15 years but, as Alan Levy, a Professor of History in Pennsylvania entitles his recent testimony at a hearing on Academic Freedom: “Political Correctness is Alive and Well on College Campuses.” After you’ve seen or read Oleanna, you’ll find Levy’s testimony fascinating reading. A full transcript can be found at: http://hnn.us/articles/23231.html

Apart from the widespread campus debates on ‘PC’ in the 1990s, (including gender politics), much media coverage was given to accusations of sexual harassment in education and the workplace. One of the most celebrated cases was between Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas.

---

4 Berman, Paul (ed), Debating PC: The Debate over Political Correctness on College Campuses (Laurel: New York, 1992)
5 Hearing on Academic Freedom in Millersville, PA, held March 22, 2006, by the Pennsylvania House Select Committee.
The Anita Hill - Clarence Thomas hearings

In 1991, Anita Hill, a law professor, accused Judge Clarence Thomas of sexually harassing her when she had previously worked as his assistant. There were many such accusations and lawsuits at the time, but this case caught the American nation’s attention because Thomas had just been nominated to the Supreme Court by President George Bush (Senior).

David Mamet had been working on Oleanna prior to this event, but it was the Hill-Thomas Hearings, conducted by the United States Senate Judiciary Committee, that apparently ‘crystallized and concretized Mamet's latest dramatization of the power dynamic.’


‘During the three days of televised hearings, the Senators and the viewing public heard testimony from both Hill and Thomas, as well as their supporters. Hill referred to specific incidents of Thomas' behavior, including repeated requests for dates and references to pornographic material. Thomas vehemently denied Hill's allegations and responded with outrage, at one point by calling the hearings “a national disgrace...a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks who in any way deign to think for themselves, to do for themselves.” [Both Hill and Thomas are African-Americans]. So adamant was each sides' accounts that many observers in the press labeled the hearings an example of "He Said, She Said," with both parties offering such vastly differing recollections of events that many wondered if the hearings could ever reveal the truth.

Two days after the hearings ended, with no clear resolution of the discrepancy between Hill's and Thomas' accounts, the Senate voted on Thomas' confirmation. Due to the media coverage of the hearings, public interest in the vote was unusually high, as evidenced by a barrage of phone calls and faxes sent to the capital on this issue. Although opinion polls reported evidence of debate and division among minority groups, including African-Americans and women, they also indicated that a majority of voters supported Thomas. Ultimately, the Senate voted 52-48 in favor of Thomas' confirmation.

[…] the televised Hill-Thomas hearings etched some clear and unforgettable images into the minds of the American public. To those observers who did not believe Hill's claims, the hearings represented the gravity of such allegations in a society where gender politics can be divisive. To Hill's sympathizers, the memory of a lone woman reluctantly speaking out about past painful experiences to a room full of bewildered and unsympathetic men may have been one reason why an unprecedented 29 women were elected in the subsequent congressional elections.’

Further information can be found on the website for the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University: [http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/hill/hillframe.htm](http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/hill/hillframe.htm)

---


David Mamet’s writing

‘Mamet’s is a world of collapsing marriages, attenuated relationships and disintegrating values. The physical world is in a state of decay: lakes are polluted, the countryside characterized by autummal dissolution. The city streets are violent and inhabited by petty criminals, pimps and prostitutes. His apartments are stark and uncomfortable; his stores littered with detritus; his offices inhabited by crooked lawyers, hypocritical journalists, dishonest salesmen. His characters seem to have lost their human instincts, except for the blind desperation with which they reach out for one another – a gesture, however, which appears doomed to fail. They have surrendered an essential component of their individuality along with their moral sense.’ C.W.E. Bigsby

‘What I write about is what I think is missing from our society. And that’s communication on a basic level.’ David Mamet

‘The sense of loss that dominates his work is not purely a product of a consumer society in which the values of the market have spilled over into human affairs, nor entirely caused by that sense of isolation bred by urban anonymity – though those forces are powerful enough. It is more fundamental than that. His characters register loss, but lack the language to express or the will to neutralize it. Some resource is no longer available to them; genuine human contact no longer seems credible.’ C.W.E. Bigsby

Professor Bigsby said this about Mamet’s work seven years before Oleanna was written. Many of the characters in his earlier plays have been described as ‘low-lifes’, with patterns of speech (according to several critics) symptomatic of urban ‘aphasia’. The dictionary definition for this condition is partial or total loss (or understanding) of speech caused by brain damage. Although the majority of Mamet’s characters do not appear to suffer from (significant) disorder of the brain, their speech patterns are indicative of the struggle to communicate – even, as Mamet has stated, at a basic level.

This ‘urban aphasia’ may have been attributable to the social circumstances of most of Mamet’s earlier characters. With Oleanna, however, the protagonists are assumed to be intelligent, erudite people, drawn together for the very purpose of investigating and improving human understanding and knowledge through the means of dialogue. What occurs, though, is a subsequent demonstration of an almost complete lack of communication, resulting in dangerous misunderstanding and vastly conflicting reports of the same event.

Some critics have accused Mamet’s characters and situations of inertia. As John Simons put it: ‘I’m not asking for unity of action, I’m asking for any bloody kind of action whatsoever.’ The action in Mamet’s plays may not be overt, but there is certainly struggle and conflict. In Oleanna, it is the use of language which drives the piece. Whereas some of Mamet’s other characters may find language a constraint, in Oleanna John and Carol also use it as a weapon. What may appear, at first sight, to be a superficial text is employed with devastating effect as the balance of power in the play shifts through the use – and misuse – of language.

---

10 Bigsby, ibid, p.49.
11 John Simon, National Theatre study notes for Glengarry Glen Ross 1983, p.3
Masculinity and feminism in Mamet’s work

‘Mamet’s is, to a surprising degree, a male world. In some of his most powerful and original works there are no female characters. He may deplore the sexism of the American language no less than of American social behaviour but he frequently chooses to explore situations in which women find little or no place.’

C.W.E. Bigsby

With Oleanna, David Mamet may have attempted to move away from this perception of his work by writing a play where men and women are, in some measure, on equal terms. However, for many, his efforts to demonstrate two sides of an argument, from both a male and a female point of view, are flawed:

‘Ultimately Oleanna is a simplistic reading of gender misunderstandings, fuelling the fires of war between the sexes with its assurances that the gulf between men and women is too wide to be bridged. Oleanna affirms the fears of Mamet’s male characters and helps to explain why they are so afraid of the feminine, why they are disgusted by women, why they long for their all-male worlds.’

Carla J. McDonough

McDonough goes on to comment on Mamet’s continuing bias towards the male by highlighting the deficiencies of characterization in the part of Carol in Oleanna:

‘Mamet’s play stacks the deck, perhaps unconsciously on Mamet’s part, in favor of his male character, effectively shutting down the possibility of real exposé by its lack of character development in regard to the female character.’

Alisa Solomon goes one step further:

‘Camille Paglia couldn’t have invented a more ludicrous spokesperson for feminism.’

But Leslie Kane is keen to steer the argument of the play in another direction:

‘It is simply too easy to dismiss the play as antifeminist, even misogynist. Truth – however much it cost her – has little to do with the abolition of elitism and sexism. What we are speaking about here is fascism.’

Whichever view one takes of the play, whilst its ‘impartial’ treatment of gender politics is questionable, Oleanna has certainly contributed to the debate on the depiction of the sexes in modern drama.

---

14 McDonough, ibid, p.95
American drama and David Mamet

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, American drama had been fostered mainly by the architects and participants of its ‘frontier’ theatre. Coming from England and Europe in the 1700s, actors and actor managers such as Lewis Hallam and his family brought with them their repertoire of European drama, from Shakespeare to Restoration comedy and, with their successors, melodrama. It was to these models (especially melodrama) that American drama applied itself. Until the First World War (1914-1918), the majority of American playwrights were producing unremarkable imitations of their European counterparts.

American drama only really came into its own, and onto the global stage, after the War, when the country emerged as a world power in the 1920s. At around the same time, during the meteoric rise of capitalism, and the ensuing Depression following the Wall Street Crash, a generation of writers surfaced who dramatized American life with a language and idiom all of its own. Just a few of the distinguished playwrights and theatre practitioners it would be worth learning more about include George Kaufman, satirist and principal mover of the American commercial theatre on New York’s Broadway; Lillian Hellman (socially-shocking drama); Hallie Flanagan and the Federal Theatre Project (the first government-sponsored theatre initiative in the US); Clifford Odets and Paul Green, writers of ‘social protest’, and both connected with the Group Theatre (a theatre collective of actors and directors, including Lee Strasberg, dedicated to presenting new American plays); and the writer who many call the Father of American Drama, Eugene O’Neill.

O’Neill, like his predecessors, looked to Europe for his dramatic models. However, it was from the work of playwrights such as Ibsen and Strindberg, with their exploration of the new theatre of realism and naturalism, and also from expressionism, that O’Neill drew his inspiration. Experimenting with these techniques, O’Neill dramatized the American ‘way of life’ and society’s values, especially through his treatment of the American ‘Family Play’. His work became the standard by which American writers have since been judged.

From the end of the Second World War, with the pursuit of the ‘American Dream’, the names of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller can be added to the list of great American playwrights. They were joined in the 1950s and 60s by the likes of Edward Albee and Lorraine Hansberry (the first black woman playwright on Broadway). The 1970s and 80s saw the arrival of young writers influenced by the demise (or the betrayal) of the ‘Dream’: amongst their number are Sam Shepard, David Guare, August Wilson and David Mamet.

‘Mamet emerged on the national scene in the latter half of the 1970s. Politically, America was still coming to terms with Watergate and the Vietnam débâcle. Culturally, the aesthetic and social radicalism of the1960s had faded. The avant-garde theatre (in the form of Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman and Spalding Gray) seemed concerned to explore individual consciousness, to promote the self as the centre of meaning and experience. Broadway, with its emphasis on private anxieties, ranging from the nature of one’s sexual identity to the fear of terminal illness, was scarcely less private in its subject matter. Mamet’s work cut a tangent across this. He offered a critique of America society – its capitalist ethos, its increasing privatism, its loss of spiritual meaning and social will – which made him a natural successor to such writers as Arthur Miller, Clifford Odets and Eugene O’Neill.’

Some methods of play analysis

Breaking down the play into units

How a play is made, or what it is trying to say, can be determined through analysis of its constituent scenes. This may be a straightforward process when applied to exploring open form plays which are already divided into scenes, such as those by Shakespeare or Brecht. Some writers help still further by giving their scenes individual titles, summarising the purpose or objective of each scene. However, analysis is more complicated when dealing with a closed form play such as Oleanna, where there are no divisions of separate scenes and action is sustained without a break over long periods. If this form of drama is approached incorrectly, it can lead to performance (and consequent audience perception of the piece) where ‘not much appears to happen’.

The following is a useful method of finding a way into the closed play.

Working through the text, try to locate key moments, when an action or a line of dialogue identifies what is occurring. These key moments should be as few as possible, but as many as are necessary to tell the story of the play.

The second act of Oleanna could, for instance, be broken down into the following units containing key moments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Unit description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>John explains his situation to Carol and asks that they settle the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Carol forces John to face what is in her report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>John tries to question the different charges in the report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Overriding his protests, Carol condemns his conduct and makes to leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>John appeals to her on ‘human’ terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>The phone rings and John reassures his wife about the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Carol resists his conciliatory appeal and makes to go again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>John restrains her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Carol shouts for help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These units could have been broken down differently but it is important that, whichever key moments are identified, they help to move the action on.

Examine the script for each of the units described above. There should be at least one piece of action that will epitomise what is occurring in that moment. Choose an image that represents that key moment.

By creating a series of images in these units, it should be possible to build up a continuous and coherent narration of the story.

See also Still Image and Narration below.
Identifying the action within the play

Although *Oleanna* is more a play of words than physical action, it is a play that focuses on the use and misuse of power. It is this preoccupation with power that drives the play’s action.

Look for evidence of the different forms that power takes in the play:

- Power in the use of language: the ability to dominate through skill with words.
- Power in the education system; the abuse of teacher-student relationship; and knowledge as power.
- Power as gender dominance.
- Power as changing class status
- Power as the expression of the relations between an individual and a group.
- Power as a physical force - and the recognition of its use as ultimate failure.

By identifying and employing units of action or dialogue that portray these elements of power, the play can be explored further through use of some of the following drama techniques:

**Still Image**

Where a single student, or group of students, creates an image with their own bodies, to represent a moment in the drama, in the manner of photographs, paintings, sculptures, video freeze-frames etc. These are sometimes ‘read’ by group members outside the image and are a very useful means of encouraging reflection. Sometimes they are brought to life in mime or with words. This is also very useful for discovering the relationships between people and the feelings people have at a particular point when you stop the action of a story momentarily. It’s useful for deciding what could happen next or what has happened already which might not be explicit in the story.

*This is a great technique for exploring sub-text and how tension can be built up through pace, silences and delivery. Usefully it creates a silence out of which reflective Thought Tracking (see below) can emerge. This in turn can influence the delivery of subsequent lines, both improvised and from the text, illuminating the tone of voice needed. It can also help with an investigation of how settings and characters are built up from small details by suspending time and focusing on those details.*

**Thought Tracking**

This can emerge from a still image or from a moment of quiet reflection within a story. Participants try to put themselves in a character’s place, decide what is in the mind of this character at a particular moment and may also speak the thought or feeling aloud. A further development is to have the participants draw the distinction between what a character says and what he or she thinks and feels.

*Can often be used in conjunction with Still Image (see above) but also to support exploration of how the reader responds to a character – ‘If I were in their position I would …’– or examining their relationships with other characters; when discussing characters’ feelings; and when linking to own experiences.*
Hot Seating

Where the group interviews or questions a person who is in character to discover or develop detail often only there in the sub text of a story. Using a mixture of research, what they can deduce from the text and subtext, and imagination used appropriately, characters become more fully developed and motives for action explored.

Terrific for investigating how characters are presented through dialogue, action and description but also for exploring feelings, behaviour and relationships further and to support the writing of character portraits.

Role Play

Where students explore familiar or unfamiliar roles, often to deepen understanding of characters within a story.

Students need to be able to prepare and re-tell stories individually and through Role Play in groups using dialogue and narrative from text. There are numerous other areas that can usefully be explored through Role Play, especially identifying the point of view from which a story is told, and the treatment of different characters.

This could be a series of still images brought alive with Thought Tracking fleshed out with Hot Seating, challenged by Conscience Alley (see below).

Narration

A useful device for moving the action along condensing aspects of the story or giving information which would take too long to incorporate into the dialogue or which would be inappropriate within the dialogue. This can help with settings too. It can be used simply as a linking device between performed elements of the drama and also to underscore mime or a movement sequence.

Pupils are asked to be aware of the various voices used within stories, particularly differences between the narrator and any characters used. The re-telling and re-enacting of stories and the balancing of narration and dialogue are important literacy skills.

Group Improvisation

Where students work together to construct a story from familiar, researched or imaginary situations. They may be themselves in a familiar or unfamiliar situation or they may take on other roles. Here it is the story which is the focus.

This technique is useful in exploring both fiction and non-fiction, especially when combined with Forum Theatre (see below). From their earliest school years pupils are asked to re-enact stories and understand how they are built up and concluded. This technique is most useful for the purposes of prediction and for linking stories to pupils’ own experience when exploring themes. It is also appropriate when changing a setting to see how that could impact on an event.
**Conscience / Decision Alley**

**Conscience Alley** can be used after a decision has been made in a drama to challenge or explore further the reasons for that decision. Classically the group stands in two facing rows close enough to allow the person who has made the decision to pass between them. As this person passes down the row they are asked to justify their actions and may be challenged with alternatives. When they arrive at the end of the row they decide whether they stand by their actions or whether they wish they had done something different. This can also operate in a circle or any other arrangement appropriate to the drama. Eg John’s Tenure Committee, Carol’s ‘Group’ etc.

**Decision Alley** can be used before a decision has been made. In this instance, the person passing along the row asks for suggestions to help make the decision and only comes to a conclusion after consultation. Which technique you choose depends on where the action in the story is stopped.

Even in Reception pupils are expected to be aware of actions/reactions and consequences in stories. Gradually pupils are required to discuss characters’ feelings, behaviour and relationships, referring to the text and making judgements. By KS2 they are asked to identify moral issues and the dilemmas faced by characters, discussing how the characters deal with them. These areas of understanding have relevance right through Key Stage 3 and beyond. This is a very useful and flexible technique.

This is a wonderful technique for challenging situations.

**Forum Theatre**

Where the action of a drama can by interrupted to change its direction either by the participants themselves, possibly following a period of Thought Tracking, or by onlookers who make suggestions for change indirectly, or who take over roles directly.

*Most useful to change the point of view, re-enacting an incident or situation from the point of view of another character or perspective.*
For further reading:

On the play:


A very useful introduction with commentary and notes by Daniel Rosenthal can be found in the later Methuen student edition of the script published in 2004.

On David Mamet:


And see the David Mamet Society website: [http://mamet.eserver.org/](http://mamet.eserver.org/)

On American Drama:

Professor Christopher Bigsby’s work on modern American Drama is comprehensive. Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* are published by Cambridge University Press


Specific reading:


Internet research

The following pages are taken from Wikipedia, a free internet ‘encyclopaedia’. Compiled by ‘on-line’ contributors (ie anybody!), information contained within this source may require clarification or even substantiation (and please pay particular attention to their important note and disclaimer at the end of the entry regarding tertiary sources). However, it is as good a starting point as any for suggesting areas of enquiry.


David Alan Mamet (born November 30, 1947) is an American playwright, screenwriter, director, poet, essayist and novelist. His theatre and film work is known for its clever, terse, and sometimes vulgar dialogue and his exploration of masculinity.

Biography

He was born to a Jewish family in Flossmoor, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Educated at the Francis W. Parker School and at Goddard College and a founding member of the Atlantic Theater Company, Mamet first gained acclaim for a trio of off-Broadway plays in 1976, The Duck Variations, Sexual Perversity in Chicago, and American Buffalo. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1984 for Glengarry Glen Ross, which received its first Broadway revival in the summer of 2005.

Mamet's famous ear for dialogue was in evidence from the first. He is not, however, simply a human tape-recorder; the dialogue is very obviously and precisely crafted for maximum poetic effect. It is the quality for which he has not only been almost universally praised, but which has made him the touchstone for any number of imitators. The attention given the dialogue has been so great that, in Writing in Restaurants, Mamet himself denigrated his (and other writers') early tendency to write "pretty" at the expense of sound, logical plots.

His work has developed over the years, then, primarily in his skill at sustaining longer plots, using tantalizing and even playful surprises. (He himself has expressed relief that he grew tired of writing short plays - largely exercises in dialogue - before the audience grew tired of attending them.)

Mamet's first screenplay was the 1981 production of The Postman Always Rings Twice based upon James M. Cain's novel. He won an Academy Award nomination for his next script, The Verdict. In 1987 Mamet made his film directing debut with House of Games, starring his then-wife, Lindsay Crouse and a host of longtime stage associates. He remains a prolific writer and director, and has assembled an informal repertory company for his films, including William H. Macy, Joe Mantegna, Crouse, Rebecca Pidgeon (his wife since 1991), and Ricky Jay.

Like independent director John Sayles, Mamet funds his own films with the pay he gets from credited and uncredited rewrites of typically big-budget films. For instance, Mamet has done rewrites of the scripts for Hannibal and Hoffa, and turned in an early version of a script for Malcolm X that director Spike Lee rejected.

Three of Mamet's own films, House of Games, The Spanish Prisoner, and Heist have involved the world of con artists.
Mamet has published three novels, *The Village* in 1994, *The Old Religion* in 1997, and *Wilson: a Consideration of the Sources* in 2000. He has also written several non-fiction texts as well as a number of poems and children's stories. He was credited under the name "Richard Weisz" for *Ronin*.

In July 2004, Cambridge University Press published *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, edited by Christopher Bigsby. The book includes essays analyzing Mamet's biography, his impact during various decades, and pieces on most of his work.

Since May 2005 he's been a contributing blogger at The Huffington Post.

He has also published a lauded version of the classical Faust story, *Faustus*, in 2004.

He is also the creator, producer and frequent writer of the television series *The Unit*, co-produced with friend Shawn Ryan of *The Shield*.

**Family**

Mamet and actress Lindsay Crouse were married from 1977 to 1990, and have two children together, Willa and Zosia. Since 1991, Mamet has been married to actress and singer-songwriter, Rebecca Pidgeon. They have two children, Clara and Noah.

**Filmography**

- *Spartan* (2004) [Director] [Writer]
- *Heist* (2001) [Director] [Writer]
- *Hannibal* (2001) [Writer]
- *Catastrophe* (2000) [Director]
- *State and Main* (2000) [Director] [Writer]
- *The Winslow Boy* (1999) [Director] [Writer]
- *Wag the Dog* (1997) [Writer]
- *The Spanish Prisoner* (1997) [Director] [Writer]
- *The Edge* (1997) [Writer]
- *Oleanna* (1994) [Director] [Writer]
- *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994) [Writer]
- *Hoffa* (1992) [Writer] [Producer]
- *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) [Writer]
- *Homicide* (1991) [Director] [Writer]
- *We're No Angels* (1989) [Writer]
- *Things Change* (1988) [Director] [Writer]
- *House of Games* (1987) [Director] [Writer]
- *The Untouchables* (1987) [Writer]
- *About Last Night...* (1986) [Writer]
- *The Verdict* (1982) [Writer]

**Plays**

- *The Duck Variations* (1972) [Writer]
Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974) [Writer]
Squirrels (1974) [Writer]
American Buffalo (1975) [Writer]
Reunion (1976) [Writer]
The Water Engine (1976) [Writer]
A Life in the Theatre (1977) [Writer]
Revenge of the Space Pandas, or Binky Rudich and the Two-Speed Clock (1978) [Writer]
The Woods (1979) [Writer]
Lakeboat (1980) [Writer]
Edmond (1982) [Writer]
The Frog Prince (1983) [Writer]
Glengarry Glen Ross (1984) [Writer]
The Shawl (1985) [Writer]
Speed-the-Plow (1988) [Writer]
Bobby Gould In Hell (1989) [Writer]
Oleanna (1992) [Writer]
The Cryptogram (1995) [Writer]
Boston Marriage (1999) [Writer]
Faustus (2004) [Writer]
Romance (2005) [Writer]
The Voysey Inheritance (2005)[Writer-adaptation of play by Harley Granville-Barker]

Books
Writing in Restaurants (1987) [Author]
On Directing Film (1992) [Author]
Make-Believe Town: Essays and Remembraces (1996) [Author]
Three Uses of the Knife (1996) [Author]
True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor (1999) [Author]

External links
David Mamet Bio at CBS - The Unit
David Mamet at the Internet Movie Database
David Mamet's writings and cartoons on the Huffington Post
The David Mamet Society
Interview at salon.com
book review of True and False

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia © 2001-2006 Wikipedia contributors (Disclaimer)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Most educators and professionals do not consider it appropriate to use tertiary sources such as encyclopedias as a sole source for any information — citing an encyclopedia as an important reference in footnotes or bibliographies may result in censure or a failing grade. Wikipedia articles should be used for background information, as a reference for correct terminology and search terms, and as a starting point for further research. As with any community-built reference, there is a possibility for error in Wikipedia's content — please check your facts against multiple sources and read our disclaimers for more information.

This article is licensed under the GNU Free Documentation License.