

Candidate 1 evidence

Analyse the extent.. successfully made the audience engage in relevant + social + political message

Return to

Drama Advanced Higher Resource Sheet		
Candidate Name		Scottish Candidate Number
Question Selected	Q1	

Intro - date, Name, main issues
 Past ~~2013~~²⁰¹³, Present ~~2013~~²⁰¹⁸, future 2016

"We needed to shout loud and commit to a show entirely of ignition graduates" S. Graham

Beginning process "a string of material" Neil Bettes :o
 before play written => So message clear? Director
 Designer Andrezej Bauding Shipping container Multi
 "a play ground" sound / projection use
 "key aspect of visual aesthetic" puppet wife / dress of

Kitchener's army = George / wife => sound

Baby "A beginning" Frankie Present (Afghanistan)
 Tubbs friend died Nat future (Hence Aleppo / Syria
 Anna Jordan)

Make own! "Visceral, but, a muddled drama about a trio of traumatised Veterans"
 Andrzej Lukowski: Time out

Word count:	103
-------------	-----

Advanced Higher Drama Assessor Assignment

Question 1

Analyse the extent to which a theatre practitioner successfully made the audience engage in relevant social and political messages.

Frankie's Frankie Assembly's production of Anna Jordan's *The Unreturning* was performed in the Traverse Theatre in October of 2018. The play explored the issues of men returning from war to the long-dreamed comfort of friends, family and community only to find that war had changed both them and their home. It attempted to ~~communicate~~ communicate the effects of conflicts and immigration by looking at the issue through experiences of different characters from the past (1918), the present (2013) and the future (2026) using a now very recognisable array of Frankie Assembly physical theatre techniques, stark music and a stylised set.

The project was borne out of Frankie Assembly's desire to create a piece of theatre made up entirely of graduates from their Ignition programme. This programme selects and trains groups of young, untrained male actors in an intensive two-week programme of physical theatre training culminating in a performance in London, "We needed to shout loud and commit to a show entirely of Ignition

graduates" Scott Graham. It was feedback from the Ignition graduates who related stories of missing the camaraderie of the Ignition programme and returning to their lives completely changed that inspired the company to think about the effect of change on those that go and return to a community. It could be argued that there is a vast difference in the two experiences, theatre training and war and combat, and that by trying to connect both the company diluted the important messages about war.

The rehearsal process, described in their support pack, also indicates that the physical ideas of returning home came before an idea about engaging with the issues of war. They started by creating sequences and motifs in movement of leaving and returning with subtle changes in movement as the mood or pace of the movement, reversing the moves until they had "a string of material" Neil Bettles: Director. During this improvising stage they explored key times when community comes together like on Christmas day and experimented with changes in a family dynamic when someone returns through movement techniques. The connection to the theme of war and the use of direct dialogue came through playwright Anna Jordan proposing discussions. Through reading Frankie guide on creating the performance and the final playscript it seems as if it was very collaborative and the devised material was often layered in the performance text. I think that this desire to include all these ideas led to a performance that was often confusing and sometimes unclear in the messages that they were trying to communicate.

~~How~~ To tell these interweaving stories from

different time frames they used one set and setting in various, imaginative ways. A large, metal shipping container with side accesses removed and various doors and outside stairs revolved centre stage with the only other aspects of set being simple chairs and one table that had multi-purpose usage. The metal container communicated connotations of travel and entrapment and looked brutal and cold which was very much like the settings it tried to communicate - a world war one trench, a train carriage, a lorry, a pub and a future devastated city on the North East of England. The designer Andrzej Goulding described his vision for the set as "a playground and this for me led to some beautiful and moving stage pictures but also it became disorientating and difficult to follow as the set revolved and the actors went through/under/over and around the container in numerous inventive ways. It felt like they were trying to show off their movement abilities rather than progress the story and ~~communicate~~ communicate the messages about returning from war.

Goulding also stated that the lighting was a "key aspect of the visual aesthetic" and I think in this design area he had success making you think about the message of the futility of war. The no-man's land around the container was bathed in an amber and red glow with video projections of burnt trees as George sat hunched, traumatised in his trench, lit by tungsten bulb. The devastation and loss of life was also communicated in the devastated Scarborough although this time the lighting was with stark, cold LED strips inside the container and around the top skyline of the

city which made the "returning" to the community in 2026 for the character of Nat to have a feeling of being souless and of him being ~~disappointed~~ dispossessed and unconnected. The playwright Anna Jordan said that she wanted the future aspects of the play to echo with the devastations in Syria and Aleppo and I think that although there was a general mood of a ~~broken~~ broken city it may have been more powerful to connect the message through the projection of images of this conflict to connect with the future imagined in Scarborough.

Because the set was so sparse the key ways in which social and political messages were communicated was through the direction and use of actors. The story of George demobbed from kitcheners army was, in my opinion, the easiest story to connect to. The actor who played him showed sensitive facial expressions in the train carriage scene when showing he was afraid to be branded, a coward because of his fear of combat. His timing and tone of voice when reading his letter to his wife at home showed how war had changed him. When talking nostalgically ~~about~~ about things and experiences he remembered from home he sat comfortably with a warm smile but as he started to describe aspects of trench life he stood suddenly and started to pace anxiously. Ultimately, he was unable to keep up the pretence as he shoved the letter into his uniform ~~pod~~ pocket and started to cry quietly. This was a naturalistic moment and simply captured how this young man had changed.

When the character of George returned home the character of his wife was played by another male actor holding 1920s dress and hat on long sticks like a puppet and speaking in a higher pitched voice. At times this was almost comic and this undermined the importance of trying to reconnect to his life and relationship with the woman he loved and consequently lost impact and confused the message about war.

The character of Frankie in the present time frame was returning Afghanistan and was suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. His character struggled to return to his confident and swaggering persona as he had received a dishonourable discharge. This caused lots of explosive interactions where he shouted and physically fought with his friends in the pub as he was unable to control his feelings furthering his social isolation. What was difficult to follow and affected my appreciation of these stories was that George's experiences and Frankie's experiences were interspersed and the scenes were often very short, involving the container spinning and the actors changing costumes. The literally Frankie manner of the performance stopped me from truly engaging in one story and rather than making connections about the themes and messages it seemed like a random montage of unrelated moments.

Amongst all of the ~~for~~ frenetic scenes there were some that I found very impactful. George is haunted by his friend's Tibb's death and finds it hard to ~~to~~ touch base. He talked about a bird trapped in his chest and much of his dislodge

when he was home was underscored with low irregular heartbeats and flapping birds wings. He has a complete breakdown until Rose puts his baby in his arms and simply says "A beginning" and that moment there was a sense of positivity and hope. In the last part of Frankie's story, we see a repeated video projected and distorted where Frankie sees himself beating up the innocent Afghan boy. In a final monologue he states he wants to "sleep for a thousand years" and walks up stage into the sea to escape the horror of war and the ghosts of this event. His suicide created a pessimistic end to his story and highlighted the message that after violent trauma of war people cannot go on with their lives. When Nat sailed back on a small dingy to his unrecognisable home town this communicated images very similar to the current refugee crisis across the world and highlighted the tragic fall out of war for thousands of people years after the conflict has ended.

Andrew Lukowski writing in Timeout said that the performance was "visceral but, a muddled drama about a trio of traumatised veterans" I think that there were key memorable scenes that did force the audience to think about the devastating effects of war on all whom are involved and the poetic physical style of Frankie allowed the male characters to express their repressed emotions and experiences. I think that if individual scenes were allowed to develop, with fewer character changes, set revolving and Frankie's signature movement pieces we would of had more time to ~~connect~~ connect to these characters' experiences and each individual

narrative would be more powerful and communicate the message with more clarity and impact.