

Our Country's Good

AQA A Level Drama Play Guide

Downloadable Worksheets

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Book page number

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Relationships between characters

Character revision

As you study the characters, use this table to note your discoveries.

Name of character	
Age and appearance	
Status/occupation/relationships for example, officer, convict, friend, lover, actor	
Background (place of birth, family, childhood, education, etc)	
Key role or function in play (protagonist/antagonist, parent, sibling, son/daughter, friend, lover, obstacle, foil, outsider). Explain their actions within their role.	
Key scenes/moments	
Key lines	
Costume and make-up design	

Form and structure

The scenes of the play

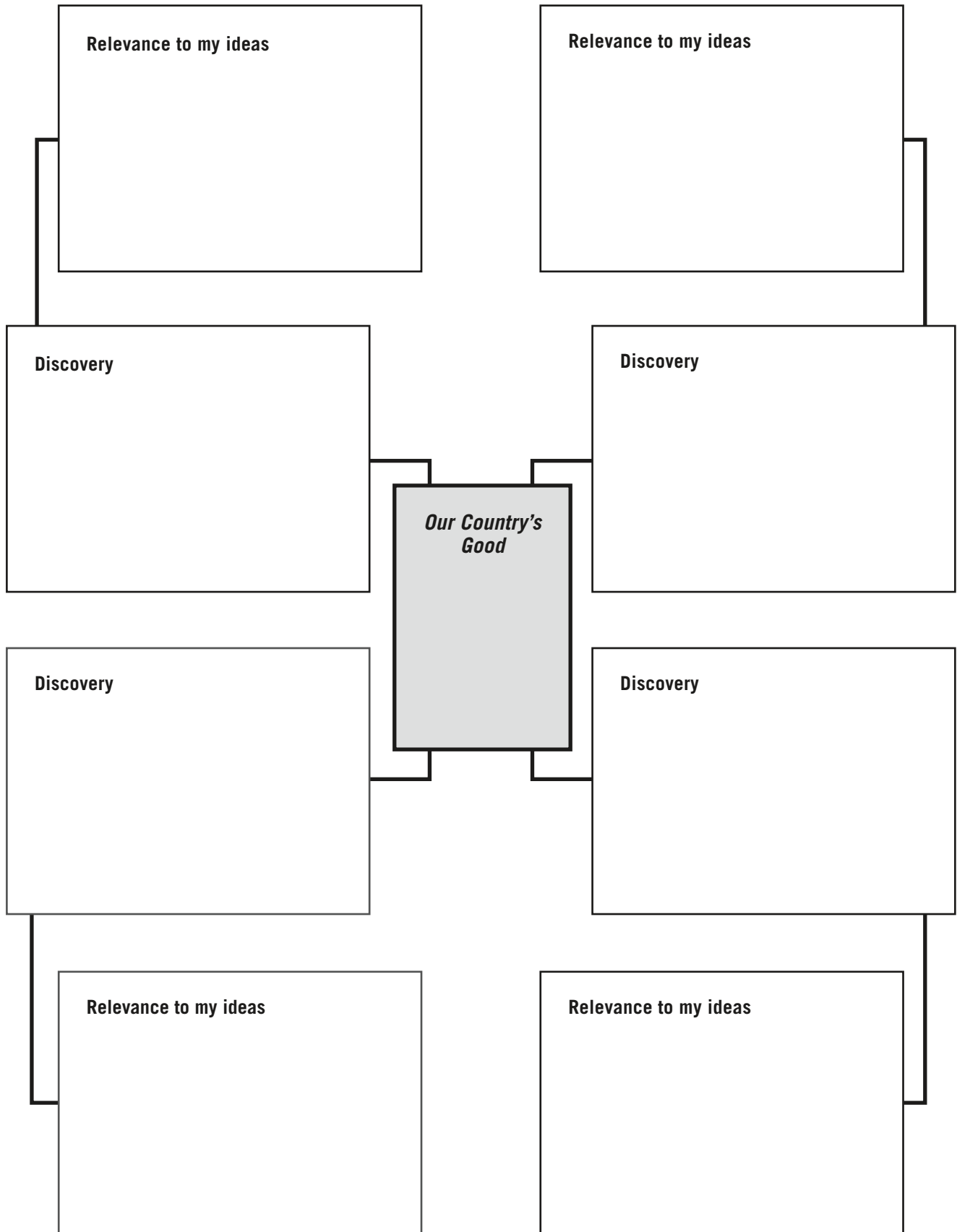
Use this chart to analyse the form and structure of the play. (An example has been suggested.)

Key events	Structure/purpose	Explanation
Ralph Clark counts the flogging strokes of Sideway, while the convicts reflect on their feelings.	This opening establishes the period of the play, the harshness of the convicts' lives and their separation from the officers. Mary's line foreshadows the influence of love on her.	The presence of the ship indicates that they are on a journey. The title reinforces this. At first, the convicts might be a huddled mass, but their lines begin to differentiate them. Ralph's lack of emotion shows how much he grows during the play.

Researching context, genre and style

Your discoveries and ideas

Use the mind map below to begin noting your discoveries.



Noting your rehearsal discoveries

Motivations, skills and effects

Using a grid like the one below, locate a key line or stage direction, then consider what the characters want, the skills to be used and the effect on the audience.

Character Line Actions/motivations	Acting skills used (vocal, physical; interactions, spatial relationships, reactions, etc)	Effect on audience (understanding of character and/or situation, creation of conflict/tension/comedy/surprise, etc)
Act 1, Scene 3 Phillip: Was it necessary to cross fifteen thousand miles of ocean to erect another Tyburn? To influence the officers to be more compassionate. Phillip wants to create a new, better society..	The men stand in a loose diagonal line SR, with Harry slightly to side holding a bag for the birds they shoot and assisting Phillip. Phillip holds a rifle, taking aim, squinting one eye. Speaks with an upper-class English accent, enunciating in a confident tone. He colours 'Tyburn' to show disapproval. He shoots at the end of his line, and shakes his head in disappointment at having missed.	The fact that the men are shooting while discussing something so serious will interest the audience, but also show the difference between a life-and-death matter to the convicts and a calm discussion point for the officers. The gun blasts provide a surprising counterpoint to this debate. Phillip's idealism may appeal to the audience.

Noting your rehearsal discoveries

Notes on a section of the play

Use this grid to collate your overall discoveries about a scene.

Act _____ Pages _____	
Positioning of characters on stage Are they standing or seated? Downstage, centre or upstage? How do they use the set?	(You could sketch this.)
Characters' motivations/actions What do they want? How will they try to achieve their wishes?	
Sources of conflict What obstacles do they face? How are their desires in opposition to another character's?	
Vocal and physical skills Changes in pitch, volume, tone, etc. Use of pause/pace. Gestures, movements, stillness, handling of props, etc.	
Spatial relationships How near or far are they from each other? Do they avoid or dominate another character?	
Listening and reacting How do they react to key moments? (Expressions, stillness, gestures, eye contact, etc)	
Pause/pace/silence Does the scene speed up or slow down? Are there pauses or silences? Why?	
Use of props/costume/set How do props, costumes and the set aid the scene?	(You could sketch an example.)
Purpose of scene; its effect on the audience What is the importance of this scene? How does it further the plot or reveal information or insight? How do we feel about the characters and plot here?	

Acting choices

Vocal skills on key lines

When you are experimenting with vocal skills to convey the character and their situation, use this chart to note the effect you want and how you could accomplish it. (An example has been started.)

Scene/line	Desired effect/understanding	Vocal skills used
Dawes: What? No? Why not? As long as I don't have to watch it. (Page 26)	Dawes is one of the few characters who isn't involved with the play because he has his mind on what he believes are higher or more important matters. He serves as a contrast to the characters who care passionately about it.	An educated, well-modulated voice and somewhat superior attitude. A tone of surprise and slight irritation. My abrupt 'What?' makes clear I haven't been listening. I elongate the question 'No?' with the pitch going up at the end to stall for time as I work out what has been asked of me. The pace quickens when I quickly say the last sentence, emphasising 'I' as I feel it doesn't involve me.
The Aborigine: This is a dream which has lost its way. Best to leave it alone. (Page 4)		
Phillip: We learned to love such things because they were offered to us when we were children or young men. (Page 5)		
Ralph: On Sunday, as usual, kissed your dear beloved image a thousand times – was very much frightened by the lightning as it broke very near my tent – several of the convicts have run away. (Page 8)		
Dabby: Course she will. Where do I come in, Lieutenant? The cousin. (Page 16)		
Duckling: Why didn't you let them hang me and take my corpse with you, Harry? (Page 29)		

Acting choices

Physical skills in key moments

One way of exploring physicality is to choose a few key moments when movement, gestures, posture and so on might change or develop. The chart below has been started to show how you could note ideas for Ralph.

Chosen moment	Physical skills	Effect
Moment 1: Act 1, Scene 3, Ralph writes in his diary and speaks to his wife's picture (pages 7—8)	Ralph is alone on stage, dressed casually and standing in a relaxed way, holding a miniature of his wife. He will touch it to his lips and hold it up high on 'Dreamt.' He suddenly turns and walks to his table on 'Oh my dear woman.' He places the image on the table, touching it tenderly on 'you.' Leaning against the table, he rubs his temples, appearing exhausted. He loosens the neck of his shirt and swats away an insect when he says, 'this dismal country.'	This is the second time the audience sees Ralph and it contrasts with the first impression. Here, I want to show how lonely, vulnerable and fed up he is. The comfort he gets from his wife's portrait contrasts with the heat, insects and exhaustion that plague him. By holding her miniature high, it shows the esteem in which he holds her, which contrasts with the country he is in and his many frustrations.
Moment 2:		
Moment 3:		
Moment 4:		
Moment 5:		
Moment 6:		

Stage space

Locations in the play

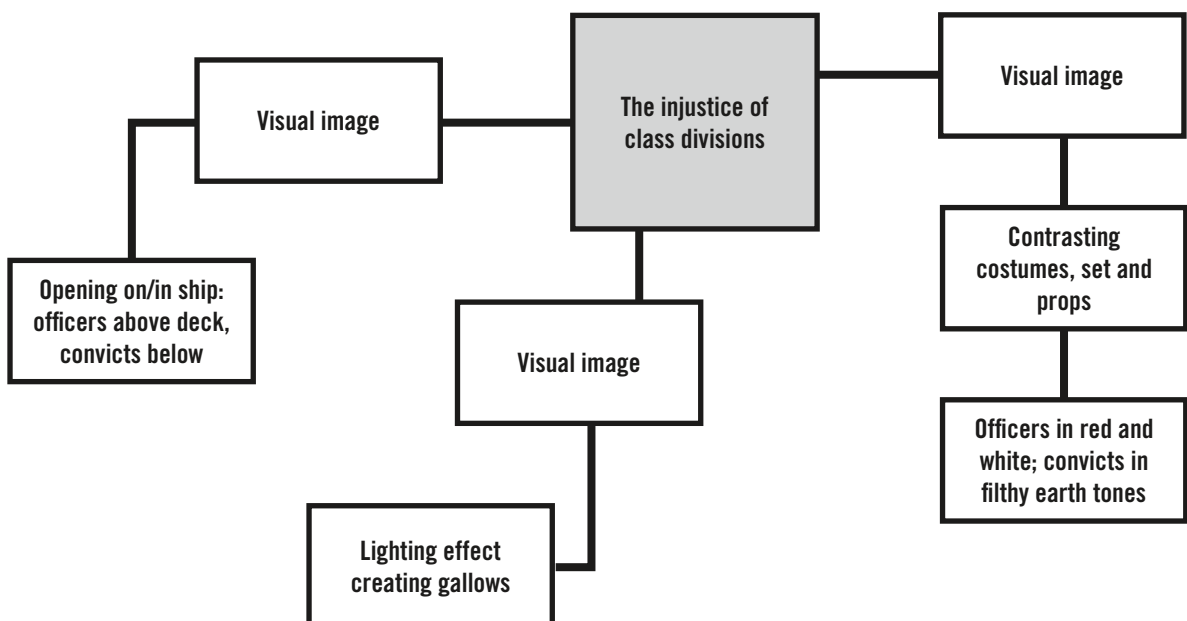
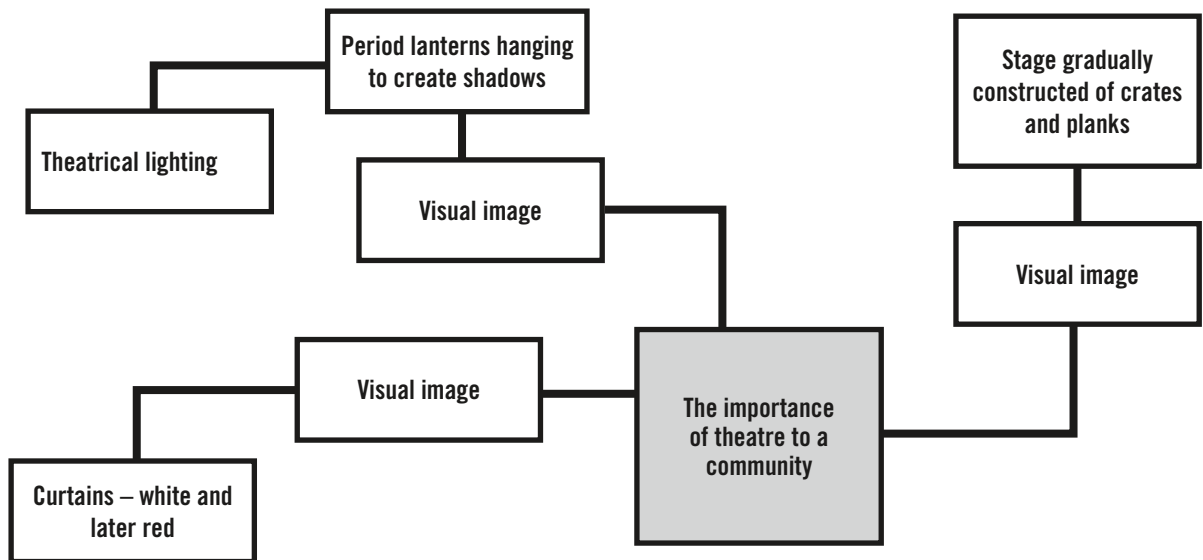
All of the action takes place in the hold of the ship and various locations on Sydney Cove, but these spaces may be imagined in different ways and their appearance may change depending on the actions and time of day. Use the grid below to help you prepare your ideas. (Some examples have been suggested.)

Event/page	Set/lighting/props/sounds	Effect on audience
Play's opening (pages 3—4)	I want to capture the trauma of the long journey. The stage will be dimly lit with the occasional flash of strobe, while long sheets of white cloth are waved horizontally across the stage alongside the sound of waves crashing. Suddenly, the sound snaps off, replaced by the sound of whipping, and the cloths pulled off to the wings, while the convicts are revealed centre stage in a huddled mass. Sideway is upstage, backlit so that he only appears in silhouette reacting to the lashes. A tight spotlight will appear on each convict's face as they speak.	An arresting and startling opening, with the audience having to quickly make connections between what they are seeing and hearing. The sheets, like the sails on a ship, and the sound of crashing waves will establish their journey, while the whipping and Sideway's reactions show the cruelty of this world.
Shooting scene (pages 4—7)		
Ralph and Harry (pages 7—12)		
Harry and Duckling rowing, (pages 27—30)		
First rehearsal (pages 42—54)		
Prison scene (pages 55—58)		
Mary and Ralph on the beach (pages 79—81)		
Play's ending (pages 85—93)		

Set design

Visual imagery

Think about what the play means to you and how you can use items in the set to help the audience understand that meaning. You could use a mind map, like the examples below, to set out your concept.



Lighting and sound design

Lighting and sound design grid

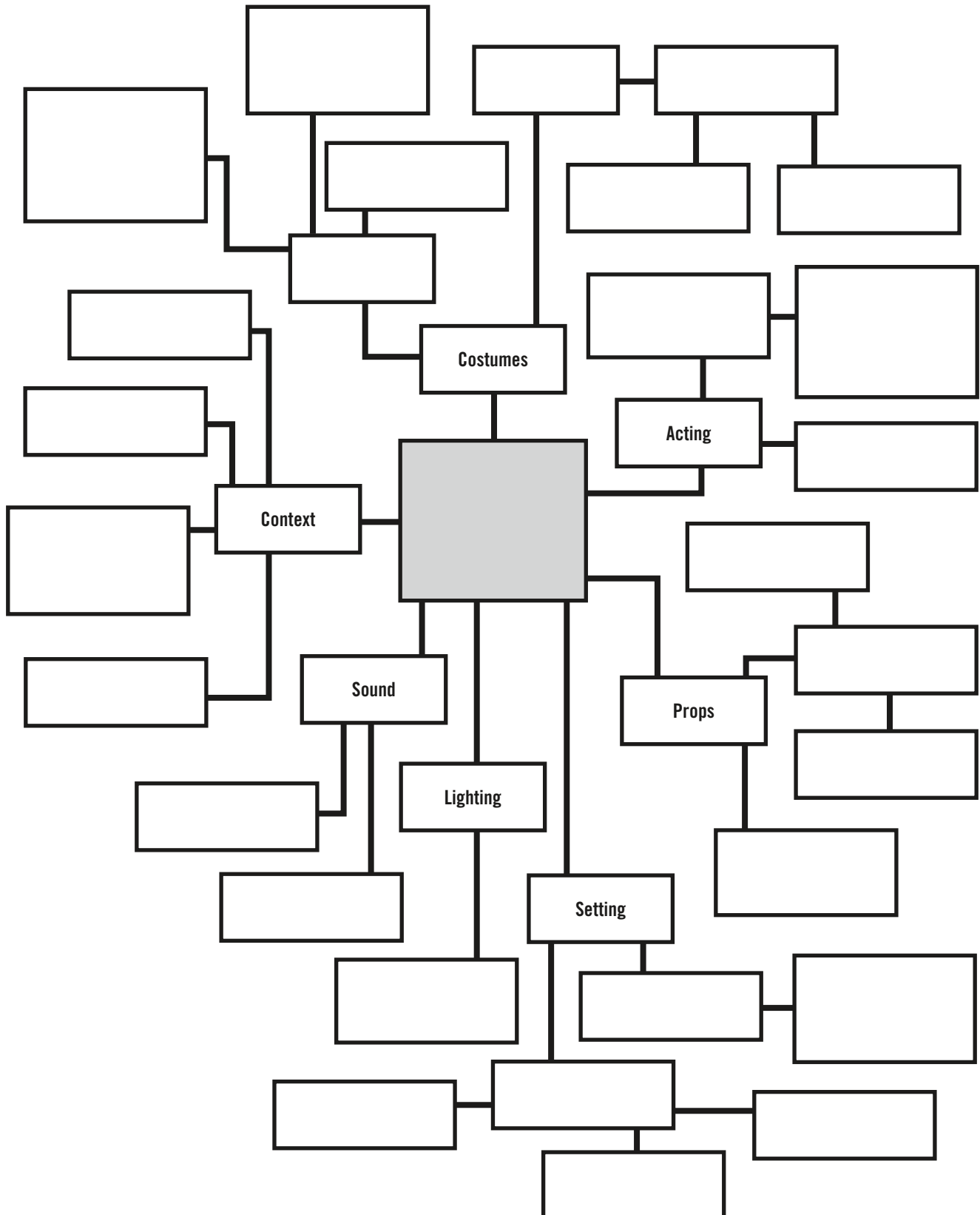
Use the grid below to begin planning your lighting and sound design choices for important moments in the play.

Scene/key moment	Lighting (intensity, angle, colours, lanterns, etc)	Sound (music, sound effects, live, recorded, volume, etc)	Effect on audience (setting, mood, context, tension, psychological insight)
Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2: The play's opening			
Act 1, Scene 3: Shooting			
Act 1, Scene 4: Ralph's tent (Similar lighting might be used in the scene with Ketch)			
Act 1, Scene 5: Ambition (Similar lighting might be used for rehearsals)			
Act 1, Scene 6: Debate			
Act 1, Scene 7: Boating			
Act 2, Scene 1: Imprisonment			
Act 2, Scene 3: Harry's hallucinations (Similar lighting might be used in Harry's death scene)			
Act 2, Scene 9: Mary and Ralph on the beach			
Act 2, Scene 11: Backstage of first performance and play's ending			

Creating a cohesive concept: acting, directing, design

Ideas for your production

Use the mind map below to set out your ideas for your ideal production.



Making a plan

Mind map

Use this mind map to plan a response to an exam question about set and lighting design. (You could use a similar map for another question.)

