VCE Drama  
Advice for teachers 2019–2024

Example of application of symbol

**Stimulus:** English Children’s Song, *What are Little Girls Made of*?

Students are asked to brainstorm ideas of how symbol may be applied to explore the theme of binary gender stereotypes through the use of the following:

* Language: ‘babe’ ‘baby’ ‘bitch’ ‘witch’ ‘run like a girl’. These words/phrases might be applied in a heightened or poetic way. Explore repetition of the word ‘baby’ in different contexts. For example: two lovers, woman says to man, ‘Oh baby’ (sexualised). Man to woman, ‘You’re my baby’ (diminutive). Literal term, ‘baby’ (innocence). Explore the symbolism of the words ‘sugar and spice’ or ‘frogs and snails’ and the connotations for each gender, played out through an exaggerated use of language. Contrast use of language to imply diminutive, apologetic, flowery versus aggressive, assertive and hard. Then use the same text with the opposite gender.
* Action: a coach says to a team ‘Man up’ and we see various symbolic representations of masculinity, such as a body builder pose. Mime grabbing a woman, dipping her and kissing her. A soldier marching on the spot. Someone picking a flower and smelling it.
* Gesture: a punch, a slap, a submissive head drop, covering eyes or face in shame, no eye contact, hands protecting chest, chest pouted like a pigeon. Use of repetitive gesture (Pina Bausch) such as mime of lip stick being applied gently and slowly. The action is repeated multiple times and each time it becomes more exaggerated and aggressive.
* Heightened movement: exploring reversed stereotypes. Female with a wide, heavy stance, heels to the ground first. Male miming walking in heels, on tip-toes, treading lightly. Symbolism through an observation and exploration of gait.
* Vocal or facial expression: giggling, grunting, heavy exhalation of air, gasping, wolf-whistling, clucking tongue, pouting lips, licking lips seductively, frowning, sneering, biting lip nervously, mouth agape, smiling sheepishly.
* Object/prop: a traditionally-male-associated object such as a sword transformed into objects traditionally associated with women, such as a wooden spoon, a baby, a bunch of flowers.
* Costume: pussy hat (project), colours of baby blue/pink (one person is in pink and the rest are in blue). Apron (clean and white versus soiled with car oil or blood-stained). Army boots, singlet, sequins. Females in restricted high heels and males in heavy boots, both become barefoot through the piece.
* Set pieces: posters on backdrop of advertisements from the 1940s (women and war recruitment) contrasted with advertisements of 1950s (images of housewives). Link this to gender stereotypes used in advertising today (Lynx, etc.)