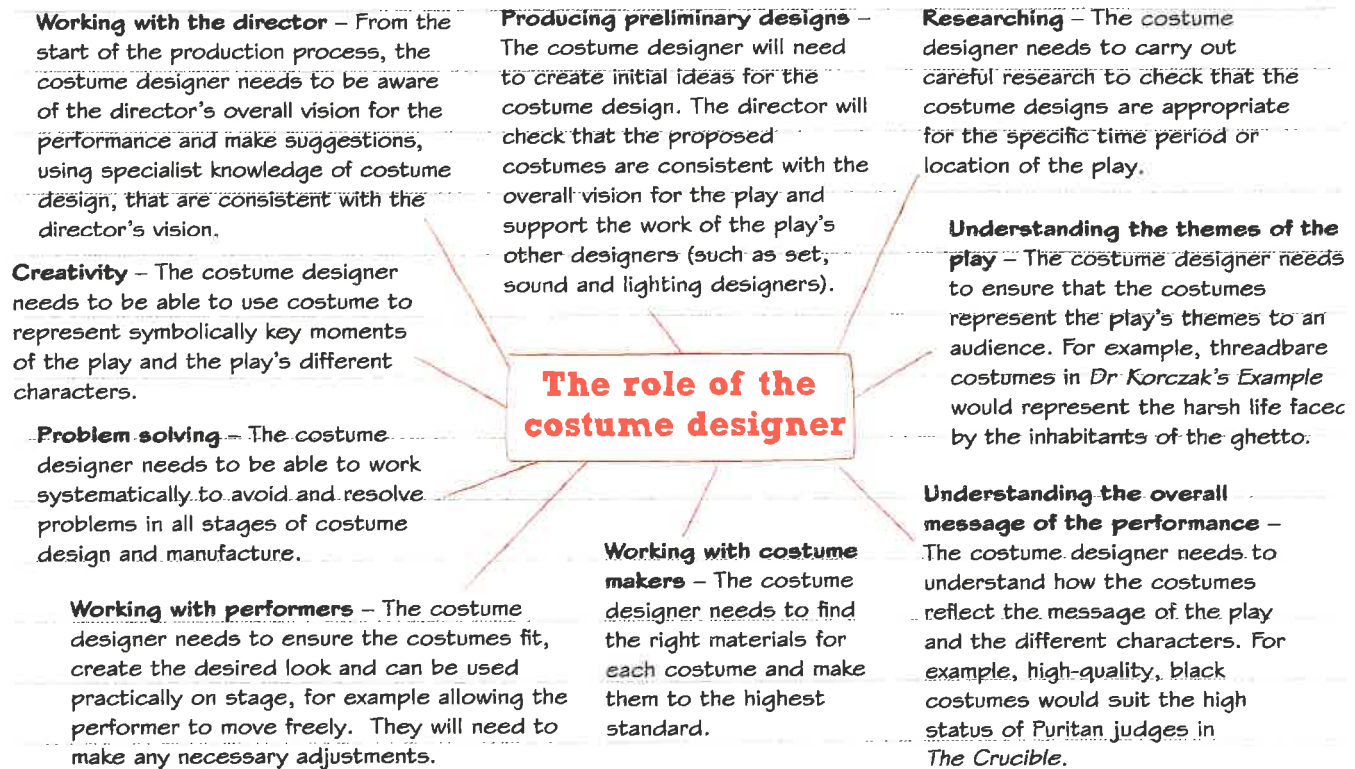


The costume designer

A costume designer must be able to support the overall concept of the performance and communicate key aspects of the play and character to an audience.



Pre-production

The costume designer works with the director and other designers long before rehearsals start.

To help shape the production, the costume designer needs to:

- ✓ have a clear and full understanding of the play
- ✓ share and develop ideas about the text, themes, issues and characters.

The costume designer needs to be aware of:

- the characters – their ages, gender, physicality, social status
- the overall plot
- the time and location of the play
- the style of the performance
- any specific requirements made by the director or playwright.

On stage an array of dolls, dressed as Korczak's orphans...

In the background two or three dolls dressed as Nazi soldiers, two as Polish adults, and a Korczak doll...

The clues to the time period and the types of characters can be found in the stage directions.

For example, *Dr Korczak's Example* includes helpful information for a costume designer:

- It is set in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1942.
- Life in the ghetto is very difficult.
- There must be a contrast between ghetto residents and the Nazi soldiers.
- Characters are represented by both performers and dolls: this must be clear to the audience through the costume.

Costume and context

If a performance is to flow and be consistent, it is vital to ensure that the costume designs fit with the play's overall design concept. Therefore, each costume-design decision needs to be considered in the wider context of the performance as a whole.

General design concept

While a playwright might indicate how the play should be set, directors often look for new, creative approaches.

At the start of the production process, a director works closely with a team of designers. Each designer must be clear about the overall design concept and work to achieve it.

Fundamental elements that may influence the overall design concept are:

- the location in which the play is set
- the time in which the play is set
- the style of the production
- the genre of the play
- the space used to stage the production
- portability (whether the production is touring).

Status

A character's **status** can be clearly represented through different combinations of materials, colours and accessories.

- **Higher status** can be indicated through neat, expensive, clean and well-fitting clothes.
- **Lower status** can be shown through dirty, torn, damaged and ill-fitting clothes.

Character traits

Costume can be used to show how a character behaves or feels, and their personal habits. For example, if a character is depressed, they may take little care in their appearance and personal hygiene, and look scruffy and dirty. If a character is trying to impress someone, they may take great care about how they look.

Symbolism

Costume design is effective when it conveys messages about the plot and the characters to the audience. These messages can be very obvious or quite subtle.

Symbolism is where the costume (or part of a costume) represents something more than its surface meaning. See page 27 for more on symbolism.

Costume can be used to:

- show social status or wealth/poverty
- show a change in a character's fortunes
- show location, such as a tropical island or snow-bound Siberia
- indicate the time period of the play
- represent themes
- create mood and atmosphere.



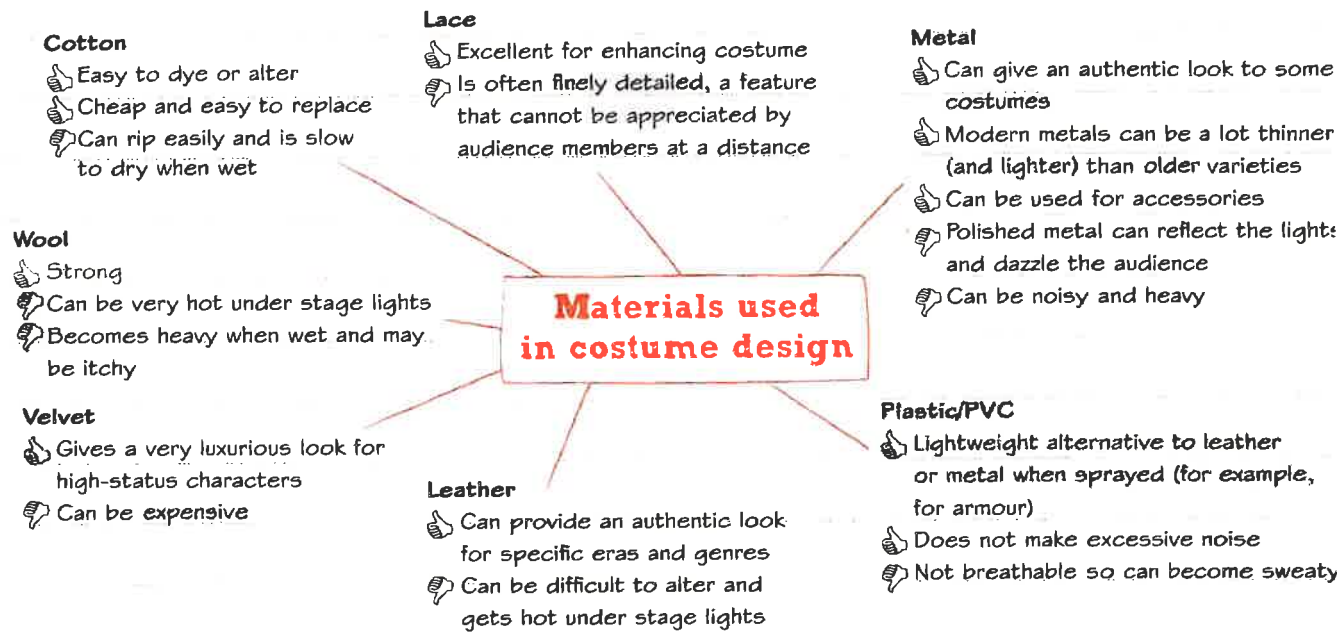
In the Comedy Theatre's 2000 production of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, the contrast between Davies's lower status as a tramp and Aston's higher status is symbolised through costume.

Costume and context

Costume is key to communicating the social, historical and cultural context to an audience. It makes clear the wider context in which the play is set and therefore allows the audience to gain a deeper understanding of the play.

Materials and colours

The choice of materials used in costume design can have a significant impact on how effective the end results are. Key messages such as character **status** can be communicated through colour in costume design.



The use of colour in costume design

The careful use of **colours** can help to provide the audience with **strong visual information**. Different colours can mean different things and so **colour symbolism** must be considered in the context of the play's whole design.

