

# Narration and multi-role

**Narration** is one device that helps to tell the story of the play, while the technique of **multi-role** can allow a performer to communicate a number of different characters.

## Using multi-role in performance

Multi-role can:

- 👍 provide an effective way of telling a story with a small company of performers
- 👍 be a device to tell the story, so that the audience can focus on the story's message
- 👍 be achieved through the use of costume and physical and vocal skills
- 👍 be an effective way to engage an audience.

Multi-role can be achieved through various acting techniques or design elements.

In David Greig's *Dr Korczak's Example*, multi-role is used to focus the audience on the message of the play, which is based on the Nazi ghettoisation of Warsaw. Greig wrote the play for three performers, perhaps looking for a more **non-naturalistic** or **stylised** performance. The audience will be aware that they are watching theatre, so will not become too attached to individual characters. In this way the play becomes more about the theme/message of the play than about the characters' individual stories.

## A Brechtian technique

Multi-role is often referred to as a **Brechtian technique**, as it was a key idea of the theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. Brecht wanted his audiences to focus on the message of the play rather than becoming too attached to any particular character. Brecht believed that a performer can 'distance' him or herself from a role they are playing by portraying a number of roles to an audience in the same play.

**Multi-role** – When a performer plays various roles on stage in one play.

Multi-role can include performers playing different genders and personalities. These changes are often portrayed through an adjustment in the performer's costume, physicality and voice.

## Performance skills

**Narration** – The process of telling a story. It can take many forms, including a character narrating sections of the play, or the playwright using a specified narrator or narrators to carry out a specific role in the play.

## Narration in performance

Narration can take many forms and require particular skills in performance.

For example, the play *1984* opens with a voice that acts as a narrator telling the story of Winston. The performer playing the voice cannot be seen, so the performer's vocal skills are vital here in delivering the words clearly and with the most appropriate tone. This narrative device works well on stage, as *1984* is an adaptation of a novel. The invisible voice returns at the end of the play, and a performer playing this role would need to consider how the delivery changes at this point.

## Multi-role performance

Multi-role demands particular performance skills in order to make the approach work successfully.

For example, in the Young Vic 2011 production of *Government Inspector*, many members of the cast played more than one role. The performer Steven Beard played the roles of Dr Gibner, Waiter and Shopkeeper. This would have required the performer to create three separate characters, with three different approaches to physicality and voice. Playing these different characters also meant the performer had to think carefully about how he developed each role throughout the performance.