

**Drama and Theatre 2024-2025**

***Welcome to Drama and Theatre!***

**Machinal** by Sophie Treadwell

One of the plays we will be studying next year is *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell. *Machinal* was written by playwright and journalist, Sophie Treadwell. It is her most famous piece of work and was first produced on Broadway in 1928, directed by Arthur Hopkins. It was a critical success and was described as a ‘tragedy of submission’. It is loosely based on the real-life trial of Ruth Snyder who with the help of her lover, Judd Gray, murdered her husband. She was eventually sentenced to death by electric chair.

**Themes**

*Machinal* explores a range of themes and ideas. Expressionistic Theatre is the perfect form for the journey of the Young Woman, and through a collection of episodes the audience are invited into the hard and mechanical world that suffocates and traps the **hopes and dreams** of Helen Jones.

Treadwell uses a range of **non-naturalistic techniques** and devices to give the audience an insight into the effects of living in a **dehumanised, materialistic and machine-driven society**.

Expressionistic drama puts society under the theatrical microscope and provides insight into the soulless systemisation of mankind. The world of the Young Woman is one that exploits people and robs them of **beauty and individualism**. The metallic and mechanical sounds that dominate the production add a haunting and disturbing quality to the overall narrative.

**Activity 1:**

Research the following – and create a research page(s) to present your findings. You can use annotated pictures, diagrams, prose, PPT, photographs etc.

**1. What is Expressionism?**

You may find it useful to consider the following questions to help you.

What exactly does the term expressionism mean?

How does the term apply to theatre?

What is the context behind this movement?

What should you consider when approaching an expressionist play?

These are some conventions associated with Expressionist Drama: atmosphere, plot, dialogue, set design, character.

**2. Treadwell’s inspiration/context**

What was Treadwell’s inspiration?

Why was it written?

Does the play reflect the writer’s own context?

What messages, if any, is it trying to convey to the audience?

Is it fiction or truth or a mixture of both?

### 3. 1920's Machine society

Capitalism and Urbanisation – what do these terms mean?  
How did the rises in technological advances affect 1920's society?  
What is the 'American Dream'?

### 4. Other areas – Feminism, Women's Rights and Prohibition

1920s American society was still very much dominated by men, but this was beginning to change.

How were women gradually being given more freedom and autonomy  
What elements were women still battling in 1920s America

**Prohibition** is another key factor in the play.  
What was prohibition in 1920s America and what was the reason for it?

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### Activity 2: Key Practitioners

Another important feature of A-Level Drama and Theatre is exploring the work of influential practitioners and applying their techniques to your own work.

#### **Antonin Artaud 1896-1948**

Research this practitioner and explore the following key ideas:

#### **Artaud**

- His ideas for the use of sound
- His actor /audience relationship
- His ideas for the use of the stage space; proxemics
- His ideas for lighting
- His use of mask and puppetry

Present your findings in an interesting way – e.g. a poster page, a PowerPoint or a mind map.

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### Activity 3: Monologue

You will be given a monologue to work on as your final task over the summer. The monologue is taken from the play, 'Girls & Boys' by Dennis Kelly. You should research the play and copy/ print the monologue. Please annotate the script with key details such as the emotions presented by the character and how you would convey this as an actor. There are limited stage directions so annotate your scripts with ideas for where the character might be and how you would explore the performance space. Be prepared to discuss your ideas in September.