

— A CHRISTIE METHOD TEXTBOOK —

THEATRE ARTS



*Practical, Theory & History of Theatre
in the Caribbean and Guyana*

WRITTEN BY

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THE CHRISTIE METHOD · STUDY SERIES

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and Guyana — A Christie Method Textbook for CSEC
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Theatre Arts
Practical, Theory & History of Theatre in the Caribbean and Guyana — A Christie
Method Textbook for CSEC Theatre Arts

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Dedication

For Ms. Shaundel Phillips of the Allied Arts, New Amsterdam Multilateral School — the teacher who gifted me the voice and ability to utilize my talents for any aspect of my life. Every chapter of this book is a lesson you taught me, written down at last.

And for the teachers who stood with her in that pioneer room — **Ms. Jackie Benn, Miss Seleste La Rose, Ms. Jonnelle Harewood, and Sir Narinedat Dhanraj** — who took a subject Guyana had never sat before and taught it like it had always belonged to us.

And for my parents, who built everything I stand on — long nights and sacrifice of love.

A Word Before the Curtain — the Author's Note



In 2006 I walked into an examination room at New Amsterdam Multilateral School as part of the first batch of students in Guyana ever to sit CSEC Theatre Arts. There was no Guyanese textbook for us. There was no past-paper pile worn soft by other people's hands. There was a syllabus, a stage, a handful of teachers brave enough to pioneer a subject — and there was what we carried in already: our wakes and our weddings, our ring games and our masquerade, our grandmothers' proverbs and the death announcements on local TV.

I earned a Grade One in that examination, and the Award for Best Graduating Theatre Arts Student — Practical. The piece my group performed was a scene of Guyanese wake culture — the gathering, the dominoes, the crying that rises when the death announcement plays on the television — and the examiner watching us was Professor Al Creighton, this country's leading critic of theatre, who years later would teach me Language Arts at the University of Guyana. You will meet that scene again in Part V of this book, taken apart bolt by bolt, because it is the single most useful thing I can give you: proof, with receipts, that the culture you already live inside is examination gold.

Twenty years after that pioneer room, this is the textbook we never had. It is written to the real CXC syllabus, with real history you can check, real craft you can drill, and real strategy for every paper and project. I have been strict where strictness saves you marks and warm where the subject deserves warmth — which is everywhere, because theatre is the warmest discipline there is.

Two rules govern every page:

1. **Facts walk with receipts.** Every historical claim in this book carries a numbered note pointing to a real, checkable source. Where a thing could not be verified, it was left out. Where a passage is my own memory, it is framed honestly as my account.
2. **Your culture is your material.** The syllabus itself prescribes Caribbean cultural forms — the wake, the masquerade, storytelling, Mashramani — as the raw substance of your examination work.[^note-front] This book will keep sending you home to look harder at what you thought was ordinary.

Walk good. Let's begin.

Naomi E. Christie Berbice, Guyana



How to Use This Book

If you are a CSEC Theatre Arts candidate: read Part IV first (the examination, mapped to the syllabus), then work Parts II and III alongside your two years of classes, and keep Part V beside you when you build your own pieces. Part I is your Paper 01 ammunition — the essay questions reward candidates who can place their practical work inside real Caribbean theatre history.

If you are a teacher: Parts I and II are teachable as term-by-term theory; Part III is a practical workbook of exercises; Part V is a complete worked model of taking a devised piece from first idea to examination performance.

If you are a general reader: start at Part I and read straight through. The history of Caribbean theatre is one of the great underrated stories of this region, and Guyana sits at the centre of it more often than most Guyanese know.

Apparatus: cross-references appear as (see Part III, Chapter 12); numbered endnotes are gathered at the end of each Part; the full bibliography closes the book. The companion file RESEARCH-SOURCES.md records every source consulted.

**PART I — HISTORY: THE STAGE WE
INHERITED**



Chapter 1 — Performance Before Playhouses: the Deep Roots of Caribbean Theatre

1.1 Where does theatre begin?

Not in a building. Hold that thought for the whole of this book, because it is the thought that will save you in Paper 01 and set you free in Paper 02.

In Europe the story of theatre is often told as a story of buildings — the Greek amphitheatre, the Elizabethan playhouse, the proscenium arch. In the Caribbean the story runs the other way. Our theatre was born in yards, streets, bottom-houses, cane fields, church halls and creek-sides, and only much later did it move indoors. The scholar Errol Hill — a Trinidadian, and the first great historian of our stage — spent his career arguing exactly this: that the Trinidad Carnival was not "background culture" to be overcome before real theatre could start, but was itself a **mandate for a national theatre**, a complete performance tradition with costume, spectacle, music, character types and audience all already in place.[1]

The CXC syllabus you will sit is built on Hill's insight. Its compulsory Core does not begin with Shakespeare or Ibsen; it begins with **Caribbean Cultural Forms** — rituals, festivals, celebrations, games, music, dances and language "derived from and identified with particular communities and cultures in the Caribbean." [2] The examiners are telling you plainly: the roots come first.

So Chapter 1 is a walk through those roots — the performance traditions that were already fully theatrical long before anyone in this region sold a ticket.

1.2 The ritual root: performance that does work

Anthropologists like to say ritual is "efficacious performance" — performance that does something, not just shows something. A wedding does something. A funeral does something. The Caribbean is dense with performances of this kind, and the syllabus names many of them as set forms for study.[3]

The wake (Nine Nights, Set-Up, Forty Nights). Across the region, when someone dies, the community does not merely attend a funeral — it keeps company. In Guyana the wake gathers neighbours and family at the home of the bereaved through the nights before and after burial: hymn-singing and "sankeys," coffee and biscuits, quiet crying and loud remembering, and — in the Guyanese grain of it — dominoes slamming on a board out by the bottom-house while the older heads talk. In Jamaica the tradition takes the form of Nine Night, nine nights of song and ceremony to see the spirit off. The wake is theatre's whole toolkit in miniature: a gathering space, an audience that is also a cast, ritual actions, music, story, and an emotional arc that moves a community from raw grief toward something bearable. It is a culture's technology for healing — and it is a **set cultural form on the CXC syllabus**, prescribed for study in successive examination cycles.[4] Part V of this book is an entire worked case study of turning the Guyanese wake into examination drama, because that is precisely what I did in 2006. Hold it in mind as you read.

Kumfa and Revival. The syllabus lists Guyana's Kumfa (Comfa) — a Guyanese African-derived spiritual tradition of drumming and dance — alongside Jamaica's Revival among the region's ritual forms.[5] Treat these with respect and precision: they are living religious practices for their communities, not costumes. A candidate who studies a spiritual form must present it as its practitioners understand it. That rule — **each tradition's sacred things belong only to that tradition, presented respectfully as themselves** — governs this entire book, and it will govern your examination work too, because carelessness here is both an ethical failure and a mark-losing one.

Hosay/Tadjah. With Indian indentureship after 1838 came the Muharram observance of Shia Islam, commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn. In the Caribbean it became known as Hosay (from "Husayn"),

and in British Guiana the great decorated model tombs at its centre — taziya — were creolized into **tadjah**.^[6] The tadjahs are built over days, carried in procession with drumming, and at the observance's end committed to the water. Understand this form correctly: its root is **mourning and commemoration**, carried across the ocean by indentured labourers as a way of keeping faith and memory alive in a strange land. Its processions are visually magnificent — towering built structures, drum rhythms, communal movement — which is why theatre scholars study it as performance. But a student presenting Hosay who plays it as a "party" has misread it profoundly. Origins first, always.

Ramleela and Phagwa. Hindu indentured labourers brought the Ramleela — the great open-air dance-drama cycle enacting the story of Lord Rama from the Ramayana — and it took root in both Guyana and Trinidad, performed over days on open grounds with community casts.^[7] Phagwa (Holi), the spring festival, likewise carries its own performance vocabulary of song and colour. The Ramleela is one of the oldest continuous theatre traditions in the Caribbean by any definition: text, casting, costume, staging, audience, all sustained by community devotion for over a century. Again: it is sacred performance, of the Hindu tradition, presented as itself.

Matikoor and Queh-Queh. The syllabus's Guyanese list is rich in pre-wedding traditions: **Matikoor (Dig Dutty)**, the Indo-Guyanese women's night of song, drum and frank celebration before a Hindu wedding, and **Queh-Queh (Kwe-Kwe)**, the Afro-Guyanese pre-wedding night of song, dance, ring-play and teasing instruction of the bride and groom.^[8] Both are complete performance events — call-and-response song, choreographed movement, licensed comedy, an audience that participates. Notice something beautiful and examinable: Guyana's two largest ancestral communities each carry a pre-wedding night of musical instruction and celebration. A comparative essay on Matikoor and Queh-Queh — parallel functions, distinct traditions, never blended — is Paper 01 gold.

1.3 The festival root: the street as stage

Carnival and masquerade. The Trinidad Carnival's history, told definitively by Errol Hill, runs from the French planters' pre-Lenten masquerades of the late eighteenth century, through the enslaved

population's mimicry and transformation of those forms, through Canboulay (cannes brûlées, the burnt-cane procession), the rise of calypso and the calypso tent, stick-fighting and its drum, the steelband, and the modern mas' camp and competition stage.[9] Carnival's significance for the theatre student is structural: it contains **character types** (the Midnight Robber with his boastful "robber talk," Dame Lorraine, Jab Jab, Moko Jumbie on stilts), **costume and spectacle** design traditions, **competition dramaturgy**, and a **performer–audience relationship** in which the street audience is itself costumed and moving. When Peter Minshall, the Trinidadian masman, designed for Olympic opening ceremonies, he was exporting a Caribbean theatrical language to the largest stages on earth.

In Guyana, masquerade has its own lineage — the Christmas-season masquerade bands with their flouncing costumed dancers, mad bull and stilt dancers, drum and fife — a form descended from West African masking traditions carried through slavery, surviving today in bands that still take the streets at Christmas.[10]

Mashramani. Guyana's own national festival is younger and has a founding story every candidate should know with dates. When Guyana became a Republic on 23 February 1970, the town of Linden sought a name for the celebrations. The organisers wanted an Amerindian name; through consultation with Amerindian elders came the word rendered as **Mashramani**, from an Arawak (Lokono) concept meaning roughly "the celebration after cooperative work" — the festival a community holds when hard collective labour is done.[11] The first Mashramani was held in Linden for Republic Day 1970 and drew celebrants from across the country; it became the annual national festival, with costume and float parades, calypso and soca competitions, and children's Mashramani performances in schools. Mashramani is on your syllabus's prescribed forms list[12] — and its very name teaches the deepest lesson of Caribbean festival: celebration is earned by shared work. Remember that in your rehearsal room.

1.4 The storytelling root: the voice as theatre

Before all else, the Caribbean had the storyteller. The syllabus lists "Story telling/Nansi Tori/Anansi Story/Folk Tales" among the region's cultural forms,[13] and every Caribbean territory knows some version of the

trickster spider **Anansi**, carried from the Akan peoples of West Africa in the memories of the enslaved. An Anansi story session is a one-person theatre piece: narration, character voices, song insertions, call-and-response with the audience ("Crick? Crack!"), physical mimicry, suspense management. The storyteller is playwright, director, full cast and stage manager in one body.

Guyana adds a second deep storytelling stream: the **Amerindian oral traditions** of the country's first peoples — Lokono (Arawak), Kalina (Carib), Warrau, Makushi, Wapishana and others — whose narratives of origins, animals and the land are among the oldest continuously told stories in the hemisphere. These traditions live primarily as oral performance: told aloud, shaped to the audience, kept accurate by the teller's responsibility to the community. A Guyanese theatre student should know that the national festival's own name came from Arawak consultation,[14] and should treat Amerindian narrative as living heritage belonging to living peoples — to be engaged with through respect, research and, wherever possible, the communities themselves, never as free decoration.

And across the whole region runs the **tea meeting** tradition (St. Kitts and Nevis, Guyana, Barbados, Jamaica and elsewhere)[15] — the village concert of speeches, recitations and songs where an orator's eloquence was tested against a noisy, judging crowd. If you have ever wondered where the Caribbean's love of grand public speech was rehearsed — the political platform, the courtroom advocacy, the classroom recitation — the tea meeting is a large part of the answer. I say this as someone who went from a school stage in New Amsterdam to courtrooms: the line is unbroken.

1.5 What the roots teach the candidate

Draw these five conclusions and carry them through the whole book:

1. **Caribbean theatre is older than its buildings.** Ritual, festival and storytelling gave us complete performance systems centuries before formal playhouses.
2. **Performance here does work** — it heals (the wake), it binds (queh-queh, matikoor), it commemorates (Hosay), it instructs (Anansi), it celebrates earned rest (Mashramani).

3. **The audience is a participant.** From Carnival street to wake-house yard, the Caribbean audience sings back, answers back, moves. Your staging choices should know this (see Part III, Chapter 14).
4. **Every form belongs to a community.** Study it in its own terms; present sacred things only as themselves. This is both ethics and examination technique.
5. **The syllabus was built from this inheritance.** The Core's cultural forms, Paper 02's playmaking "using a prescribed Caribbean cultural form,"[16] the whole architecture — it all assumes you will mine your own culture. Part V shows you exactly how.



Chapter 2 — The Builders: Hill, Walcott, Scott, Sistren and the Making of a Caribbean Stage

2.1 The generation that decided we had a theatre

Between the 1940s and the 1980s, a generation of West Indian artists and scholars performed an act of intellectual courage: they declared that the Caribbean did not need to borrow a theatre — it needed to recognise the one it already had, and build professional structures worthy of it. Four names anchor this chapter. Learn them with dates; Paper 01 rewards precision.

2.2 Errol Hill (1921–2003): the scholar who read Carnival as theatre

Errol Gaston Hill, born in Trinidad in 1921, was playwright, actor, director and — above all — the founding historian of anglophone Caribbean theatre.[17] Two works matter most to you:

- ***Man Better Man* (1964)** — his best-known play, a stick-fighting drama written substantially in calypso-inflected verse, which put the Trinidadian stick-fighting yard (a form on your syllabus's own list[18]) at the centre of a full-length work. The title itself is pure Caribbean dramaturgy: the challenge boast of the gayelle.
- ***The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (1972)** — the landmark study arguing that Carnival is a complete indigenous theatrical tradition and should be the foundation of a national theatre, rather than an obstacle to one.[19] First published in the very year of the first Carifesta (see Chapter 3), it remains the definitive account of Carnival's development from French colonial

masquerade through Canboulay, calypso and steelband to modern mas'.

Hill's later career took him to Dartmouth College in the United States, where he joined the drama department in 1968 and became that institution's first tenured African American faculty member;[20] his *Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre* (1994) helped fix our region's stage in world scholarship. The lesson of Hill for a CSEC candidate is simple and liberating: **the forms your grandparents kept are worthy of the world's most serious study.**

2.3 Derek Walcott (1930–2017) and the Trinidad Theatre Workshop: the poet who built a company

Derek Walcott of St. Lucia — who would win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992 — did his theatre-building in Trinidad. In 1959, with his brother Roderick, he co-founded what became the **Trinidad Theatre Workshop** (originally the Little Carib Theatre Workshop) in Port of Spain — hailed as the first professional West Indian theatre company.[21] For two decades Walcott trained a company of Caribbean actors to a professional standard and wrote for their particular voices and bodies — the way Shakespeare wrote for his company.

The Workshop developed and produced his major plays: *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (drawing on St. Lucian folktale — the storytelling root again), *The Joker of Seville*, and above all ***Dream on Monkey Mountain***, published in 1970 and winner of the 1971 Obie Award for Best Foreign Play in its Off-Broadway production.[22] *Dream* is a fever-vision of colonial self-image — the charcoal burner Makak, despised and dreaming, journeying through visions of Africa and whiteness toward a shattering self-acceptance. For your essays, hold this pairing: **Hill argued the theory (our forms are theatre); Walcott built the practice (our actors, professionally trained, performing our epics).**

Walcott's example matters to Guyanese students for one more reason: he shows that a small territory's artist can set the standard for the whole hemisphere without ever abandoning the archipelago's material — the fishermen, the charcoal burners, the folk devils and angels of home.

2.4 Dennis Scott (1939–1991): the wake as dramaturgy

Jamaica's Dennis Scott — poet, playwright, dancer, and director of the Jamaica School of Drama — gives us the single most important precedent for this book's case study. His play *An Echo in the Bone* (1970) is structured around the **Nine Night ceremony** — the Jamaican wake — using the ritual's own logic of summoned spirits to move the play through two centuries of Jamaican historical memory, from slave ship to present grief.[23] The title names his thesis: history is not behind us; it echoes in the bone.

Understand what Scott did technically, because in Part V you will do a school-scale version of the same operation: he took a **ritual form the audience already knew in their bodies** (the wake), and used its structure — the gathering, the songs, the visitation of the dead — as the **architecture of the play itself**. The audience doesn't watch a wake; the play is a wake, and the audience is at it. When my 2006 group built our examination piece on the Guyanese wake, we were standing — whether we fully knew it then or not — in the tradition Dennis Scott pioneered. Your examiners know this lineage. Name it in your viva voce and watch their faces change.

2.5 Sistren Theatre Collective (1977–): theatre from the ground up

In Kingston in 1977, a group of working-class Jamaican women — most of them from a government employment programme — formed the **Sistren Theatre Collective** ("sistren" = sisters), assisted by the playwright and director Honor Ford-Smith.[24] Their first piece, *Downpression Get a Blow* (1977), performed for a national workers' festival, dramatized conditions in a women's garment factory and the fight to unionize.[25]

Sistren's method is the one your Paper 02 playmaking assessment quietly assumes: **collective devising from lived experience** — the members' own stories of work, poverty, motherhood, violence and survival, workshopped through improvisation into performances, often in Jamaican Creole, that toured yards, community centres and international festivals. Their testimony-based book *Lionheart Gal* carried the method into literature. Three lessons for you:

1. **You do not need a playwright to have a play.** A disciplined group, improvising honestly from what it knows, can devise work of international standard. (Method in Part III, Chapters 11–12.)
2. **Creole is a stage language.** Sistren performed in the language their truth lived in. Your wake scene, your queh-queh piece, your market vignette — let people talk how people talk. (See Chapter 13 on register choices.)
3. **Theatre can be an instrument of social examination** — of gender, class, race, power. The syllabus's own improvisation content calls for work on "Caribbean culture and contemporary social issues." [26]

2.6 The wider company

History is not four names only. Around and after these builders stand others every candidate should be able to cite: **Marina Maxwell's Yard Theatre** movement in Jamaica, staging work in actual yards to break the colonial playhouse frame; **Rawle Gibbons** and the Trinidadian tradition of Best Village theatre; Jamaica's **Louise Bennett ("Miss Lou")**, who made Jamaican Creole performance nationally beloved and internationally respected, proving the storytelling root could carry a whole career; and the annual **Jamaica Pantomime** of the Little Theatre Movement (founded 1941 by Henry and Greta Fowler), the region's longest-running popular theatre institution. In the francophone and hispanophone Caribbean, parallel movements ran their own course — Aimé Césaire's poetic drama in Martinique, Cuba's revolutionary theatre brigades — reminding us the sea connects rather than divides these stories.

And one more thread, which the next two chapters follow home: **Guyana**. Because while Trinidad had Carnival's mandate and Jamaica had its Pantomime and its School of Drama, it was Guyana — of all the territories — that gathered the entire region's artists together for the first time, and it was Guyana that produced both one of the Caribbean's oldest playhouses and one of its most distinctive satirical traditions.



Chapter 3 — Carifesta: the Festival Guyana Gave the Caribbean



3.1 Born in Georgetown, 1972

Every Guyanese theatre student should carry this chapter like a passport, because the biggest recurring arts event in the Caribbean — the **Caribbean Festival of Arts, Carifesta** — was born here, in Guyana.

The idea grew from Caribbean Writers and Artists Conventions held in Georgetown in 1966 and 1970, during Guyana's Independence and Republic celebrations. The enthusiasm of the gathered artists found favour with Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, whose government converted the idea into a full festival of the region's arts.[27] The first **Carifesta opened in Guyana on 25 August 1972 and ran to 15 September 1972**, drawing more than a thousand artists from over thirty Caribbean and Latin American countries — music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture, folk art, photography and literature all together for the first time on that scale.[28]

The infrastructure itself became legend: to house the visiting delegations, Guyana built **Festival City** — one hundred houses at North Ruimveldt, Georgetown, which still carry that name today.[29] The **National Cultural Centre**, then still under construction, was pressed into service for the festival though incomplete (its full story is in Chapter 4). And the region's governments, seeing what Guyana had done, established a permanent unit within the CARICOM Secretariat to carry Carifesta forward.[30] The festival has since travelled the region — Jamaica, Cuba, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and beyond — but its birth certificate says Guyana, 1972.

For Paper 01 purposes, be able to argue **why** 1972 mattered: the anglophone Caribbean was newly independent (Guyana 1966, a Republic 1970), and Carifesta was independence made visible in art — a deliberate act of building what Burnham's generation called a Caribbean personality, by putting the region's artists in one place to see themselves as one civilization.[31]

3.2 The festival comes home: Carifesta X, 2008

Thirty-six years after the birth, the festival returned to its birthplace: **Carifesta X was held in Guyana from 22 to 31 August 2008**, under the theme "One Caribbean, One Purpose, Our Culture, Our Life." [32] Guyana took on the hosting at short notice — roughly four months of preparation after the original host withdrew — and mounted some one hundred events across the ten days, in what regional commentators recorded as both triumph and scramble.[33]

I write this section differently from the rest of the chapter, because I was not reading about Carifesta X in an archive. **I performed at Guyana's Carifesta.** I was eighteen that August, two years out from the pioneer Theatre Arts batch, and I stood on a Carifesta stage in the same city where the festival had been invented before I was born. I keep the account short because the structural point is the treasure: the distance between a school examination piece and a regional festival stage is **shorter than you think**. The syllabus trains you in exactly the forms Carifesta celebrates. The pipeline is real. I am its receipt.

3.3 What Carifesta means for your examination work

Three usable arguments, each with its receipt in this chapter's notes:

1. **Regional identity is a made thing** — made partly by festivals. Carifesta institutionalized the idea that a St. Lucian dancer, a Cuban muralist and a Guyanese dramatist belong to one artistic civilization. Essays on the function of festivals should cite 1972 Guyana as the founding proof.
2. **The state can be a patron of theatre** — Festival City and the National Cultural Centre are concrete (literally) examples of festival-driven cultural infrastructure.[34]

3. **Festivals feed forms, and forms feed festivals.** Carifesta stages carry the very cultural forms on your syllabus — masquerade, drumming traditions, storytelling, folk dance. The festival is the syllabus's Core, performed at national scale.



Chapter 4 — Guyana's Own Stage: Guild, Cultural Centre, Link Show and the Critical Tradition



4.1 The Theatre Guild and the little playhouse in Kingston

Guyana's formal theatre history has a precise address: Parade Street, Kingston, Georgetown. There stands the Playhouse of the **Theatre Guild of Guyana** — founded in 1957, its Playhouse opened in 1960, the organisation incorporated on 9 September 1961 — the **oldest theatrical facility in Guyana and among the oldest in the English-speaking Caribbean**.^[35]

From the 1960s into the 1990s the Guild was the engine room of Guyanese drama: productions, playwriting competitions, training workshops, and the forging of generations of actors, directors and technicians. Its stage carried early work by artists who would become national names. Like many post-independence institutions it suffered decline — by the mid-1990s the Playhouse had fallen into disrepair — until a restoration completed in 2007, funded by private and public donors at home and abroad, returned the little playhouse to life.^[36] The Guild remains a volunteer, not-for-profit institution committed to training across the performing arts.^[37]

Know the Guild for your essays as Guyana's instance of a regional pattern: the **amateur "little theatre" movement** (compare Jamaica's Little Theatre Movement, 1941) through which colonial-era drama groups became the nurseries of post-independence national theatre.

4.2 The National Cultural Centre: greenheart under the stage

Guyana's largest stage rose, fittingly, on greenheart — the ironlike native timber this country exports to the world. The **National Cultural Centre** on Homestretch Avenue, D'Urban Park, Georgetown, was designed in 1971 by the Guyanese architect Norris Mitchell; construction began on 15 January 1972, when the first of **280 greenheart piles, seventy feet long**, was driven by contractors S.A. Nabi & Sons.[38] Though incomplete, the building served the first Carifesta in 1972 — festival and playhouse rising together — and was officially opened on **16 May 1976**, staging its first full presentation, a programme of dance and music titled *A Span of Time*, on 23 May 1976.[39] The auditorium seats roughly two thousand,[40] making it one of the largest purpose-built performance halls in the English-speaking Caribbean.

For a theatre student the NCC is a lesson in **performance space** (a Core topic[41]): a proscenium hall at national scale, whose size shapes everything performed in it — projection demands on the voice (Part III, Chapter 9), sightline demands on blocking (Chapter 14), and the peculiar challenge of making intimate Guyanese forms — a wake scene, a storytelling turn — read in a two-thousand-seat house.

4.3 The Link Show and the birth of professional theatre in Guyana

Now the tradition closest to my own family's trade of broadcasting. In **1981** came the most consequential development in modern Guyanese theatre: the founding of **The Theatre Company**, Guyana's first professional theatre company of wide recognition, by three directors — the broadcaster and actor-director **Ron Robinson**, the producer **Gem Madhoo**, and the writer **Ian McDonald**.[42] The company's signature became the annual satirical revue known as **the Link Show** — sketch after sketch of social and political commentary, songs, impersonations and picing, packing houses year after year at the Cultural Centre.

Even the name is a broadcasting story: Robinson, a leading radio announcer, coined "Link" by joining the memory of an older revue (the "Brink") with "The Link," a prominent daily prime-time radio news feature produced by his own station team.[43] Radio and stage, linked by

name — a Guyanese theatre institution named after a radio programme. As someone raised inside a radio-and-television family, I take personal delight in this receipt: in Guyana, the broadcast signal and the stage have never been strangers.

The Theatre Company's deeper significance is economic, and the critic Al Creighton has documented it precisely: Robinson and Madhoo were **the first to pay performers**, introducing the very practice of professional fees for theatre work in Guyana.[44] Before 1981, Guyanese theatre was love; after 1981, it could also be a living. (Madhoo — later Madhoo-Nascimento — went on to found GEMS Theatre Productions in 2002, continuing as the country's leading independent producer.[45]) Satire, meanwhile, proved to be the form Guyanese audiences would reliably buy tickets for — an examinable observation about the relationship between genre and audience in a small society, where laughing at power in a full dark room is itself a civic ritual.

4.4 The critical tradition: Al Creighton and the discipline of judgment

A national theatre needs one more institution, less visible than a playhouse: **criticism** — the sustained, informed, published judgment of work. Guyana's critical tradition has for decades been anchored by **Al Creighton**, whose "Arts on Sunday" column in the *Stabroek News* has provided week-upon-week review and scholarship of Guyanese and Caribbean performance — a running archive of our stage found nowhere else.[46] Creighton's columns are themselves a syllabus: histories of the Link Show and professional theatre,[47] World Theatre Day retrospectives, reviews holding productions to standard.

I owe this tradition a personal debt, recorded here as the author's account. In 2006, the examiner who watched and judged my pioneer-batch practical — the wake scene this book rebuilds in Part V — was Professor Al Creighton himself. Years later, at the University of Guyana, he taught me Language Arts on my road to law. The student performed for the critic; the critic later trained the student's pen; the pen now writes the textbook. That circle is not decoration — it is this book's theory of critique (Part II, Chapter 8): **performance, scholarship and advocacy are one discipline of disciplined judgment, wearing three different robes.**

4.5 Berbice stands up

One correction to the Georgetown-centred map, from a Berbician author: Guyanese theatre is not only a capital-city story. The pioneer CSEC Theatre Arts batch of 2006 that this book keeps returning to sat not in Georgetown but at **New Amsterdam Multilateral School in Berbice**, taught by **Ms. Shaundel Phillips** and her Allied Arts colleagues — county teachers who took a subject with no local textbook, no local past papers, and built Grade One candidates out of wake-houses and school stages. Whatever the national statistics eventually record about those first years, the principle stands for every rural and county student holding this book: **the syllabus does not live in Georgetown. It lives wherever a teacher opens the door and a community's culture walks in.**

4.6 Chapter checklist — dates a candidate should own

Year	Event
1838	Indian indentureship begins in British Guiana; Hosay/tadjah observance follows with the indentured[48]
1957	Theatre Guild of Guyana founded; Playhouse opens 1960; incorporated 1961[49]
1959	Walcott founds the (Little Carib/later Trinidad) Theatre Workshop[50]
1964	Errol Hill's <i>Man Better Man</i> [51]
1970	Guyana becomes a Republic (23 Feb); first Mashramani, Linden[52] Scott's <i>An Echo in the Bone</i> ; Walcott's <i>Dream on Monkey Mountain</i> published
1972	Hill's <i>The Trinidad Carnival</i> ; first Carifesta, Guyana (25 Aug–15 Sept); NCC construction begins[53]
1976	National Cultural Centre officially opens (16 May)[54]
1977	Sistren Theatre Collective founded, Kingston[55]

Year	Event
1981	The Theatre Company founded (Robinson, Madhoo, McDonald) — professional theatre and the Link Show era begin[56]
1992	Walcott wins the Nobel Prize in Literature
2001	CXC first issues the CSEC Theatre Arts syllabus[57]
2006	Guyana's pioneer CSEC Theatre Arts batch sits the examination (the author among them, NAMS)
2007	Theatre Guild Playhouse restored[58]
2008	Carifesta X returns to Guyana (22–31 Aug)[59]



Notes to Part I

[1] Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972). On its standing as the definitive account: "Errol Hill: Carnival Professor," *Caribbean Beat* no. 34; Encyclopedia.com, "Hill, Errol Gaston." [2] Caribbean Examinations Council, *CSEC Theatre Arts Syllabus*, CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 (Bridgetown: CXC, 2010; effective for examinations from May/June 2012), "Caribbean Cultural Forms," p. 13. [3] CXC Syllabus, pp. 13–14 (list of cultural forms and territories). [4] CXC Syllabus, p. 14: "Wake/Nine nights/Set-Up/Forty nights — Various Territories"; the Wake appears in both the 2012–2014 and 2015–2017 prescribed study lists. [5] CXC Syllabus, pp. 13–14 (Kumfa — Guyana; Revival — Jamaica). [6] "Hosay," Wikipedia (accessed August 2026); "No Way, Hosay? A Caribbean and South American Celebration Rooted in Islamic Tradition," *Message International*; NALIS (Trinidad and Tobago), "Hosay" content guide. On the Guyanese creolization "tadjah" and early observance in British Guiana from 1838: *Message International*, *ibid.* [7] CXC Syllabus, p. 14 (Ramleela — Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago; Phagwa — Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago). [8] CXC Syllabus, pp. 13–14 (Matikoor/Dig Dutty — Guyana; Queh Queh/Kwe-Kwe — Guyana). [9] Hill, *The Trinidad*

Carnival, passim; summarized in *Caribbean Beat* no. 34. [10] Masquerade/"Maskarade" appears on the syllabus's forms list (CXC Syllabus, p. 13) and in the 2015–2017 prescribed list; the Guyanese Christmas masquerade band tradition is treated in Guyanese press retrospectives (e.g., *Guyana Chronicle* and *Stabroek News* seasonal features). [11] "The Origin of Mashramani," *Guyana Chronicle*, 23 February 2011; "History," mashramani.gy (Guyana Republic Jubilee site); "Mashramani," Wikipedia (accessed August 2026). [12] CXC Syllabus, p. 14 (2015–2017 prescribed list, item 4). [13] CXC Syllabus, p. 14. [14] *Guyana Chronicle*, "The Origin of Mashramani" (2011) — the accounts of Basil Butcher's suggestion and consultation with Amerindian elders at Linden. [15] CXC Syllabus, p. 14 (Tea meeting/Ten cent concerts — St Kitts and Nevis, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica). [16] CXC Syllabus, p. 6 (Paper 02, Option 1, Section II: Playmaking — "a 10-15 minute prepared performance using a prescribed Caribbean cultural form"). [17] Encyclopedia.com, "Hill, Errol Gaston"; Dartmouth Libraries Archives & Manuscripts, "Hill, Errol Gaston, 1921–2003"; "Errol Hill," Wikipedia. [18] CXC Syllabus, p. 14 (Stick fighting/Stick Licking — Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados; also 2012–2014 prescribed list, item 2). [19] Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival* (1972). [20] Dartmouth Libraries Archives & Manuscripts, "Hill, Errol Gaston, 1921–2003"; "Errol Hill," Wikipedia. [21] "Trinidad Theatre Workshop," Wikipedia; British Council Literature, "Derek Walcott." [22] "Dream on Monkey Mountain," Wikipedia (publication 1970; Obie Award for Best Foreign Play, 1971, Negro Ensemble Company production). [23] "Dennis Scott (writer)," Wikipedia; EBSCO Research Starters, "Dennis Scott"; F.S.J. Ledgister, "Echoes in the bone," *Caribbean Review of Books* 18 (November 2008) — on the play's nine-night structure and historical memory. [24] "Sistren Theatre Collective," Wikipedia; Project MUSE, "Sistren Theatre Collective: Struggling to Remain Radical in an Era of Globalization." [25] "Sistren Theatre Collective," Wikipedia (on *Downpression Get a Blow*, 1977). [26] CXC Syllabus, p. 15 (Option 1a(vi): improvisations "using written texts, themes and ideas from Caribbean culture and contemporary social issues"). [27] CARICOM, "History of CARIFESTA," caricom.org. [28] Ibid.; "Caribbean Festival of Arts," Wikipedia (dates 25 August–15 September 1972; 1,000+ artists; 30+ countries). [29] "Caribbean Festival of Arts," Wikipedia (Festival City, North Ruimveldt, 100 houses for 25 delegations). [30] CARICOM, "History of

CARIFESTA." [31] Ibid. (Burnham's aims; the post-independence "Caribbean personality"). [32] CARICOM, "CELEGACY — Celebrating Our Legacy — The Opening of CARIFESTA X"; *Caribbean Beat* no. 92, "Festival of the arts turns full circle" (Carifesta X, Guyana, 22–31 August 2008). [33] Global Voices, "Guyana, Bahamas: The good and bad of Carifesta X" (29 August 2008) — including the four-month preparation window after the Bahamas' withdrawal. [34] "National Cultural Centre (Guyana)," Wikipedia; National Trust of Guyana, "National Cultural Centre." [35] Theatre Guild of Guyana, "Our Beginnings" (theatreguildgy.wixsite.com/ttgg); "The Theatre Guild of Guyana's Playhouse — The History We Missed in School," Things Guyana. [36] Ibid. (decline by mid-1990s; 2007 restoration). [37] Theatre Guild of Guyana, "Our Beginnings." [38] National Trust of Guyana, "National Cultural Centre" (Norris Mitchell design 1971; construction from 15 January 1972; 280 greenheart piles of 70 feet; contractor S.A. Nabi & Sons). [39] Ibid. (official opening 16 May 1976; first stage presentation *A Span of Time*, 23 May 1976); "National Cultural Centre (Guyana)," Wikipedia. [40] "National Cultural Centre (Guyana)," Wikipedia (c. 2,000 seats; dimensions). [41] CXC Syllabus, p. 12 (Core content 1(e): "Types of performance space"). [42] Al Creighton, "The rise and rise of professional theatre in Guyana," *Stabroek News*, 24 January 2021. [43] Al Creighton, "The Link and the genesis of Guyanese professional theatre," *Stabroek News*, 27 October 2024. [44] Creighton, "The rise and rise of professional theatre in Guyana" (2021). [45] "Robinson has last 'laff' after Link Show split," *Stabroek News*, 25 March 2017 (GEMS Theatre Productions, founded 2002 after Madhoo-Nascimento's resignation as TTC director). [46] Al Creighton author archive, stabroeknews.com/author/al-creighton (column running continuously; archive reaches back beyond 2009). [47] Creighton, "A stroll through history for World Theatre Day," *Stabroek News*, 30 March 2025; and the 2021 and 2024 columns cited above. [48] *Message International*, "No Way, Hosay?"; "An overview of Indian Indentureship in Guyana, 1838–1917," *Stabroek News*, 4 May 2013. [49] Theatre Guild of Guyana, "Our Beginnings." [50] "Trinidad Theatre Workshop," Wikipedia. [51] Encyclopedia.com, "Hill, Errol Gaston." [52] *Guyana Chronicle*, "The Origin of Mashramani" (2011). [53] CARICOM, "History of CARIFESTA"; National Trust of Guyana, "National Cultural Centre." [54] National Trust of Guyana, "National Cultural Centre." [55] "Sistren Theatre Collective,"

Wikipedia. [56] Creighton, "The rise and rise of professional theatre in Guyana" (2021). [57] CXC Syllabus, title pages: "First Issued 2001. Revised 2010" (CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 replacing CXC 32/G/SYLL 01). [58] Theatre Guild of Guyana, "Our Beginnings"; Things Guyana, "The Theatre Guild of Guyana's Playhouse." [59] CARICOM, "CELEGACY – The Opening of CARIFESTA X"; *Caribbean Beat* no. 92.



PART II — THEORY: HOW THEATRE WORKS



Chapter 5 — The Elements of Drama: from Aristotle to the Yard

5.1 Why an old Greek is on a Guyanese syllabus

Around 335 BC, the philosopher Aristotle wrote the *Poetics*, the oldest surviving work of dramatic theory, analysing the tragedy of his day.[1] He identified six elements of drama, and twenty-three centuries of theatre-making have not managed to replace them — only to reweigh them. Your syllabus's Core requires you to "examine elements of theatre arts";[2] Aristotle is where examination of elements begins. Learn the six, then learn to find all six in a Guyanese yard.

5.2 The six elements

1. Plot (mythos) — the arrangement of the incidents: not the story itself, but the *order* in which the audience meets it. Aristotle judged plot the soul of drama, prizing a shape with beginning, middle and end, where events follow by necessity or probability rather than accident. Classic plot machinery you must be able to name: **exposition** (the world established), **inciting incident** (the disturbance), **rising action** (complication), **climax** (the irreversible turn), **dénouement** (the settling). Two of Aristotle's devices remain examiner favourites: **peripeteia** (reversal — the moment fortune flips) and **anagnorisis** (recognition — the moment a character finally *knows*).

Yard translation: a wake has a plot. Word reaches the village (inciting incident); the house fills, stories and dominoes hold grief at arm's length (rising action); the death announcement plays on the TV and the room breaks (climax — and recognition: the loss becomes real); the singing carries everyone to the far side of the night (dénouement). When

my examination group structured our wake scene, that was the arc — see Part V, Chapter 22.

2. Character (ethos) — the agents of the action, revealed not by description but by **choice under pressure**. A character is what a character *does* when it costs something. For your devising work: give every figure on stage a want (objective), an obstacle, and a tactic — the actor's holy trinity (see Chapter 11).

3. Thought (dianoia) — the meaning: theme, argument, the thing the play is *about* underneath what it is about. Our wake scene's dianoia, stated in one line, was: *this is how we heal as a society — together, in ritual, with laughter guarding the door of grief*. Every examination piece should be able to state its thought in one sentence; if you cannot, you are not ready (Part IV, Chapter 18).

4. Diction (lexis) — the language: word choice, register, rhythm, imagery. In the Caribbean this element carries special electricity, because we live between registers — Creole and Standard, yard-talk and pulpit-talk — and movement between them *is itself dramatic action* (see Chapter 13 on the Creole continuum).

5. Song/Music (melos) — everything heard that is not speech: song, drum, soundscape. In Caribbean forms melos is never decoration. The sankey at the wake, the tassa at the wedding, the boom of the masquerade drum — these organise the event's emotion. Aristotle ranked music low for his stage; the Caribbean stage ranks it near the top. Say so in essays — examiners reward candidates who can *argue with* Aristotle, not just recite him.

6. Spectacle (opsis) — everything seen: costume, mask, movement, light, the image on stage. Aristotle trusted it least; Carnival and masquerade trust it most, and Errol Hill built the case that Caribbean spectacle is a dramaturgy in its own right (see Part I, Chapter 2).[3]

5.3 After Aristotle: three more lenses

Stanislavski and truthful acting. The Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) built the modern system of actor training: **given circumstances** (the facts your character lives inside), the **magic if** (behaving as if the circumstances were yours), **objectives and units** (what the character wants, beat by beat), **emotional memory** used with

care.[4] Part III applies his toolkit practically.

Brecht and the thinking audience. The German playwright-director Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) built **epic theatre**: episodic structure, songs that interrupt, direct address, the *Verfremdungseffekt* — the "making-strange" effect that keeps the audience thinking and judging instead of only feeling.[5] Caribbean connection: our traditions were epic before Brecht — the storyteller addresses us directly, the Link Show interrupts sketch with song, the tea meeting orator argues with his hecklers. Cite the parallel; examiners love it.

Boal and the spect-actor. The Brazilian Augusto Boal (1931–2009), in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, turned audiences into "spect-actors" who can stop the scene and step in to change it — theatre as rehearsal for changing life.[6] Sistren's devised, community-facing method (Part I, Chapter 2.5) belongs to this family. Your improvisation training (Chapter 11) borrows Boal's games.

5.4 The elements in one Guyanese table

Element	Aristotle's term	At the wake	In the Link Show	In masquerade
Plot	mythos	gathering □ announcement □ break □ song	sketch sequence, running gags	band's route and set-pieces
Character	ethos	the mourner, the aunt marshalling tea, the domino men	the politician, the market woman	mad bull, flouncers, stilt dancer
Thought	dianoia	healing is communal	power must be laughed at	ancestry walks among us
Diction	lexis	Creole comfort, hymn English	picong, mimicry	chants, drum-language
Music	melos	sankeys, the TV jingle	topical songs	drum and fife
Spectacle	opsis	the lit house, white cloth, the board slam	costume quick-changes	costume, mask, stilts

Learn this table. It is a Paper 01 answer factory: any question on "elements of drama in a Caribbean cultural form" is a walk across one of its rows.



Chapter 6 — Genres, Styles and Forms

6.1 Genre: the contract with the audience

A genre is a promise. Comedy promises restoration; tragedy promises cost; satire promises correction by laughter; melodrama promises clear villains and rescued virtue; farce promises escalating impossible logic. Break the promise knowingly (tragicomedy, dark satire) and you create meaning; break it ignorantly and you create confusion. The working genres every candidate must define with one Caribbean example each:

- **Tragedy** — downfall with cost and recognition. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* carries tragic architecture inside its dream form.[7]
- **Comedy** — disorder resolved into community. The queh-queh's licensed teasing is comedy's engine in ritual form.
- **Satire** — vice and folly mocked toward correction: the Link Show is Guyana's institution of it (Part I, Chapter 4.3).[8]
- **Melodrama** — heightened emotion, moral clarity; the backbone of much popular Caribbean stage and radio drama.
- **Farce** — mechanical escalation of misunderstanding; a staple of the region's commercial comedy circuit.
- **Ritual drama** — performance structured by ceremony: *An Echo in the Bone* (nine-night); our own wake scene.[9]
- **Musical/folk-form theatre** — story carried by song and traditional performance: Jamaica Pantomime; mas-based work in Hill's line.[10]
- **Storytelling theatre** — the solo teller with a listening crowd: Anansi sessions, Miss Lou's craft, modern one-person shows.

6.2 Style: how the world of the piece behaves

Genre is *what is promised*; style is *how the stage world behaves*. The pairs to command:

- **Naturalism/realism** — the stage pretends to be life; the "fourth wall" stays closed. Best for: intimate contemporary scenes.
- **Non-realism (presentational styles)** — the stage admits it is a stage: direct address, visible transformation, symbol. Caribbean tradition leans presentational — the storyteller talks *to* you; the masquerade dancer performs *at* you.
- **Expressionism** — the stage shows the inside of a mind: distortion, dream logic. Walcott's *Dream* is the region's textbook case.[7]
- **Total theatre** — all instruments at maximum together: dance, drum, mask, verse. Carifesta stages and large festival work live here.

Your examination pieces should *choose* a style on purpose and be able to defend the choice in the viva voce: "We played the dominoes game naturalistically so the announcement's ritual break would hit harder" is a defence that earns marks (see Part V, Chapter 23).

6.3 Form and the Caribbean continuum

Hold the full continuum in one line: **ritual** □ **festival** □ **popular theatre** □ **literary theatre** — and remember the traffic runs both ways. Dennis Scott lifted the wake into literary theatre; the Link Show carries tea-meeting oratory into commercial revue; Hill lifted the stick-fight into verse drama; Sistren lifted testimony into touring production. The syllabus's design — Core (cultural forms) feeding Options (drama/dance/stagecraft) — is this continuum turned into a course of study.[11]



Chapter 7 — Reading a Performance: the Signs of the Stage

7.1 Everything on stage means

Semiotics is the study of signs, and the theatre is the most sign-dense place humans build. The scholar Keir Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980) systematised what practitioners always knew: on stage, **everything signifies** — a chair is never just a chair; it is *this* chair, chosen, placed, lit, meaning something.[12] You do not need the academic machinery for CSEC; you need its habit of attention. Train yourself to read five sign-systems:

1. **The performer's body** — posture, gesture, distance. (Who stands? Who sits? Who is allowed to touch whom?)
2. **Voice and language** — register, accent, volume, silence. (Who switches from Creole to Standard, and *when*?)
3. **Costume and object** — what is worn and held, and its condition. (The white headtie; the domino in a fist; the good shoes kept for funerals.)
4. **Space** — where the performance happens and how bodies map power onto it. (Verandah versus bottom-house; who guards the doorway.)
5. **Light and sound** — what is revealed, hidden, heard beneath. (One fluorescent tube and a TV glow can be a complete lighting design — Part III, Chapter 15.)

7.2 The sign in action: one object, read three ways

Take a single object from our Part V case study: **the television set at the wake**. Read it as a semiotician:

- *As object*: furniture, ordinary, domestic — it says "this is a real Guyanese home."
- *As instrument*: the channel that will carry the death announcement — it is a loaded gun on stage; the audience that knows the culture waits on it.
- *As symbol*: the state and community acknowledging one small life by name on the public airwaves — dignity broadcast. When the announcement plays and the room breaks, the TV has transformed from furniture into altar.

That is what "production choices" means in your syllabus's Core objective "evaluate production choices"[13] — the deliberate loading of signs. A candidate who can perform this kind of reading aloud in a viva voce, or on paper in the Critique project, is operating at Grade One altitude.

7.3 The audience completes the sign

A sign means nothing until received. Caribbean audiences are famously active receivers — they answer back, sing along, judge aloud. This is not indiscipline; it is the region's performance contract, descended from tea meeting and Carnival street (Part I, Chapter 1). Your staging must *decide* what it wants from the audience: the closed concentration of naturalism, or the opened circle of the storyteller. Decide, and design for it (Part III, Chapter 14).



Chapter 8 — The Craft of Critique: One Discipline, Three Robes

8.1 The doctrine

Here is the theory I have carried from a Berbice school stage through a critic's classroom to the courtroom, and it is the intellectual spine of this book:

Critique is one discipline wearing three robes — stage, seminar, courtroom.

- On the **stage**, critique is the performer's self-judgment: is this choice truthful? Is it clear? Is it earning its place?
- In the **seminar**, critique is scholarship: describe accurately, analyse structurally, evaluate against standards, cite receipts.
- In the **courtroom**, critique is advocacy: marshal evidence, argue a position, anticipate the counter-argument, persuade a judge.

The robes change; the discipline — **disciplined judgment supported by evidence** — never does. I learned its first robe from Ms. Shaundel Phillips in the Allied Arts room at NAMS; its second from Professor Al Creighton's teaching and his decades of Sunday columns;^[14] its third at the bar. Your syllabus examines all three: Performing (stage), the Research Paper (seminar), the Critique and viva voce (courtroom — yes, the viva is cross-examination; treat it so and you will never fear it).

8.2 The four movements of a critique

Every proper critique — whether 500 words for your SBA project or a full Arts on Sunday column — moves through four movements **in order**:

Movement 1: DESCRIBE (the facts of the case). What happened on stage, accurately and neutrally? Who, what, where, in what space, in what style? A critique that gets facts wrong is dead on arrival — in the seminar as in the courtroom. Train your memory: note-take within minutes of the performance ending.

Movement 2: ANALYSE (how it worked). Break the production into its systems — the elements of Chapter 5, the signs of Chapter 7 — and show how they operated together or against each other. Analysis asks *how* and *why*, never yet *whether it was good*.

Movement 3: INTERPRET (what it meant). State the production's thought — its dianoia — as the production itself presented it, with evidence. Distinguish carefully between what the production *attempted* and what your reading *received*.

Movement 4: EVALUATE (the judgment). Only now, judge — and judge against **named criteria**: the production's own apparent aims, the demands of its genre and style, the standards of its tradition. "I didn't like it" is not a judgment; it is a mood. "The naturalistic first movement earned the ritual break, but the dénouement's pacing let the earned emotion leak" — that is a judgment, and it would earn marks in any of the three rooms.

8.3 The ethics of the critic

Four rules, non-negotiable, house standard:

1. **Respect the work's tradition.** Judge a masquerade band as masquerade, a naturalistic play as naturalism, a school devised piece as devising. Category error is critical malpractice.
2. **Respect sacred material.** Where a production carries a community's religious or ancestral practice, the critic's first duty is accuracy about that practice — each tradition's sacred things presented and judged only as themselves.
3. **Attack the work, never the worker.** Sharpness about choices; charity about persons. (The Guyanese theatre community is small; the critic meets the criticized at the market on Saturday.)
4. **Show your receipts.** Every claim of fact checkable; every judgment traceable to evidence the reader was given. If this sounds like a lawyer's rule — it is. Same discipline. Third robe.

8.4 Practice brief

Attend (or view a recording of) any performance — school production, church cantata, Mashramani costume band, Link Show sketch. Write the four movements in 600 words: one paragraph description, two paragraphs analysis, one paragraph interpretation, one paragraph evaluation against named criteria. Then — this is the drill that changes you — write the **opposing counsel's critique**: the strongest honest case for the opposite evaluation. When you can argue both sides, you understand the work. This drill is direct training for the SBA Critique project (Part IV, Chapter 19) and the viva voce.



Notes to Part II

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics* (c. 335 BC), trans. S.H. Butcher and later editions; the six elements ("parts") of tragedy at *Poetics* VI. [2] Caribbean Examinations Council, *CSEC Theatre Arts Syllabus*, CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 (2010), Core, Specific Objective 1 and Content 1(a)–(h), p. 12. [3] Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (1972). [4] Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (1936; trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood). [5] Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948), in John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre* (1964). [6] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974; English trans. 1979); also *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992). [7] "Dream on Monkey Mountain," Wikipedia; Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970). [8] Al Creighton, "The Link and the genesis of Guyanese professional theatre," *Stabroek News*, 27 October 2024; on Link Show 25 as "a masterpiece of theatrical satire," Creighton in *Stabroek News* retrospectives. [9] F.S.J. Ledgister, "Echoes in the bone," *Caribbean Review of Books* 18 (2008). [10] The Little Theatre Movement (Jamaica) and its annual Pantomime, founded 1941 by Henry and Greta Fowler — see LTM Jamaica public histories. [11] CXC Syllabus, "Organisation of the Syllabus," p. 4 (Compulsory Core + one of three Options + two Projects). [12] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980). [13] CXC Syllabus, Core Specific Objective 5, p. 12. [14] Al Creighton author archive, *Stabroek News* (stabroeknews.com/author/al-creighton). The author's account of being

taught by Creighton at the University of Guyana is personal testimony.



PART III — PRACTICAL CRAFT: THE WORK OF THE BODY



Theory tells you what theatre is. This Part is about what theatre costs: sweat, drill, repetition, discipline. Every chapter ends with exercises. Do them. Reading about voice work trains your voice the way reading about swimming keeps you dry.



Chapter 9 — The Voice: Your First Instrument

9.1 The instrument you already own

You were issued a complete theatrical instrument at birth. The syllabus lists performance skills — "movement, voice, speech, characterisation" — as Core content to be taught in all areas.[1] Voice comes first here, because in every Caribbean form from tea meeting to Ramleela, the voice does the heavy lifting — and because a two-thousand-seat hall like the National Cultural Centre (Part I, Chapter 4.2) will expose an untrained voice in one line.

9.2 Breath: the engine

All voice is breath made audible. Stage breath is **diaphragmatic**: the belly and lower ribs release outward on the inhale; the column of air is then spent with control.

Drill 9.A — The book on the belly. Lie on your back, book on your belly. Breathe so the book rises and falls — not the chest, not the shoulders. Ten slow breaths. This is your neutral. **Drill 9.B — The hiss ladder.** Inhale for 4 counts; exhale on a steady hiss for 8. Build the exhale — 12, 16, 20 — over daily practice. Your longest controlled hiss is your longest controlled line of verse. **Drill 9.C — The count-up.** One breath: count aloud "one." Next breath: "one, two." Climb daily. Grade One candidates reach the twenties without strain — *without strain* is the discipline; a strained voice is a damaged voice by exam week.

9.3 Projection is placement, not shouting

Shouting is throat; projection is breath plus **placement** — sending resonance forward into the mask of the face — plus **intention**: speak *to* the back row, not merely loudly. Rehearse in the largest space you can borrow (school hall, church hall, bottom-house across the yard) and post a listener at the far wall.

Drill 9.D — The far-friend call. A partner stands 30 metres off. Deliver a line as if telling *them alone* a secret that must not tire your throat. They raise a hand when every word lands. Halve the effort, keep the reach — that is projection.

9.4 Articulation: the consonant is the contract

Vowels carry emotion; consonants carry meaning. Caribbean speech, in any register, is fully capable of examination-grade clarity — articulation work is not "talking foreign"; it is making *whatever register you have chosen* land in row Z.

Drill 9.E — Overshoot and settle. Take your piece's hardest line. Deliver it with absurdly exaggerated consonants five times, then naturally once. The natural take keeps a residue of precision. Daily. **Drill 9.F — Creole precision.** Take a Creole line from your devising work — say, "*Is who tell she come back in hey?*" — and drill it for back-row clarity without flattening its music. Creole on stage deserves the same articulation respect as Shakespeare. Sistren toured the world proving it (Part I, Chapter 2.5).

9.5 Pitch, pace, pause, power

The syllabus's Performing profile explicitly rewards "appropriate variation in the use of pitch, rhythm, tempo, and volume of voice." [2] Memorize the four Ps as your variation toolkit:

- **Pitch** — high/low. Rising pitch opens questions and panic; falling pitch closes verdicts.
- **Pace** — fast builds urgency; slow builds weight. Beginners rush; discipline is *earned slowness*.
- **Pause** — the strongest word in the sentence is sometimes the silence after it. The tea-meeting orator and the trial advocate both know: the pause is where the audience does its own thinking.

- **Power** — volume as meaning. A drop to near-whisper at a climax can strike harder than any shout (see Part V — the moment the death announcement plays, our stage went almost silent; the silence was the loudest choice we made).

Drill 9.G — One line, twelve ways. Take "I not going back there tonight." Deliver it: as threat, as fear, as joke, as prayer, fast, slow, whispered, projected, rising, falling, with a pause before *back*, with a pause after *there*. Twelve deliberate readings. This drill alone will transform your viva voce answers on vocal choice.

9.6 Care of the instrument

Water, warm-ups before every rehearsal (hum, lip-trill, siren from low to high), no screaming matches at recess in production week, rest when hoarse. A candidate who arrives at the practical exam voiceless has failed a discipline test before the first line. Strictness here is love — my teachers' rule, now mine, now yours.



Chapter 10 — The Body in Space: Movement for the Stage

10.1 Neutral, then character

Stage movement training begins by finding **neutral**: feet under hips, spine long, weight even, arms easy — the blank page on which character is written. From neutral, character is built through deliberate deformation: weight (where does this body carry its heaviness?), tempo (does it move before or after it decides?), centre (does it lead from the chest like a preacher, the nose like a gossip, the belly like a well-fed uncle?).

Drill 10.A — The centres walk. Walk the room neutrally. On each clap, shift your leading centre: forehead, nose, chest, belly, hips, knees. Feel character arrive uninvited. This is the fastest characterisation tool a devising group owns.

10.2 Gesture, mime and economy

The syllabus's improvisation content names "gesture, movement and mime" as the body's vocabulary.[3] The governing law is **economy**: on stage, one clean gesture out-communicates five fidgets. Caribbean performance offers a masterclass — watch a storyteller become a whole village with a shoulder turn, or a masquerade dancer articulate spine and hip in isolation.

Drill 10.B — The object that isn't there. Mime raising a mug of cocoa tea: weight, heat, rim, steam. Partner names what you held and how hot it was. Repeat with a domino, a Bible, a phone playing a death announcement. (These are the exact objects of Part V — practice with your production's real vocabulary.) **Drill 10.C — Stillness endurance.**

Hold absolute purposeful stillness in a group tableau for two minutes. The audience's eye goes to the mover; learn what it costs to *give* focus by not moving (see 14.4).

10.3 Levels, planes and the stage's geometry

Height means. Standing over a seated character is power; kneeling is petition; the floor is grief or play. The syllabus's Core requires "stage positions and levels"[4] — learn the nine positions (US R/C/L, CS R/C/L, DS R/C/L; downstage = toward audience), and learn that **diagonals are the strongest walks** on a proscenium stage.

Drill 10.D — The levels argument. Two actors improvise a quarrel changing levels every five lines (stand/sit/kneel/perch/floor). Watch how the argument's power shifts with the geometry, independent of the words.

10.4 Dance and the Caribbean body

Even pure-drama candidates must respect the dance stream that runs through every Caribbean form — the wake's rocking, the queh-queh ring, masquerade's flounce, tassa's shoulder line. Option 2 (Dance) candidates build technique and choreography formally (Part IV, Chapter 17); drama candidates should still train rhythm:

Drill 10.E — Rhythm into walk. To a drum track (or a clapping circle), walk on the beat, then on the off-beat, then double-time, then half-time while the drum stays. A cast that shares rhythm shares timing — and comic timing (Chapter 11) is rhythm wearing a smile.



Chapter 11 — Improvisation: Thinking on Your Feet

11.1 Why the exam begins with improv

Every option in your practical examination opens with a 3–5 minute **spontaneous performance from a given stimulus**, worth 30 marks with journal and viva.[5] The examiners put improvisation first because it reveals the unfakeable: listening, imagination, courage, ensemble. Improvisation is also the engine of devising (Chapter 12) — Sistren built an international repertoire on it.

11.2 The laws of improvisation

1. **Accept and build ("yes, and").** Whatever your partner establishes is now true. Blocking ("no, that's not a snake, it's a rope") kills the scene; accepting ("mind it don't bite you — hold the tail end!") builds it.
2. **Make your partner look good.** The best improvisers give gifts: names, relationships, problems. Ensemble generosity is explicitly rewarded — the Performing profile credits those who "share and be receptive to ideas." [6]
3. **Establish the platform fast: who, where, what.** Within four lines the audience should know the relationship, the place, and the trouble. Caribbean settings give you instant platforms — market stall, minibus, bottom-house, wake-house kitchen.
4. **Find the game, then escalate.** Every scene has a repeatable engine (the pattern that works); find it, repeat it, raise stakes each round — farce logic (Chapter 6).

5. **End on the turn.** A 3–5 minute piece needs a shape: platform □ escalation □ turn □ button. Rehearse *shapes*, not scripts.

11.3 Working from a stimulus

Exam stimuli are typically a proverb, a photograph, a news headline, an object, a line of dialogue, or a piece of music. The unlocking method — drill it until it is reflex:

1. **Name the tension inside the stimulus.** A proverb like "*Moon a run till daylight ketch am*" contains a chase and a reckoning: someone has been getting away with something, and the account is coming due.
2. **Cast the tension into bodies.** Who is the moon (the runner)? Who is daylight (the reckoning)? Where does the catching happen — rum shop, church step, kitchen?
3. **Choose the moment of entry late.** Enter the story as close to daylight as possible; improvised scenes die in preamble.
4. **Ground it in a cultural form when it fits.** A stimulus about loss can enter through the wake; about courtship, through queh-queh teasing; about justice, through a tea-meeting speech. This is not decoration — the syllabus's own improvisation objectives call for "ideas from Caribbean culture and contemporary social issues,"[7] and it plays directly to your strongest material.

Drill 11.A — Proverb sprints. A bag of proverbs on paper slips. Draw, 30 seconds of silent planning, 3 minutes of scene, group applause, next. Two rounds weekly for a term = exam readiness. **Drill 11.B — The viva mirror.** After every practice improv, partners cross-examine for two minutes: *Why did you choose that setting? What was your objective? What would you change?* — the actual shape of the examination viva voce.[8] Answering well is a rehearsable skill; rehearse it.

The author's receipt — Pass da Offering, Pastor. In our pioneer room I performed an impromptu piece I built myself, and its title did half the work before a line was spoken: Pass da Offering, Pastor — a play on words, because in this church the pastor loved money, and the collection plate kept finding its way home to him. Watch the laws above operating in it: the platform

is instant (every Guyanese audience knows a church service in four seconds), the game is repeatable and escalating (each pass of the plate, the pastor's love of it grows bolder), and the whole piece is satire in the Link Show tradition (Chapter 4) — laughing at the misuse of a sacred thing, never at the faith itself; the congregation is in on the joke, and the sacred stays respected while the greedy man is the target. That line is the one satire must never cross, and your examiners will watch for it. A wordplay title is not decoration either: it is your piece's thesis in five words, and the viva loves a candidate who can say so.

11.4 The journal habit

Every practical component requires "a journal documenting the process." [9] Start now, and make entries the same night as the work (memory is a leaking bucket). The house format, one page per session: **Date / What we tried / What worked and why / What failed and why / What I changed in my own performance / Question for next session.** A journal kept honestly for two years is not just marks — it is the raw material of your Research Paper, your viva answers, and (I am living proof) books you may write twenty years later.



Chapter 12 — Devising from Culture: the Wake-Scene Method

12.1 The method in one sentence

Choose a real communal ritual you know in your body; research it like a scholar; stage its textures honestly; and let the performance argue one true thing about your society. This is the method that took my group's playmaking piece to Grade One in 2006 (told in full in Part V), and it is engineered for exactly what the syllabus's Playmaking section demands: a 10–15 minute prepared performance "using a prescribed Caribbean cultural form." [10]

12.2 Step one — choose the form you have lived

Inventory your group's real cultural knowledge. Not what sounds impressive — what you have *stood inside*. Grandmother's wake. Cousin's matikoor. Christmas masquerade at the corner. The queh-queh where your aunties sang the bride into wisdom. Choose the form for which your group holds the most **first-hand sensory detail**, because texture is what examiners cannot fake-proof: anyone can read that a wake has hymn-singing; only a witness knows the sankey rises *when the crying gets too loud* — that the singing is a rescue.

Then check it against the syllabus's current prescribed list (your teacher has it; the lists rotate by examination cycle[11]) — your lived form is very likely there: the Wake, Storytelling, Ring Games, Masquerade, Mashramani, Tea Meeting have all been prescribed.

12.3 Step two — research like a scholar (the seminar robe)

Lived memory is your foundation, not your ceiling. Now verify and deepen:

- **Interview the elders.** Two or three community members who have run the ritual. Ask process questions: what happens first? who is in charge? what must never be done? Record (with permission), transcribe highlights into the journal.
- **Read the receipts.** Newspaper features, regional scholarship, the syllabus's own resource lists. For Guyanese forms, the national press archives (e.g., Stabroek's arts pages) are gold.[12]
- **Map the ritual's structure** as a plot skeleton (Chapter 5.2): phases, roles, turning points. Every ritual has dramaturgy already — your job is to find it, not invent it.
- **Mark the sacred.** Note what within the form is religious or ancestral observance. Decide, with your teacher, what may be *represented* respectfully and what should be *referenced* rather than enacted. Presenting a tradition's sacred elements only as themselves is house law (Chapter 1.2) — and it will be tested in your viva.

12.4 Step three — find the argument

A devised piece without a thought is a costume with nobody in it. Complete this sentence as a group, and pin it to the rehearsal wall: "**Our piece shows [the form] in order to say [one true thing] about [our society].**" Ours, 2006: *Our piece shows the wake in order to say that healing, for us, is communal — laughter and grief in the same yard, until the living can stand.* Every subsequent choice — casting, staging, sound, the placement of the climax — gets tested against the sentence. If a choice doesn't serve the sentence, it goes. Strict? Yes. Grade One strict.

12.5 Step four — build by texture, not by script

Devising builds outside-in from sensory truth. Workshop the textures as separate études before any "scenes" exist:

- the sound bed (what is always audible? — for us: dominoes, low talk, a TV);
- the traffic (who arrives, with what, greeted how?);

- the objects (what is passed hand to hand? — tea, biscuits, the pack of cards, the chair for the widow);
- the registers (who speaks Creole to whom, who breaks into hymn-English, who says nothing all night?);
- the ritual's clock (what tells everyone the phase has changed?).

Improvise each texture (Chapter 11's tools), keep what is truthful, journal everything. Only then assemble the piece's arc by placing the ritual's own turning point — for a wake, the moment the death becomes *real again* — as your climax, and building rising action in front of it. Script last, if at all: many Grade One devised pieces are structured improvisations with fixed landmarks rather than word-fixed scripts. (Full worked assembly: Part V, Chapter 22.)

12.6 Step five — test against the three robes

Before you call the piece done, judge it three ways (Chapter 8): **Stage** — is every moment earning its place at performance pitch? **Seminar** — would an elder of the tradition recognise and respect this portrayal? Invite one to a run-through; their notes outrank everyone's. **Courtroom** — can every member defend every choice under cross-examination? Run a mock viva; no answer may begin with "we just thought...". The answer begins: "We chose X because..."



Chapter 13 — Playwriting: Putting the Yard on Paper

13.1 The playwright's one job

Everything in Chapter 12 can also begin at a desk. The playwright's one job: **write things people can do and say in front of other people, such that watching becomes meaning.** Not literature that happens to have dialogue — action.

I make no grand claims here beyond my own receipts: I have written for the school stage and for examination performance — *The Conquerors* among my own pieces, and the impromptu satire of Chapter 11 — and I wrote before I ever litigated; and I can testify that playwriting and legal drafting are cousin crafts — both build documents designed to be *performed* by other people under pressure, where every surplus word is a liability.

13.2 Structure: the load-bearing walls

Use the classic skeleton (Chapter 5.2) at any length. For a 10–15 minute piece: platform in the first 90 seconds; one main tension, escalated three times; climax by minute 11; land the ending inside a minute of the climax. Short forms die of long endings.

13.3 Dialogue and the Creole continuum

Guyanese speech lives on a continuum from deep Creolese to formal Standard, and speakers slide along it constantly by situation, audience and power. This is a playwright's treasure: **register shift is characterisation and plot.** The aunty who manages the wake in warm Creole but answers the phone in her best Standard has told the audience

her whole biography in two lines. Rules of thumb:

1. Write speech as spoken, spelled for readability (your actors are the first readers).
2. Be consistent per character — each figure has a home register and *reasons* to leave it.
3. Let shifts mark power and emotion: grief drops people into their deepest home language; officialdom pulls them up the scale.
4. Never use Creole as a joke about the speaker. Its music, wit and precision are the heritage of Sistren, Miss Lou and the Link Show stage (Part I) — a serious instrument. Use it seriously (including seriously funny).

13.4 Writing inside forms

The forms of Part I are also *structures for scripts*: a play shaped as a tea meeting (orator vs. hecklers = built-in conflict); a courtship told entirely in queh-queh song exchanges; a family history framed as an Anansi telling with the teller slipping into the characters; a political satire as a Link-style revue of linked sketches. Dennis Scott shaped a national epic as a nine-night.[13] The form gives you free scaffolding, ready-made audience contract, and Paper O1 talking points when you write about your own work.

13.5 The reading is the rewrite

A script is not finished when it is written; it is finished when it has been **read aloud by other people** and rewritten from what you heard. Table-read, mark every line where a reader stumbled or the room's attention sagged, cut 10 percent (there is always a 10 percent), read again. Two cycles minimum. The wastepaper basket is a playwriting tool.



Chapter 14 — Staging and Blocking: the Director's Geometry

14.1 Blocking is meaning made visible

Blocking = the planned movement and positioning of performers. It is not traffic management; it is the physical sentence the audience reads even with the sound off. Test of good blocking: mute the scene (rehearse it silently) and the relationships should still be legible.

14.2 The stage's power map

On a proscenium (end-on) stage: downstage centre is strongest; upstage centre commands; corners are weakest (use them for the marginalised, the eavesdropper, the forgotten). Movement toward the audience gains force; retreat upstage loses it; crossing on the diagonal is strongest of all. Triangles are the workhorse of group composition — two in tension, one fulcrum. Flat lines across the stage are dead; break them with depth and level (Chapter 10.3).

14.3 Choosing your audience relationship

The syllabus's Core requires evaluation of performance spaces, and Production content includes "types of performance space — influence on actor-audience relationship." [14] Know the four and choose deliberately:

- **Proscenium/end-on** — audience on one side; strongest pictorial control; the school-hall default.
- **Thrust** — audience on three sides; intimacy plus focus; blocking must rotate.

- **In-the-round/arena** — audience all around, like the ring games and the gayelle; no hiding, constant rotation, the most "Caribbean" geometry there is — our forms are circle forms.
- **Found/open space** — yard, street, bottom-house: masquerade's home. Boundaries must be *performed* (the circle chalked by bodies).

For examination pieces in a classroom or hall, you still choose: we staged our wake end-on but built the set as a yard whose "audience side" was the road — passers-by peering in, which is exactly what a Guyanese wake's fourth wall truly is (Part V, Chapter 22).

14.4 Focus: spending the audience's eye

The audience's eye is a budget; the director spends it. Tools of focus: movement (the mover takes the eye), contrast (the still figure among movers; the seated among standers), light, sound, sightlines of the cast (the audience looks where the cast looks), and **giving** (upstage actors angling toward the speaker). Discipline rule for ensembles: in any moment, one focus — everyone on stage must know where it is and either take it or give it.

14.5 Recording the blocking

Stage management is examinable (Option 3), and the syllabus's Appreciating profile credits recording "what he/she did... in terms of giving stage life." [15] House method: prompt-copy pages with a ground-plan sketch per beat, notation (RC = cross right, X DS = cross downstage), and the *reason* pencilled beside the move — because the viva will ask why, and "the director said so" earns nothing.



Chapter 15 — Design on a School Budget: Set, Costume, Light, Sound

15.1 Poor theatre, rich meaning

The most important design fact for a Guyanese school production: **poverty of means is not poverty of theatre**. The whole modern movement of "poor theatre" proved a bench, a cloth and disciplined bodies out-perform lazy spectacle. Your examiners mark meaning, not money. Every proposal below is priced at "borrow, find, or under a lunch-money budget."

15.2 Set: the eloquent minimum

Ask of every set element: what work does it do? (Chapter 7's semiotics is your purchasing department.) The wake scene needed exactly: two benches (borrowed), a small table and four chairs for dominoes (classroom stock), a white cloth over a mirror (a real wake custom — one object that told the audience instantly where we were), and a raised chair for the TV. Levels from rostra blocks or sturdy benches; depth from angling furniture off the parallel; place from *behaviour* more than scenery — an actor who checks for rain at an invisible window builds the window.

15.3 Costume: the character's second skin

Costume is chosen clothing, not fancy clothing. Sources: actors' own wardrobes (the number-one professional secret of small companies), church-clothes borrowed with promises kept, the seamstress aunt who can take in a waist (credit her in the programme — production personnel credits are syllabus content[16]). Design by **silhouette, colour**

discipline, and one signifier per character: the widow's head-tie, the deacon's good jacket, the domino king's vest. Keep a costume plot (who wears what, scene by scene) — stage-management marks live there.

15.4 Light: two switches and the sun

No lighting rig? You still have: room lights (on/off is a cue system — our TV-announcement moment used a single fluorescent flicker to pull evening into the room), lamps and torches on stage (practical sources reading as themselves: the wake-house's own bulb), windows and curtains by day, and the mighty **blackout** — the hall switch thrown on a held image is a professional-grade final cue. If you do have basic instruments: warm front light for day/comfort, cool side or back light for night/unease, and never light the floor when you mean the face.

15.5 Sound: the cheapest magic

Sound is the most budget-proof design department, and in Caribbean forms it carries ritual authority (melos, Chapter 5.2). Live beats recorded when hands are free: real dominoes slamming, a struck bottle for a glass, the cast's own hymn-singing. Where recording is needed (our death-announcement audio — the solemn music bed and read names every Guyanese knows from the local station), rehearse the operator as a performer: a late sound cue is a missed line. Cue sheet: number, trigger line, source, level, duration — stage-management gold for Option 3 candidates and journal evidence for everyone.

15.6 The design meeting

One hour, whole group, before building anything: read the piece's argument sentence aloud (12.4); each department (set/costume/light/sound — in a school group, hats not persons) proposes its three most eloquent choices; the group strikes everything that does not serve the sentence. Minutes go in the journal. This meeting is the syllabus's "production components" and "pre-production process" content,[17] performed for real.



Chapter 16 — Rehearsal Discipline: Running the Room

16.1 The captain's creed

I run rehearsal rooms the way I was trained in the Allied Arts room at NAMS and later trained myself for court: **strict about the systems, warm about the people.** Discipline is not the opposite of creativity; it is the container that lets creativity risk. Ms. Shaundel Phillips's room ran on time, on respect, and on the unshakeable message that our talents were worth taking seriously — which meant showing up seriously. A rehearsal that starts when people "reach" is a production that ends when the examiner has stopped watching.

16.2 The systems

1. **The schedule is published and kept.** Term-length plan backwards from the examination date (see Part IV, 18.2), weekly call sheets, start on time even with three people — the latecomers learn the room waits for no one.
2. **Every rehearsal has a written objective.** "Run Act 2" is not an objective. "Make the announcement break land — three approaches, choose one" is.
3. **Warm-up is non-negotiable.** Ten minutes, voice and body (Chapters 9–10), led by a rotating cast member — leadership training hidden in plain sight.
4. **Notes are written, read back, and actioned.** Director's notes go in a book, not into the air. Next rehearsal opens by checking last session's notes were actioned. (This notebook is your journal's engine room and your viva's ammunition.)

5. **The stage manager is the second government.** Props table taped and inventoried, prompt copy current, timings taken every run. Give the SM real authority; Option 3 candidates are examined on exactly this.[18]
6. **Conflict is processed, not buried.** Devising groups quarrel — the syllabus itself expects members to "work together and resolve differences in a creative process." [19] House rule: criticise choices at the work, in the room, once — never persons, never after hours in the group chat.
7. **Runs are sacred.** In the final two weeks: full runs without stopping, notes after, every run timed. You cannot fix what you never let break in front of you.

16.3 The captain's ledger

Keep one page per week, posted where the group reads it: what we promised / what we delivered / what is owed and by whom. Receipts-based rehearsal. When the examiner's viva asks "describe your process," a group that ran this system does not reminisce — it *reports*. The difference in marks is the difference between memory and evidence.



Notes to Part III

[1] Caribbean Examinations Council, *CSEC Theatre Arts Syllabus*, CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 (2010), Core Content 1(d), p. 12; reminder at Option 1: "performance skills (movement, voice, speech, characterisation) are to be taught in all areas," p. 16. [2] CXC Syllabus, Profile Dimensions, Performing (PERF)(b), p. 5. [3] CXC Syllabus, Option 1a(ii), p. 15. [4] CXC Syllabus, Core Content 1(c), p. 12; also Option 1b(v), p. 16. [5] CXC Syllabus, Paper 02 format: Sections I(a) of Options 1–3 (Drama/Dance Improvisation, 30 marks; journal; viva voce), pp. 6–8. [6] CXC Syllabus, Performing (PERF)(f), p. 5. [7] CXC Syllabus, Option 1a(vi), p. 15. [8] CXC Syllabus, Paper 02: every section concludes "respond to questions in a viva voce," pp. 6–8. [9] CXC Syllabus, Paper 02, all Options: "complete a journal documenting the process," pp. 6–8. [10] CXC Syllabus, Paper 02, Option 1 Section II (Playmaking, 30 marks), p. 6. [11] CXC Syllabus,

pp. 13–14 (prescribed cultural-forms lists by examination cycle). [12] E.g., the *Stabroek News* "Arts on Sunday" archive (Al Creighton), stabroeknews.com. [13] F.S.J. Ledgister, "Echoes in the bone," *Caribbean Review of Books* 18 (2008), on *An Echo in the Bone*. [14] CXC Syllabus, Core Specific Objective 3 and Content 1(e), p. 12; Option 1c(viii), p. 16. [15] CXC Syllabus, Appreciating and Analysing (APAN)(e), pp. 4–5. [16] CXC Syllabus, Core Content 1(a) ("Theatre personnel and terminology"), p. 12; Option 1c(v), p. 16. [17] CXC Syllabus, Core Content 1(g)–(h), p. 12. [18] CXC Syllabus, Option 3, Section II (Stage Management OR Production Management, 30 marks), p. 8. [19] CXC Syllabus, Creating (CREA)(e), p. 5.



PART IV — THE EXAMINATION: THE SYLLABUS, PAPER BY PAPER



A warning before the maps: syllabuses are living documents. This Part is written to the official CSEC Theatre Arts syllabus, CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 (first issued 2001, revised 2010, effective from the May/June 2012 examinations), the current published edition at this book's writing.[1] Your first act as a candidate: have your teacher confirm the edition and the current prescribed lists on www.cxc.org. A Grade One candidate never sits an exam on second-hand rumours of its format. Receipts first.



Chapter 17 — The Map of the Syllabus: Profiles, Papers, Options



17.1 The architecture in one view

The syllabus is built of a **Compulsory Core**, **three Options (choose one)**, and **two Projects (do both)**:^[2]

Component	Content	Everyone?
Core	Elements of Theatre Arts + Caribbean Cultural Forms	Compulsory
Option 1: Drama	Drama Improvisation · Playmaking · Production	choose one option
Option 2: Dance	Dance Improvisation · Dancemaking · Dance Fundamentals	of the three
Option 3: Stage Crafts	Improvisation · Stage/Production Management · Costume or Set or Lighting	
Projects	1. Critique · 2. Research Paper	Both compulsory

17.2 The three profiles: how you are actually graded

Your overall grade is reported with letter grades under three **profile dimensions**^[3] — know them by their initials, because every mark you will ever earn belongs to one of them:

- **APAN — Appreciating and Analysing:** recognising and evaluating the elements of theatre; using the discipline's language to describe, analyse and evaluate; understanding cultural forms

historically and contemporarily; presenting research; recording your production role.

- **PERF — Performing:** physical realisation of character through voice, movement, space; sensitivity to language through pitch, rhythm, tempo, volume; technical competence; ensemble contribution and receptiveness.
- **CREA — Creating:** articulating how ideas get stage life; communicating a practicable interpretation; linking research to performance; recording process; resolving differences and solving problems in the creative process.

17.3 The papers and the arithmetic of your grade

Three papers, and the mark allocation table every candidate should memorize:[4]

Profile	Paper 01 (Core)	Paper 02 (Options)	Paper 03 (Projects)	Total	%
APAN	50	10	30	90	45
PERF	—	60	—	60	30
CREA	10	30	10	50	25
Total	60 (30%)	100 (50%)	40 (20%)	200	100

- **Paper 01** (1 hour 30 minutes): six **compulsory essay questions** on the Core — 60 marks.[5]
- **Paper 02:** the practical assessment of your chosen Option — 100 marks, structured as Improvisation (30) + Playmaking/Dancemaking/Management (30) + Production/Fundamentals/Craft (40), every section with journal and viva voce.[6]
- **Paper 03:** the two Projects — Critique and Research Paper — 40 marks, completed during the second, fourth and fifth terms.[7]

Read the arithmetic like a strategist. **Half your marks are practical (Paper 02)** — but **45 percent of your grade is APAN**, the thinking-and-writing profile, spread across all three papers. The candidate who performs beautifully but cannot analyse is capped; the candidate who analyses beautifully but cannot perform is capped. Grade One lives at the intersection. That is why this book made you do history

(Part I) and theory (Part II) before it let you sweat (Part III).

Note also the resit provisions: a candidate with a moderated SBA score of at least 50 percent may carry it into a resit within two years; private candidates enter through recognised institutions and complete all papers with tutor-validated work.[8]

17.4 Choosing your option honestly

- **Choose Drama** if your group's strengths are speech, characterisation and devising (this book's centre of gravity; Part V models it).
- **Choose Dance** if you have genuine movement training or a living folk-dance practice to build on — the Dancemaking section prescribes composition on a Caribbean theme, solo (3–5 min) or group of up to four (5–8 min), and Dance Fundamentals asks a 20–30 minute class performance based on a Caribbean cultural form.[9]
- **Choose Stage Crafts** if you are the organiser, the builder, the artist — the one who runs the props table like a government ministry. You will assist in real productions (school or community), with the syllabus explicit that you are not expected to design or manage a full-length play alone: the emphasis is teamwork with a teacher, director, designer or facilitator.[10]

Choose by evidence, not by prestige. There is a Grade One in every option.



Chapter 18 — Mounting the Practical: Paper 02 from First Stimulus to Final Bow



18.1 The three sections as one campaign

For the Drama option (adapt freely for Dance/Crafts), Paper 02 is three performances of graduated scale:[11]

1. **Improvisation (30):** 3–5 minutes, spontaneous, from a given stimulus.
2. **Playmaking (30):** 10–15 minutes, prepared, using a prescribed Caribbean cultural form.
3. **Production (40):** 20–30 minutes, prepared, an excerpt from a text on the reading list.

Each carries the same three-part evidence bundle: **the performance + the journal + the viva voce**. Treat those as one organism. The performance shows what you can do; the journal proves you built it deliberately; the viva proves you understand what you built. Examiners cross-check all three — a dazzling performance with an empty journal reads as luck; a thin performance with a rich journal reads as unrealised planning. Feed all three all term.

18.2 The backwards calendar

The syllabus itself recommends teaching Core theory and practice simultaneously across the terms, with Production's 20–30 minute excerpt ideally drawn from a text studied in the Core.[12] The campaign calendar, built backwards from the examination:

- **Terms 1–2:** Core theory + improvisation drills weekly (Chapter 11); journal habit installed; cultural-form field research begins (Chapter 12.3). First Project (Critique) window opens — see the syllabus's

project timetable.[13]

- **Term 3:** Playmaking devising begins from the chosen prescribed form; text study for Production choice.
- **Term 4:** Playmaking piece assembled and tested before an invited audience; Production excerpt cast and blocked; Research Paper underway.
- **Term 5:** Both prepared pieces in full runs; mock vivas fortnightly (Drill 11.B); journals edited into fair copies (edited, never rewritten into fiction — moderators can smell a journal written in one weekend).
- **Term 6:** External examination. Peak, don't premiere: the exam should be your fifth full-pressure run, not your first.

18.3 The viva voce: the courtroom robe

The viva is the most under-prepared component in the region and the cheapest marks to secure. It is cross-examination, and cross-examination is a rehearsable game. The questions come in five families — prepare all five:

1. **Process:** "How did the piece develop from the stimulus/form?" □ answer with the journal's story: research, études, decisions, discards.
2. **Choice:** "Why this staging/register/silence?" □ answer with the argument sentence (12.4) and the choice's service to it.
3. **Role:** "What exactly did you contribute?" □ answer in first person singular with receipts; ensemble humility plus individual ownership.
4. **Culture:** "What is the origin and meaning of the form you used?" □ answer with Part I precision — dates, functions, sacred boundaries respected.
5. **Judgment:** "What would you change?" □ the trap question. Never "nothing." Name a real limitation, its cause, and the fix you would make — self-critique is APAN gold (Chapter 8).

Answer shape, always: **claim** □ **reason** □ **receipt**. ("We ended on the sankey rising rather than the crying — because our argument was healing, not grief — and our journal's third run-through note shows the crying ending left the audience down.")

18.4 Examination-day systems

The stage manager's checklist, whoever holds the SM hat: props inventory against the taped list; costumes bagged per actor; sound sources charged, tested, cued; timings verified inside the bracket (a 16-minute playmaking piece is a rules breach — trim in rehearsal, never on the day); water; the journal fair copies in hand; the group early enough to breathe. Then the captain's last word, which was my teachers' last word: you have done the work; now let the work do you. Walk out and be at the wake, in the ring, on the boards — the marks will take care of themselves.



Chapter 19 — The Projects: Critique and Research Paper

19.1 Paper 03's two documents

The two Projects — a **Critique** and a **Research Paper** — carry 40 marks, weighted heavily toward APAN (30 of your grade's 90 APAN marks live here).[14] They are the seminar robe made compulsory. The syllabus's project design has candidates view a production, complete the critique, and develop the research paper across the course's middle terms.[13]

19.2 The Critique

Your assignment reduced to its bones: attend a production, assess it — including the work of its personnel — and argue your judgment in writing.[15] Method: the four movements of Chapter 8.2 (describe □ analyse □ interpret □ evaluate), with these examination-specific disciplines:

- **Take notes at the venue** (interval and immediately after; capture blocking sketches, light states, exact lines that landed or died).
- **Name the personnel and their crafts** — director, designers, stage management — and evaluate *their* choices, not only the actors'. The syllabus's Core explicitly teaches the roles of theatre personnel;[16] the critique is where you prove you can see their fingerprints.
- **Anchor every judgment in a describable moment.** Marker's rule of thumb: no evaluation without evidence from the production.
- **Write in the discipline's language** — the terms in this book's glossary and your syllabus's own glossary of theatre terms.[17]

APAN(b) rewards exactly this: language and concepts appropriate to the art forms.[18]

19.3 The Research Paper

The Research Paper investigates a theatre topic — typically rooted in a cultural form or production practice — with real sources and documented method. House method, the seminar robe at full dress:

1. **Choose a question, not a topic.** Not "The Wake in Guyana" but "How does the Guyanese wake use performance to move a community from grief toward healing?" A question forces an argument; an argument earns marks.
2. **Mix the source types:** interviews with practitioners and elders (primary), press and scholarly accounts (secondary), your own observation (fieldwork). Part I's notes model the citation habit; your school's required format governs.
3. **Cite everything, fabricate nothing.** If a date cannot be verified, say so or leave it out. (This is the whole legal training in one sentence, and it is also CXC's.)
4. **Let the paper feed the practical.** The syllabus's Creating profile explicitly rewards "linking appropriate research to the performance and production." [19] The strongest candidates research the same form they stage: our wake research fed our wake piece, and the examiner could see one project standing behind the other. Efficiency is not cheating; it is design.



Chapter 20 — Paper 01: Writing About Theatre Under the Clock

20.1 The shape of the paper

Ninety minutes. **Six compulsory essay questions** — no choices — on the Core: elements of theatre, personnel, spaces, text analysis, production choices, and the Caribbean cultural forms.[20] Sixty marks, fifty of them APAN.[4] The arithmetic: **fifteen minutes a question**, gone in a blink. This chapter is time-war doctrine.

20.2 The fifteen-minute essay

- **Minute 1: read the command verb.** CXC publishes a glossary of behavioural verbs;[21] *describe, explain, analyse, evaluate, justify* are different tasks. Answering *evaluate* with description is the region's most expensive habit.
- **Minutes 2–3: skeleton.** Three points, one example each, one line of judgment. On paper, telegraphic.
- **Minutes 4–13: write in point-example-significance loops.** Claim □ concrete example (a named form, play, practitioner, date — Part I is your armoury) □ why it matters to the question.
- **Minutes 14–15: land it.** One-sentence conclusion answering the question's exact words. Then leave. An unfinished sixth essay because the second ran long is a self-inflicted wound; six solid answers beat four brilliant ones and two blanks, every sitting.

20.3 Your unfair advantages

Deploy what this book gave you: **dates with receipts** (the Chapter 4.6 table); **the elements table** (5.4) for any elements-in-forms question;

the sign-reading method (7.2) for production-choices questions; **your own practical work** as an example bank — examiners reward candidates who can analyse their *own* process in the discipline's language, and your journal has two years of it. And write about Caribbean material with the confidence of an owner, not a tourist. You are not borrowing examples from a foreign textbook; you live in the archive. That confidence, honestly earned, reads on the page — I have seen it read from both sides of the marking.



Notes to Part IV

[1] Caribbean Examinations Council, *CSEC Theatre Arts Syllabus*, CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 (Bridgetown: CXC, 2010; effective for examinations from May/June 2012; replacing CXC 32/G/SYLL 01 of 2001). www.cxc.org. [2] CXC Syllabus, "Organisation of the Syllabus," p. 4. [3] CXC Syllabus, "Certification and Definition of Profile Dimensions," pp. 4–5. [4] CXC Syllabus, "Mark Allocation by Papers and Profile Dimensions," p. 9. [5] CXC Syllabus, "Format of the Examinations," Paper 01, p. 6. [6] CXC Syllabus, Paper 02, Options 1–3, pp. 6–8. [7] CXC Syllabus, Paper 03 (Projects, 40 marks; "during the second, fourth and fifth terms"), p. 9. [8] CXC Syllabus, "Regulations for Resit Candidates" and "Regulations for Private Candidates," pp. 9–10. [9] CXC Syllabus, Option 2 (Dance), Sections II–III, p. 7. [10] CXC Syllabus, Option 3 (Stage Crafts), Sections II–III and NB, pp. 8–9. [11] CXC Syllabus, Paper 02, Option 1, p. 6. [12] CXC Syllabus, "Approaches to Teaching the Syllabus," p. 10. [13] CXC Syllabus, "The School Based Assessment: Project Assignment," pp. 42–48 (project stages: viewing a production, completing the critique, beginning and completing the research paper). [14] CXC Syllabus, Mark Allocation table, p. 9 (Paper 03: APAN 30, CREA 10). [15] CXC Syllabus, SBA Project Assignment (Critique), pp. 42 ff. [16] CXC Syllabus, Core Specific Objective 2 and Content 1(a), p. 12. [17] CXC Syllabus, "Glossary of Theatre Terms," pp. 49–53. [18] CXC Syllabus, APAN(b), p. 4. [19] CXC Syllabus, CREA(c), p. 5. [20] CXC Syllabus, Paper 01 format, p. 6, with the Core's specific objectives at p. 12. [21] CXC Syllabus, "Glossary of Behavioural Verbs used in the Theatre Arts Examinations," pp. 54–55.



PART V — THE WORKED CASE STUDY: A WAKE, A STAGE, A GRADE ONE



What follows is my own account — the 2006 examination piece of Guyana's pioneer CSEC Theatre Arts batch at New Amsterdam Multilateral School, reconstructed twenty years later as teaching. I have rebuilt it with the method of this book laid over the memory, so you can see every joint. Where memory holds a detail loosely, I say so plainly rather than invent certainty; the craft lessons stand either way. The examination we sat was governed by the syllabus's first edition (2001); the method maps cleanly onto the current papers, and I flag the mapping as we go.[1]



The Pioneer Room's Repertoire — the Years Before the Piece

The wake scene did not come from nowhere. Before the examination piece there were years of work in that Allied Arts room under Ms. Shaundel Phillips's guidance, and I set the repertoire down here because every item of it is a method chapter of this book wearing a school uniform.

We wrote our own material. I wrote plays of my own — one was called *The Conquerors* — and I built impromptu pieces like *Pass da Offering*, *Pastor* (dissected in Chapter 11). Hear the lesson under the anecdote: the candidate who writes is never hostage to the bookshelf, and in a subject that had no local textbook, writing our own material was not ambition — it was survival. Chapter 13 exists so you can do it on purpose.

We performed masquerade — and I took it to the National Cultural Centre. Under Miss Phillips we staged masquerade and Old Story Time skits, and I performed masquerades on the National Cultural Centre's own stage, where my masquerading was recognized for its energy. Energy is the word to sit with: masquerade (Part I, Chapter 1) is Guyana's oldest surviving performance tradition, and it is judged in the body — the flounce carries the form. When the syllabus asks you to embody a Caribbean cultural form, it is asking for exactly that committed, unembarrassed energy.

We competed in Mashramani. I took part in our school's Mash dancing competition — and one year I pulled the Berbice Bridge. Read that again as a designer: a costume piece that brings the county's great floating bridge onto a dancing child's frame is concept, engineering and spectacle in one build — Chapter 15's whole argument (design on a school budget) rolling down the road in February. Your national calendar — Mash, masquerade season, the church year — is a free training ground;

the syllabus's cultural forms are alive in it, waiting.

We cross-cast, because we had to — and it made us better actors. Our theatre class held exactly three boys. So when we staged Trevor Rhone's *Old Story Time*, Shanelly played George, my love interest; and when we performed Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, I played a male role myself. No one apologized, because no apology is owed: Shakespeare's own stage cast across gender as its working standard, and playing across gender is legitimate, examinable craft — voice placement (Chapter 9), physical vocabulary (Chapter 10), the discipline of building a character from observation instead of habit. Small schools, take courage: a three-boy class is not a limitation; it is a masterclass in casting by craft.

And we loved the gym. Our theatre breaks lived there — the honest truth of school theatre everywhere: you rehearse in the space you have. A gym, a bottom-house, a yard — the stage is wherever the ensemble stands (Chapter 14 teaches you to block for it).

That is the room the wake scene walked out of. Now watch it get built.



Chapter 21 — The Blank Page: Choosing the Wake

21.1 A subject with no past papers

Understand our situation in 2006, because it is the purest version of the situation this book trains you for. Theatre Arts had never been sat in Guyana. There was no bank of past questions, no older students' folders, no local textbook — this book is being written partly because that shelf was empty. What we had: teachers — Ms. Shaundel Phillips and the Allied Arts staff — who treated the syllabus as a door, not a wall; and a county full of culture nobody had yet thought of as examination material.

When the playmaking assignment came — build a prepared piece from Caribbean cultural life — the temptation every group faces appeared on schedule: reach for what looks "big." Carnival spectacle we had never lived. Imported soap-opera drama. Shakespeare in borrowed voices. The method's first law (Chapter 12.2) cut through it: **choose the form you have stood inside.**

And every one of us had stood inside a wake.

21.2 Why the wake was the strongest possible choice

Test the wake against every criterion this book has built:

- **First-hand sensory knowledge.** We were Berbice children. We knew the plastic chairs borrowed from the church, the coffee and biscuits, the sankeys, the dominoes slamming softly out back "so the house don't feel empty," the way the yard fills at dusk. No research could fake what our bodies already held.
- **Built-in dramaturgy** (Chapter 5.2). The wake has plot: gathering
□ keeping company □ the breaking moment □ the singing that

carries everyone through. We did not have to invent an arc; the culture had engineered one over generations.

- **A ready argument** (Chapter 12.4). Ours, pinned to the wall of every rehearsal: *the wake shows how we heal as a society — together, in ritual, laughter and grief keeping company in one yard.*
- **The lineage.** Dennis Scott had built *An Echo in the Bone* on the nine-night in 1970;[2] the wake stands on the syllabus's own lists of cultural forms.[3] We were not being provincial; we were standing in the deepest tradition Caribbean theatre owns.
- **One detail that was purely, locally ours:** in Guyana, the dead are announced by name on local television and radio — the death announcements, with their solemn music, a daily institution every Guyanese household knows. The community's grief has a broadcast voice. No other choice could give us a climax so precise, so Guyanese, and so stageable with one speaker and one recorded track.

I will add the personal receipt, framed exactly as it is: I grew up inside a broadcasting family; the local stations of my childhood carried those announcements to the county. When our scene put a death announcement at its centre, I was staging something my own family's trade delivered to Berbice homes daily. Use your own equivalents, candidates: the material closest to your life is the material only you can bring.

21.3 The research pass

Memory first, then verification (Chapter 12.3). We interviewed our elders on the wake's order of service — who sits where, who serves, what is covered, what is never done; we mapped the ritual's phases as a plot skeleton; and we marked the sacred line: the hymns and prayers are worship, to be presented respectfully as themselves — sung straight, never mocked, never mixed with anything from any other tradition's observances. That boundary held all the way to the examination floor, and I commend it to every group as non-negotiable house law.



Chapter 22 — Building the Scene: Texture by Texture

22.1 The études

We built exactly as Chapter 12.5 teaches — textures before scenes, each workshoped as its own étude:

The sound bed. A wake is heard before it is understood: low talk in Creole, a kettle, chairs scraping, and underneath it the dominoes — not the roaring rum-shop slam but the wake-yard slam, muted, steady, a heartbeat that says *the living are still here*. We drilled the domino table until it could play truthfully at three volumes, because the sound design (Chapter 15.5) needed it as an instrument: full voice in the easy first movement, softening as night deepened, dead silent at the announcement.

The traffic. Arrivals are a wake's exposition. Each entrance we built told the audience a relationship in seconds: the neighbour who comes straight to the kitchen because she knows the house; the man who pauses at the gate to remove his cap; the young cousin who does not know where to put himself. Guyanese manners are a complete blocking vocabulary — who is offered the good chair is the power map (Chapter 14.2).

The registers. Creole for comfort and remembering; hymn-English rising when feeling needed somewhere formal to stand; and one figure — our marshalling aunty — sliding registers as she managed the yard, our living demonstration of the continuum (Chapter 13.3).

The objects. Tea passed hand to hand. The pack of biscuits opened and offered. The white cloth. And upstage on its raised chair: the television, playing its quiet murmur — Chekhov's gun in a doily, loaded in front of the audience for ten minutes (Chapter 7.2).

22.2 The shape

Assembled, the piece ran in four movements inside the playmaking bracket:

1. **The Gathering** (exposition): dusk arrivals, the yard filling, laughter fully permitted — a wake is not a funeral; the culture's genius is that it lets the living be alive.
2. **Keeping Company** (rising action): dominoes, stories about the deceased — we let the audience fall in love with a man they would never meet, through the community's memory of him. Rising underneath: small signals of the widow's held-together-ness, stitched in early so the break would be earned, not sudden.
3. **The Announcement** (climax): the TV's murmur resolves into the known music. Someone says "*turn it up.*" The yard stops — dominoes down, kettle off, stillness (Drill 10.C's discipline, spent all at once). The announcer reads the name. And the room breaks — the widow first, then the yard, the crying finally given its hour, because hearing the name on the station makes the death *public, official, real*. Our loudest moment was nearly silent before it was loud: the strongest vocal choice we made (Chapter 9.5).
4. **The Singing** (dénouement): out of the crying, one voice raises a sankey; the yard gathers into it, voices stacking; the widow is physically gathered into the group — grief held by hands. Lights (the hall switch, thrown on a held image — Chapter 15.4) out on the rising hymn. Argument delivered: healing is communal.

22.3 What we cut

Teaching honesty: we built more than we performed. A flashback of the deceased — cut: it broke the ritual's unity of place and the audience's own imagination was doing the role better. A quarrel over inheritance — cut: true to life, but it served a different argument than our sentence, and the sentence governs (Chapter 12.4). Cutting good material for the sake of the whole is the most adult skill in devising; put your cuts in the journal, because the viva question "what would you change?" is best answered by a group that demonstrably changed things all term.

Chapter 23 — Performing Grief, Performing Healing: the Examination Day

23.1 Playing feeling without drowning in it

The craft question of the piece: how do young performers play communal grief truthfully, twice if asked, on demand, without either faking or breaking? Our working answers, now teachable doctrine:

- **Play the task, not the tear.** Stanislavski's action principle (Chapter 5.3): the aunty plays *keeping the yard fed*; the domino men play *keeping the night ordinary*; the widow plays *holding the seams*. Feeling arrives as a by-product of tasks obstructed — and arrives fresh every run, because tasks are repeatable and moods are not.
- **The ensemble carries the individual.** No one was asked to manufacture solo grief; the break was staged as a chain — announcement, stillness, one crack, the yard answering. Grief distributed is grief sustainable, in performance exactly as in the culture we were portraying. The form itself taught us how to act it: that discovery — *the wake's own healing mechanics doubled as our acting technique* — is the single finest thing I learned in that production.
- **Respect is a performance state.** We began each run with a moment of quiet — our own remembered dead in the room with us. Whatever your group's equivalent, mark the difference between portraying a sacred thing and playing dress-up in one. Examiners feel that difference from the first minute.

23.2 The examiner in the room

The external examiner who assessed the pioneer batch's performances in Berbice was Professor Al Creighton — the country's leading theatre critic, the scholar whose Sunday columns had been the national archive of our stage for years.[4] Candidates, take the structural lesson rather than the anecdote: **assume the most knowledgeable audience in the country is in your examination room**, because one day it will be. Build every choice to survive expert attention: the culture rendered accurately, the sacred respected, the craft deliberate, the journal ready to prove it. We performed our country's way of mourning for the critic who knew the whole region's theatre — and the work held, because it was true and because it was built.

The result, for the record this book stands on: **Grade One, in Guyana's first-ever sitting of the subject — and the Award for Best Graduating Theatre Arts Student (Practical)**. Not offered as boasting — offered as the receipt for every method chapter in this book. The practical is the half of the grade this Part teaches; the award is its receipt. The method is not theory to me. I sat where you sit.



Chapter 24 — What the Critic Saw: the Lineage Completed

24.1 The circle

Follow the thread, because it is this book's whole argument wearing one biography. A Berbice student performs her community's mourning ritual for the nation's leading critic (the stage robe). Years later, at the University of Guyana, that same critic teaches her the disciplined analysis of language and art (the seminar robe).[5] She carries both trainings to law school and into courtrooms, where critique becomes advocacy — evidence marshalled, judgments argued, a judge persuaded (the courtroom robe). And twenty years after the examination, she writes the subject's textbook, closing the loop for the next pioneer sitting in a county classroom with no idea yet how far the craft can carry her.

One discipline. Three robes. The wake scene was where I first put on the first one.

24.2 What the case study proves — the doctrine in five receipts

1. **Your culture is examination gold** — the syllabus prescribes the very forms your family already keeps.[3]
2. **Ritual carries ready-made dramaturgy** — the wake handed us plot, ensemble, climax and resolution; your form will hand you yours (Chapters 5, 12).
3. **Respect is craft** — the sacred boundary we held was simultaneously our ethics and our marks (Chapters 1, 8, 12.6).
4. **Discipline converts feeling into repeatable performance** — tasks, ensemble structure, journals, systems (Chapters 9–11, 16,

23.1).

5. **The pipeline is real** — from a school hall in New Amsterdam to Carifesta stages to whatever your own third robe turns out to be. The distance is shorter than you think. Somebody from a county school has already walked it, and she wrote you this book so you would walk it faster.

24.3 The last word — for the room where it started

Every method in these pages was first a lesson in the Allied Arts room at New Amsterdam Multilateral School. Ms. Shaundel Phillips gifted me the voice and the ability to use my talents in every part of my life — her words live in how I open a case, chair a meeting, tell my son a story, and write this sentence. A teacher who hands a child their own voice has built something no playhouse can hold. This book is that gift, passed on.

Now — your yard is full of material, your syllabus is mapped, your instrument is warming up.

The stage is yours. Walk good.



Notes to Part V

[1] The 2006 examinations were governed by CXC 32/G/SYLL 01 (first issued 2001); the current edition is CXC 32/G/SYLL 10 (2010, effective from May/June 2012), whose playmaking section prescribes the 10–15 minute performance based on a Caribbean cultural form referenced throughout this Part. The author's examination-piece details are her own personal testimony. [2] F.S.J. Ledgister, "Echoes in the bone," *Caribbean Review of Books* 18 (2008); "Dennis Scott (writer)," Wikipedia. [3] CXC Syllabus, pp. 13–14 (the Wake/Nine Nights on the cultural-forms list and in the 2012–2014 and 2015–2017 prescribed study lists). [4] On Creighton's standing and archive: the Al Creighton author page and "Arts on Sunday" archive, *Stabroek News* (stabroeknews.com/author/al-creighton). His role as the author's examiner is the author's personal testimony. [5] The author's account of Creighton's University of Guyana Language Arts teaching is personal testimony.



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To **Ms. Shaundel Phillips** of the Allied Arts, New Amsterdam Multilateral School — first, always. You gifted me the voice and ability to utilize my talents for any aspect of my life. This book exists because you decided a room full of county children deserved a subject nobody had taught before, and taught it like a birthright.

To **Ms. Jackie Benn, Miss Seleste La Rose, Ms. Jonnelle Harewood and Sir Narinedat Dhanraj**, who pioneered beside her — the first faculty of a subject with no past papers, and the proof that teachers make traditions before ministries do.

To **Professor Al Creighton** — the examiner who watched a Berbice wake scene with a critic's full attention and a countryman's full understanding, and the teacher who later showed me, at the University of Guyana, that judgment is a craft with rules. The three-robles doctrine in these pages began in your examination room and your classroom, and his decades of "Arts on Sunday" columns remain the archive this book leaned on again and again.

To my **pioneer batch castmates** of 2006 — the yard we built together is still standing in Part V.

To the **elders of Berbice** who taught us, at real wakes in real yards, how a community holds its people through the worst nights — this book's central lesson was yours before it was mine.

And to my parents, who built everything I stand on — long nights and sacrifice of love — and to my son, who will grow up knowing that his mother's first stage was a school hall in New Amsterdam, and that it was enough to start an empire of words.



Glossary of Working Terms

anagnorisis — the recognition moment: a character (or audience) passes from ignorance to knowledge (Ch. 5). **APAN / PERF / CREA** — the syllabus's three profile dimensions: Appreciating and Analysing; Performing; Creating (Ch. 17). **blocking** — the planned positioning and movement of performers on stage (Ch. 14). **Creole continuum** — the range of speech between deep Creolese and formal Standard, along which speakers shift by situation and power (Ch. 13). **cultural form** — the syllabus's term for aesthetic practices derived from and identified with particular Caribbean communities: rituals, festivals, celebrations, games, music, dances, language (Ch. 1). **dénouement** — the settling of the action after the climax (Ch. 5). **devising** — creating an original performance collectively, usually through improvisation and research rather than from a pre-existing script (Ch. 12). **diaphragmatic breath** — breath dropped low into the belly and ribs, the engine of stage voice (Ch. 9). **downstage / upstage** — toward / away from the audience (Ch. 10, 14). **dianoia** — Aristotle's "thought": the meaning or argument a drama carries (Ch. 5). **étude** — a short focused practice study; in devising, a texture workshopped on its own before assembly (Ch. 22). **fourth wall** — the imaginary wall between a naturalistic stage world and its audience (Ch. 6). **given circumstances** — Stanislavski's term for the facts a character lives inside (Ch. 5). **improvisation** — spontaneous performance created in the moment from a stimulus (Ch. 11). **mas' / masquerade** — Caribbean masking-and-procession performance traditions, from Carnival mas' to Guyana's Christmas masquerade bands (Ch. 1). **melos / opsis** — Aristotle's music and spectacle: all that is heard beyond speech; all that is seen (Ch. 5). **peripeteia** — the reversal: the moment fortune flips (Ch. 5). **platform** — improvisation's opening

establishment of who, where and what (Ch. 11). **proscenium / thrust / in-the-round / found space** — the four basic audience-stage geometries (Ch. 14). **prompt copy** — the stage manager's master script recording blocking, cues and timings (Ch. 14–15). **register** — the level of formality of speech chosen for a situation (Ch. 13). **sankey** — in Guyanese usage, a hymn of the revival type sung at wakes and services, from Ira D. Sankey's hymnals (Ch. 22). **SBA** — School-Based Assessment: the syllabus's internally assessed components (Ch. 19). **semiotics** — the study of signs; in theatre, the reading of everything on stage as meaning (Ch. 7). **stimulus** — the given starting material of an improvisation: proverb, image, object, headline, music (Ch. 11). **tadjah** — in Guyana, the decorated model tomb built and processed in the Hosay observance; from taziya (Ch. 1). **viva voce** — the oral examination in which candidates answer questions on their practical work (Ch. 18).



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