

Bristol Old Vic

Box Office 0117 987 7877

bristololdvic.org.uk/medusa

Teacher's Resource

ARMED
AND
DANGEROUS



Introduction

Toby Hulse - director

Medusa is the second play in a two year project created specifically for schools in Bridgwater and the surrounding area.

The first play, *Minotaur*, was made in response to conversations with young people and teachers in those schools, asking what sort of stories they would like to see onstage, and what was it about their lives and experiences that they would like to see explored.

As well as retelling a story familiar from classroom work on Greek myths, and bringing a terrifying monster into school halls, *Minotaur* raised questions about why we stay at home with what we know, and why we might make the difficult decision to leave behind what is familiar and find something new. After seeing the show, a class sized group in each school worked over a number of weeks with a workshop leader to create an artistic response to *Minotaur* – what inspired them about the show? What questions did they have about it? What might happen next? **Adam Peck**, the writer, and I then spent a wonderful week visiting each school to see, hear, experience the children's feedback to what we had brought to them, with the aim of creating a second show as an answer to the children's responses.

Although each school had worked on their own, a number of ideas and questions were common to many. Children clearly liked seeing monsters onstage. They were interested in the origins of monsters, and beginning to question who creates a monster, and who defines what a monster is. They wanted to see more female characters in their stories. They were very vocal about who gets to decide what happens to you as you grow up, and who has the power to say who you are. They were excited by stories which explored what happens if you make a different decision at a key moment, and how this might affect the rest of your life. From all these ideas and questions, Adam and I began to craft the story of *Medusa*.



Minotaur in school in 2014

Notes on Medusa

Unlike *Minotaur*, which follows the storyline of a well-known Greek myth faithfully, *Medusa* is a brand new story. It uses elements of traditional Greek mythology – the **three Gorgons**, of whom Medusa is one; **the three Fates**, who spin the thread of our lives; the characters of **Theseus** and his Amazonian wife, **Hippolyta**; the city of **Athens** that falls apart during Theseus' reign – but employs them to create a new myth that explores the questions about identity, particularly female identity, that so many of the children were interested in.

Medusa is written in the style and form of an ancient Greek tragedy. Tradition at the time demanded that plays should obey the **three Unities of Place, Time and Action** – that a play should happen in one location, over the course of no more than one day, and that there should be no subplots or extraneous characters. So, unlike *Minotaur*, which transported its audiences across land and sea from Troezen to Athens to Crete and back to Athens again, in a story of many months, with a couple of comedy guards thrown in for light relief, *Medusa* takes place in the Palace of Athens over the course of twelve hours, and only shows us the characters we absolutely have to see. The effect of obeying the Unities is to create an incredibly intense rollercoaster of a play – once the action has started there is absolutely no let-up... Ancient Greek tragedies also employed a Chorus to amplify and comment upon the action of the main characters. Although we don't have a Chorus onstage, by having Theseus address the audience as the people of Athens, and actively involving us in the performance of the play, we become the Chorus, and our involvement is key to the unfolding of the story.

It is always a great privilege to be allowed to bring theatre into schools and share stories with young people, to transform the familiar space of a school hall into somewhere new and exciting, to get the genuine and pleasingly honest feedback that young audiences have to our work. We very much hope that you enjoy *Medusa*, that it excites and challenges in equal measure, and that the performance is only the start of thinking and work about the questions that lie at the heart of the story we are telling.

Thank you for having us!

LINKS

[The three Gorgons](#)

[The three Fates](#)

[Theseus](#)

[Hippolyta](#)

[Athens](#)

[The Unities of Place, Time and Action](#)

Meet the characters

Theseus



Theseus is the King of Athens, but he has lost sight of what is good. He is frustrated by the fact that he does not have a son and heir to his throne, but he does not know what to do about it. He feels powerless, and as a result of this abuses and mistreats the women around him, including keeping them locked inside the palace. He has even turned to murdering his own baby daughters because he feels ashamed by his family's inability to produce a son.

Aethra



Aethra is Theseus's mother. She tries to care for him, but he is cold and inconsolable. She has become embroiled in Theseus's murdering of his baby daughter's and lives with the guilt of his horrible actions. She feels partially responsible, but unable to do anything about it. She is isolated from Hippolyta and Ava as she is aware how much they dislike Theseus and whilst sympathising with them feels unable to betray to her son. She is dutiful and obedient, but still has an independent mind having spent much of her life in the remote village of Troezen.

Hippolyta



Hippolyta is Theseus's long-suffering wife. She was once the Queen of Amazonia, but having lost a war with Athens was forced to leave her homeland and become Theseus's wife. She has been locked in the palace since she was brought to Athens trying to produce a son for Theseus. However, despite mothering lots of children none of them except her first, Ava, have survived beyond infancy. It seems as though she or Theseus is cursed to never be able to create a male heir. Hippolyta was once a warrior, a lover of the outdoors, a free spirit – but Theseus has essentially made her his slave and baby-making machine.

Ava



Ava is Theseus's only child and daughter. She has been imprisoned inside the palace since she was born, but despite this is an outgoing and bright person. She is intelligent and desperate for her father to invest in her potential. However, the older she has become the more she has realised how her father's bigoted nature limits her. She would like to escape Athens and its male-centricity but does not know how. She is loyal to her mother but realises that they are both prisoners and only she has the strength left to escape.

LINKS

Literacy
Characters
Greek Mythology

Meet the actors

Find out who they play

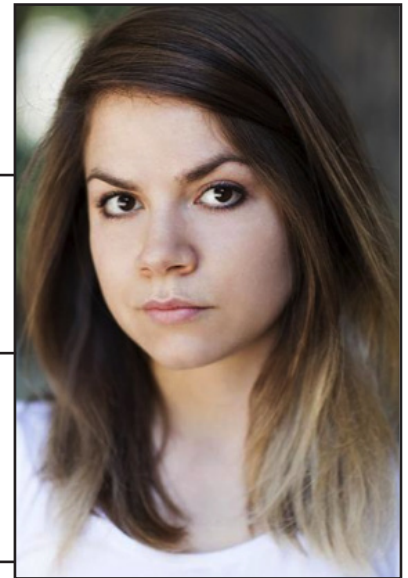


Kirsty Cox

Aethra

Klotho

Medusa



Anna Wheatley

Ava

Atropos

Medusa



Jannah Warlow

Hippolyta

Lakheisis

Medusa



Robin Hemmings

Theseus

Design challenge!

Max Johns - designer

Making a Medusa

Medusa's hair is said to be made of snakes.

What things can you think of that remind you of snakes? What is a snake's skin like? How do snakes move? And how do they make you feel when you see them or touch them?

Our **Medusa** is made from lots of different materials – some of which you might find at home. Which materials did you recognise from somewhere else? Which ones looked strange or unfamiliar?

Try drawing your own **Medusa**. Think about what her eyes are like, and of course her hair. Is she colourful or not? Is she natural or unnatural? Is she scary or likeable?

Try making your own **Medusa** head. What things could you use to make the head shape? The eyes? And the snake hair? Using materials you can find in your classroom see who can make the most frightening **Medusa**!

Designing the Medusa characters

Have a look at the costume designs for *Medusa* on the next page. Which character do you like most, just from looking at the drawings?

What do the clothes tell you about the characters? Think about the colours, styles and fabrics.

Would you design the costumes differently? Imagine the characters in your head and draw how you think they might look, or find pictures online to show how you imagine they might look.

1. Aethra
2. Ava
3. Hippolyta
4. Theseus
5. Spinners
6. Medusa heads

LINKS

Enquiry
Art and Design
Interpretation



1



AETHRA
MEDUSA



2



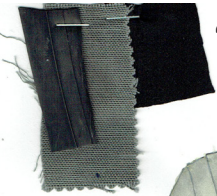
AVA
MEDUSA



3



HIPPOLYTA
MEDUSA



4



THESEUS
MEDUSA



5



SPINNERS
MEDUSA



6

MEDUSA HEADS

Setting the scene

Max and Toby

When you tour a play into schools you have got a brilliant opportunity to think creatively about how to make the stage work.

There is no need to worry about lights or curtain or stages. You can be really intimate and inventive.

Medusa is staged with the audience sitting on each side of an equilateral triangle. There are three 'portal' areas which are used for some character or costume changes as well as to add to the dramatic tension.

What ideas can you come up with for staging a play like Medusa? Max's model box design is on the next page, but you could consider some other configurations.

What about:

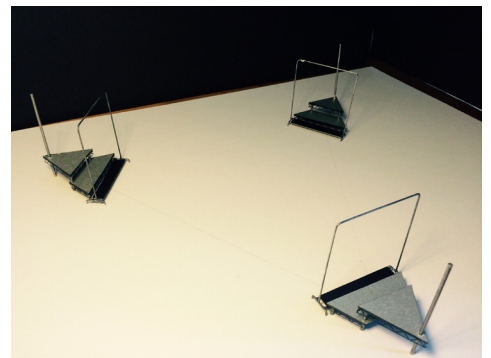
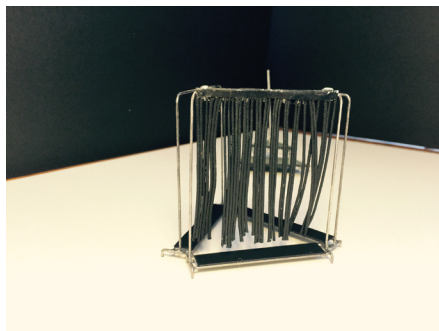
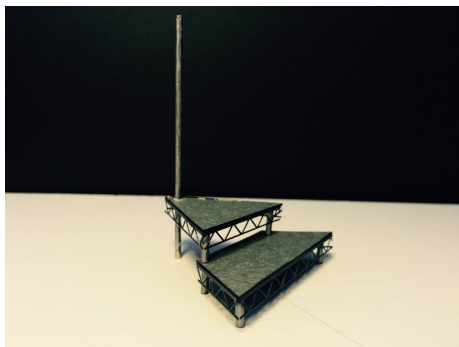
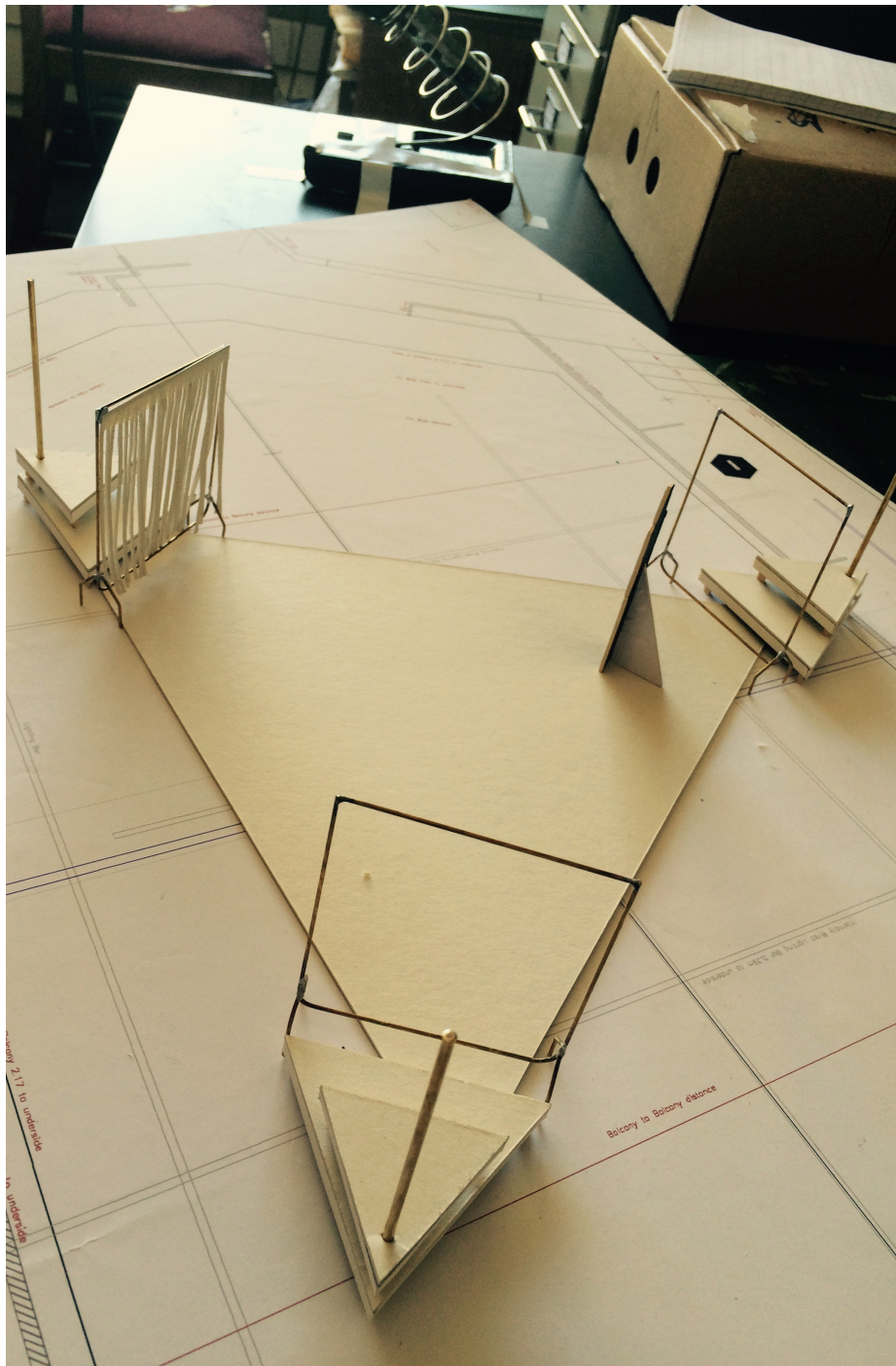
- in the round (the audience are in a circle around the action)
- end on (the audience sit in front of the action)
- promenade (the audience walk around the action which in different locations)
- tiny scale (the action takes place in a really small space which means audiences have to take turns to see it)
- outdoor (the audience and action are both outside)

Can you think of any other ideas?

What are the pro's and con's of different types of staging?

What will an audience's experience be?

How does it change the story if you try it in a different staging style?



Drama exercises

Over to you!

We are bringing a workshop into school prior to the performance, in order to work with a group of children and prepare them for the show.

There are some set pieces that they will learn to actually 'do' in the show.

We'll also be running some storytelling exercises to help explore aspects of the play.

Main tasks of the day:

1. Teach moments in the play
2. Storytelling, myth making
3. Theatre-making
4. What matters to you?

Moments in the play

- a. Simple chant
 - ☐ Everyone can sing
 - ☐ Verity will email a link or a file of the chant that everyone will need to sing. Theseus invites the children to chant, see pg
- b. Making statues
 - ☐ Three children will be invited to be 'turned into statues' during the play
 - ☐ They will need to go to the performance space 15 minutes before everyone else and be briefed by Robin
 - ☐ This could be delivered as a game, leading into a competition or class vote on choosing which the best/most interesting/democratically elected favourite statues are
- c. Guard movements
 - ☐ Theseus will call for his guards (see pg). At this point, all of the children need to stand and, in unison, perform the same movement turning into a guard.
 - ☐ This could be a game whereby everyone practices doing the same movement. Perhaps the class/some children can create the movement.
 - ☐ Theseus will 'click and point' for the cue; he will then gesture for everyone to sit.
 - ☐ The 'Guards!' call could be used throughout the day to bring everyone's attention together
- d. What's important
 - ☐ Theseus will ask three times, 'what is important to you?'
 - ☐ He'll ask specific people, who will need to identify themselves to Robin 15 minutes before the performance
 - ☐ This could be delivered with the group working in three groups to decide on what is important to them in life. We are aiming for at least one of them to decide upon family

Storytelling, myth making

This is not Medusa as you know it; it's a new story inspired by the idea of 'what happened next to Theseus', and the monster of Medusa.

For context, it was developed from the response to Minotaur identifying a desire to see a play with three females in it, and some monsters. The idea of how women are perceived or defined by the way men look at them. The idea of the righteous feminine anger.

Split the class to work in groups of 3 or 4

Improvisation games and exercises. Make, model and show.

Create stories that are ridiculous notions for things we don't understand – the very nature of mythology.

How might you create Medusa? How does she turn people to stone? Why does the Cyclops have one eye? Why is Pegasus a horse? These questions that create answers to the unknown or the assumed.

Tell a narrative in 5 images

Show status, power and relationships. Do this with actors; do it with inanimate objects. Five chairs, which has the most power? How do you show that by just how it is placed?

Keep the dynamic of the storytelling an evolution. How do you recreate the feeling of The Genie from Aladdin to help the otherworldliness of some of the storytelling?

Theatre-making

What happens when you use vocal or physical techniques to play with status, power, relationship? Using tempo, volume, discord, unity, slow-motion, backwards and forwards.

In the Research & Development period the creative team asked the following questions: you could explore these with the class

- What shape is the stage?
- How do you make the story clear?
- How do you do Medusa?
- How do you bring song and text together smoothly and without breaking from one to another?

In rehearsals, Toby has been working with the actors to explore:

- How does Medusa change from being three people together as one, to three people as individual Medusi?
- How do you become invisible on stage?
- How do you teleport from one side of the stage to another?

Musicality: hocketing

*In music, **hocket** is the rhythmic linear technique using the alternation of notes, pitches, or chords. In medieval practice of hocket, a single melody is shared between two (or occasionally more) voices such that alternately one voice sounds while the other rests.*

What's important to you?

Identity. What is important to you?

Would you rather?

If you were going to a desert island, what would you take with you?

What would you sacrifice between one thing and another?

Three groups can discuss and come up with things that are important to them in their lives, in their community, in their world today. They can share these with the rest of the group and discuss.



Medusa in rehearsal



LINKS

Enquiry
Team work
Literacy
Negotiation
Drama
Greeks
Mythology
PSHE
Art and Design
Interpretation

What is my job?

Toby Hulse (director)

I am the director of *Medusa*. Directors do many things:

They help the actors to rehearse the play by being the audience in the rehearsal room. As an outside eye, they make sure that the story is clear; that the characters make sense; that the pictures we put onstage are clear and visible to everyone in the audience; that the play has the right speed and rhythm.

Directors encourage actors to experiment and play, and to try out ideas, helping them decide which ideas work and which do not.

Directors are ultimately responsible for all the decisions made about the play – who will be in the cast; what the set and costumes will look like; how props are used; how music is used; what the publicity will look like; when rehearsals are. They do this in collaboration with all the other people working on the show, and ask for as many ideas as possible, but it is the director's job to have the final say, so that all the bits that go together to make a play make sense together.

Putting a play on can be quite stressful – everybody wants to get it right and there is never enough time or money. Directors support, encourage, listen, console and generally say, 'Everything will be alright on the night!'

How Did You Become A Director?

When I was little I used to tell stories with my toys, making them talk to each other and move around. At school I really enjoyed drama and school plays, and I was lucky to be taken to the theatre a lot as I was growing up. I thought that I wanted to be an actor, but when I went to university to study English and started acting in plays there, I found that I couldn't concentrate properly: I was always thinking about what all the other actors were doing. Actors need to be able to concentrate really well, and I realised that maybe I wasn't an actor, but a director. I tried directing a play at university and found that I really enjoyed it. When I left university I became a teacher in a primary school, and did lots of school plays and ran a drama club. Working with lots of young people really helped me learn how to tell a story on stage, and how to help actors get the best ideas. I then went to a drama school for adults called the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, where I did a course on Directing, and since then I have been lucky enough to be able to earn a living directing plays, writing plays and making theatre with young people. I don't earn very much money, but I do love going to work every day!

What is my job?

Adam Peck (writer)

I wrote the script.

That involves many things including deciding what I wanted to write about, in terms of theme and story.

Once I had decided that I wanted to write about a female monster, I researched as many Greek stories about Medusa and the Gorgons that I could. Then I created a new story using some of the characters and events from the Greek stories I had read that tackled some of the issues I wanted to address.

The play is also a sequel (of sorts) to my previous play *Minotaur* so there were some continuity issues to consider, such as why Theseus has become like he is and how the threads from the first story continue into the second (literally and metaphorically!).

I wrote the dialogue and the stage directions and tried to write on paper what I imagined could work on stage. Now it is the director and actors turns to see if I was right...

What is my job?

Max Johns (designer)

I designed the set, costumes and props for Medusa.

My job is to work very closely with the director to create the world of the play on stage.

We always start by reading the play, then we find images in books, in films, in art or on-line that seem like they relate to the play. After lots of discussions and research I start to draw sketches of the characters and the set. I then make a scale model of the set using just white card to get a sense of its size and shape. After this I make a scale model with all the details of the final set – I try to get the colours and textures just right. And I do detailed drawings or collages of the costumes.

I then work with set builders, painters, costume makers and puppeteers to bring the set, costumes and props to life and have them ready to be used by the actors on stage for the first performance.

What is my job?

Lucy Hunt (producer)

What Is Your Job? What Do You Do?

I am the producer of *Medusa*. Producers have to:

- ☐ Work out how the production will be paid for. Where will the money come from and how is the best way to spend it. Usually the money comes from a variety of places and the producer must keep them all happy!
- ☐ Get the best team of people together to make the show. This usually starts with the writer and then the director for a new play like *Medusa* but there are lots of other people who are really important and whose ideas shape the final piece.
- ☐ Make sure everyone knows what their role is, where they need to be and when, make sure they have everything they need and that they don't spend too much money!
- ☐ Think carefully about how the project went at the end and work out what to do next.

How Did You Become a Producer?

I started my love of theatre when I was a teenager and I set up a new youth theatre after taking part in a community play in my local town. I studied drama at university but focussed on work with the community and particularly with young people. My career has included work with lots of arts and education organisations in London and the south west and has always explored how we learn through the arts. I have been at Bristol Old Vic for 2 years and love my job here!

What is my job?

Verity Standon (Music Director)

I have written the songs that you will hear in Medusa...

My role consists of working with the script and Toby the director and turning the words into some atmospheric, scary, and catchy songs and soundscapes.

I am quite an unusual Musical Director in a way as I have never learnt to read music or play an instrument excellently, I just work purely with voice. I think the human voice is great. It can create a lot of really exciting sounds and atmospheres.

As you will hear in the show, the performers don't just sing songs, they also help create the whole sound of Medusa's world with their voices. Ever since I was young I was made to stand up in front of people and sing, so voice feels very important to me.

Over the years I have written music for a lot of theatre companies and also run choirs, I have also written my own singing shows that are all totally *a capella* (where people sing without any musical instruments accompanying them).

In Medusa you will hear a particular vocal technique that is called *hocketing* (where the singers are sharing words and melodies - it sounds like the voices are being batted about like a ping pong ball!)

Hocketing is a pretty hard thing to master and the performers and I have had to rehearse these songs a jolly lot.

It has been a lot of fun working on this show, we have giggled a lot when it has come to deciding what sort of voices represent the characters best. My favourites are The Spinners...

A lovely thing about being in a rehearsal room is being able to muck around for hours making silly noises and then you come out with a show at the end!

What is my job?

Jannah Warlow (Actor)

I am an actor-musician, and I am playing the part of Hippolyta, Queen of Athens, in 'Medusa'. I also play one of the Spinners and one of Medusa's heads.

As a child I loved stories and songs and I would often put on puppet shows and record story-tapes for my friends and family. At school, I enjoyed drama a lot. I studied a BTEC in Performing Arts at College and then took a degree in Acting at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Since then, I have been lucky enough to work on some wonderful projects, including touring a theatre show around Europe, running away to the English countryside with the circus, and being nominated for an award in Wales!

I am thrilled to be part of the team making 'Medusa' - it has been an exciting journey and I really hope you are as captivated by it as I am.

Follow-up questions for the class

Classroom exercise

- Who decides what sort of person you are? How did you end up being the person you are today?
- **Theseus** believes he is cursed, and that Fate is against him. Is there such a thing as Fate? How much of our life is already determined for us? Can we escape our Fate?
- In the world of *Medusa* men and women are valued very differently. How different is it in today's world?
- Is there a 'baddy' in the story of *Medusa*? If so, who is it, and why?
- Whose fault is it that **Theseus** behaves the way he does?
- **Theseus** is told he has to sacrifice the thing that is most important to him. What is the most important thing to you? Why?
- Sometimes the characters speak, and sometimes they sing. Can you describe the effect of this? What is different between what is said and what is sung? Why do you think we have decided to do this?
- The character of **Theseus** doesn't sing. Why do you think this is?
- Although *Medusa* is set in Ancient Greece, the characters do not wear Ancient Greek costumes. What is the effect of this? Why do you think we have done it? If you were to design costumes for the characters what would they look like?
- The story demands that we see **Medusa** onstage. We have found one solution to showing a monster. What other solutions can you think of?
- Adam's script is very specific that at some times we see three **Medusas**, and at other times we see one **Medusa**. We have found one answer to this challenge. What other answers are there?
- Is the ending of the play a happy ending or not? Why?
- If you were to write a sequel to *Medusa*, what do you think should happen next?
- Did you like Theseus? What could Theseus have done to make you like him more?
- How does Theseus treat his wife, daughter and mother in the play? Do you think men treat women like that nowadays?
- Why did Theseus want a son so much? Why did he not want another daughter? Do you think this is fair?
- Why do you think the women in the play turn into Medusa?
- Who were the weird women (who spun thread) that visited Theseus? What did they want Theseus to do, and why? Did Theseus do what they wanted or not?

LINKS

Enquiry

Personal reflection

Literacy

Theseus

Art & Design

Bristol Old Vic

MEDUSA

Producer	Lucy Hunt
Director	Toby Hulse
Writer	Adam Peck
Designer	Max Johns
Music	Verity Standen
Stage Manager	Juliette Taylor
Cast	Kirsty Cox Robin Hemmings Anna Wheatley Jannah Warlow
School Coordinator	Nick White
Workshops	Angie Athay-Hunt Jack Drewry Liz Hague Alice Nicholas Katie Storer
Photos	Chris Cooper

For further information please contact Lucy Hunt, Outreach Producer lhunt@bristololdvic.org.uk