

## War Horse Set Question

## Drama

### Overview/First paragraph

*War Horse* first performed on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007, on the Olivier Stage at the National Theatre, and I saw a live recording of this production. It is a creative adaptation from the children's novel of the same name by Michael Morpurgo, and the script was written by Nick Stafford. It was directed by Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris. *War Horse* follows the story of Albert Narracott and his horse Joey, from their childhood in Devon to their separation during WW1 and their eventual reunion. Although the play is not epic theatre, it is an epic story, spanning six years, from 1912 to 1918, and it uses some epic theatre techniques, such as breaking the action with song and having an episodic structure.

### Set

Rae Smith designed *War Horse's* set for the Olivier Stage, which is an open proscenium arch stage with a revolve and a fly gallery. The scale is vast, immediately giving the production an impressive impact. The set design is minimalist and representational, using simple set furnishings and techniques to transport the audience to the play's fourteen different locations. The permanent set's major element is the cyclorama, which is upstage, and covers the entire stage width and half its height (the top half). It has torn edges, and represents a page torn out of Major Nicholls sketchbook, although the audience only realises this after Albert tears out a drawing of Joey. The cyclorama constantly has drawings and animations projected onto it, creating a sense of the location and sometimes enhancing scenes' movement. Dates and addresses are also projected onto it, cleverly communicating the passing of time and the location. The stage floor is made of vinyl and has a pattern of criss-crossing shards embossed onto it, making it look textured and rough. Depending on the lighting, it can appear to be different colours, e.g., in a straw wash it looks like brown mud, whereas in a bright white wash it appears to be a starker black and white. Upstage is constantly in darkness, as the lighting rigs are really high and really low, allowing the large cast, of approximately 25 actors, to enter and exit with minimal fuss.

### Ploughing Scene (Details on Teams)



### The Tank Scene (Details on Teams)



### The End (See over for details)

★ QUESTION ★

Describe how the set was used to create a memorable experience for the audience. Analyse and evaluate how successful the set was in creating a memorable experience for the audience. You could make reference to: • materials and equipment • use of space, levels, scale, colour • a scene or section and/or the production as a whole.

## Scene 6 – Ploughing Scene

- Swift change out the farm at night – fences creating stable carried off, Narracott door flat flown up, cyclorama changes projection
- Cyclorama – projection of farm roof SR and hillside (with trees) SL, sepia toned, with slight green to hillside – like old photograph. Mostly greyish – dawn
- Inspired by Edwardian watercolours, which often depicted a rural idyll
- Basic set, with Albert, holding harness, and Joey, DSL
- Floor looks like mud
- Cyclorama projection changes to open fields, as if they're on top of a hill
- Plough trucked on SR
- Wooden frame (warm chestnut colour like rest of Devon) with two metal wheels and a blade made to look like metal (modelled on the design of 'Howard's Champion Ploughs').
- Attached to fabric (textured netting) that looks like earth – lighter chestnut, very crumpled texture, creates impression of earth being ploughed as the plough moves.
- Plough is reused later as something to hide behind in no-man's land
- Albert attaches it to Joey's harness, and pushes from behind
- Joey strains at the plough – it appears to be heavy
- Joey collapses to his knees – audience surprised, worried
- Suddenly lots of actors on stage – busy, noisy. Enter US, and just seem to appear on stage
- Buckets – used to measure the ploughing distance, comedy of Ted and Arthur agreeing the distance
- Revolve revolves – adds movement to the ploughing and excitement. Picks up pace effectively
- Cyclorama projection changes and scrolls (sense of movement) – houses, as if they're now above the village, then changes again – church spire
- Date projected onto cyclorama – 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – complete change of mood, from excited to sombre and serious.