

The importance of production elements within buried child



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Within the elements of production, the concepts of costume and set are fundamental factors in establishing the world of a play. Through the creation of these elements, the concept, content and context of a play can be exposed and explored by both the audience and the actors. In Sam Shepard's play *Buried Child*, the context of the play is a defining factor in representing characters and plot, identifying key themes and symbols. In my personal understanding of the play, the role of set and costume provides an insight into *Buried Child* that goes beyond dialogue. Due to this, the role of costume and set are equally as important as character in determining the atmosphere and tone of the play.

The creation of character is a crucial part in the writing of a play. In terms of production, costume provides a first impression on the audience, instantly exposing possible traits, personality and identity of the character.

When reading *Buried Child*, the distinct differences in personality and relationships between characters are heightened through costume. When exploring the play, the differences between Halie's and Shelly's characters are distinct. Halie, being part of a younger generation as well as being influenced by the second-wave feminism movement, is dressed considerably differently from Halie, despite their shared gender. Shelly is described as wearing a purple rabbit-fur coat, heels and tight jeans, the epitome of early 80's fashion. This fashion forward outfit reinforces Halie's personality and role within the play; a woman adapting with the time. This heavily contrasts with Halie's outfit, described as being black, conservative and similar to 50's fashion. The thirty-year time gap between the 50's and 70's was a time of immense social change, especially in regard to woman's role in society. This

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is gap is reflected in their relationship, the costumes further heightening the tension between the two characters.

When producing the play, these differences could be further conveyed through the costume. In my production of the play, the addition of bright, vibrant colors to Shelly's outfit would further determine her character's era and unsuiting setting. This color difference would separate Shelly from the house; the faded, colorless upholstery and furniture compared to her bold outfit.

Halie's costume change in the Third Act is a clear representation of how character is reflected in the costume. Upon Halie's return, she appears in a new outfit; a bright, yellow sundress. This dress acts as more than a costume, but as a representation of a different version of her character. As mentioned above, the difference between colors within costume reflect the character. Yellow, being a bright and bold colour depicts an image of happiness, joy and hope. From Halie leaving in a black outfit and returning in a yellow one, we are given the impression that Halie experiences happiness when outside the house, illustrating the impact of the setting which I will later discuss. As Shelly wears bold outfits, Halie's similar outfits renders the idea that Halie has aspects of Shelly's youthful, future-orientated personality within her. The role of costume within this play serves as a visual guide for the audience, revealing further information in regard to the context of the play.

Similarly, the story of Buried Child is completely dependent on the atmosphere and character that the set creates. The set of Buried Child is

especially significant due to the stationary nature of it; characters are never all offstage. This setting, the character's family house, serves as a reflection of the family. The home is depicted as worn-out and neglected, yet shows remnants of a happy and prosperous home.

In class, we explored the idea of space and movement within the setting of *Buried Child*. Through analyzing all the character's personalities and intentions, we were able to create a space that reflected the mood of the story. An example we focused on was the role of the couch. Dodge is positioned on the couch for the majority of the play, and the impression is created that it acts as his safety net; a safe, familiar space. We conveyed this through distancing the couch from the rest of the set, implying not only a physical separation but also a mental separation between Dodge and the rest of the characters. This spatial distancing was also utilized for the location of the front door. By placing the door far away from the living space, the gap between inside and outside the house becomes larger, and therefore the gap between the outside world and the house also becomes larger. This symbolizes the idea of isolation, which is important in the plot of the play.

When reading the play, the dynamic of Halie and Dodge's relationship is made clear through the set. The dialogue between the two characters in the beginning of Act 1 occurs on different levels of the house; Halie being upstairs and Dodge being downstairs. On the first read, the actors playing Halie and Dodge said the lines whilst yelling in order to indicate the distance between them. The approach of yelling instantly created a different tone to the scene, portraying the idea of a loveless and disinterested relationship.

The layout of having Halie being upstairs implies that she is above Dodge, in <https://assignbuster.com/the-importance-of-production-elements-within-buried-child/>

more than terms of levels. This provides us with the knowledge that Halie has the main authority in the house, being the only person that resides upstairs. The audience are never shown the second level, expressing the idea of secrecy and hidden information to the audience such as the photo wall described by Shelly in Act 2. The role of set in this example provides a deeper insight into the play, illuminating the dynamics and traits of the characters.

The use of set and costume within *Buried Child* are vital in the support and development of the play. Through applying relevant costumes that reflect the context the play, the actors and audiences are given a deeper understanding of the themes and symbols that the play focuses on. This use of style and color in costume creates an insight into the social and emotional status of the characters, helping convey their role and intentions. The stationery setting allows for interesting use of space and movement and further exposes character dynamics. Together, both costume and setting are integral features of *Buried Child*, exemplifying key themes and concepts as well as establishing the atmosphere of the play.