Staging the Starry Night

Learning objective: To identify and explain the structural features and conventions of a playscript.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below. Ensure you refer back to the text to support your answers.

Nova the owl sat atop her favourite oak tree, clutching a scroll of parchment. She was writing a new playscript about the constellations. Max the monkey watched curiously as Nova scribbled notes. 'What makes a playscript different from a story?' Max asked. Nova adjusted her spectacles. 'A playscript is a blueprint for a performance, Max. It uses specific features to guide actors and directors.' She pointed to the page. 'Look here. The character names are written in bold on the left, followed by a colon. This tells the actors who is speaking. Then, there are stage directions inside parentheses. These are written in italics and describe how a character moves or feels, but they are never spoken aloud. Finally, the scene setting at the very top explains where and when the story happens. Without these, the actors wouldn't know how to bring the story to life on stage.' Max nodded, eager to write his own script about a mathematical mystery. He realised that writing for the stage was just like solving a complex puzzle where every piece had a vital role to play.

Word bank: dialogue · stage directions · character name · scene setting · proscenium · auditorium · act

1. According to the text, how are character names formatted in a playscript? (1 mark)

2. What do stage directions tell the reader or the actors? (1 mark)

3. Why does Nova describe a playscript as a 'blueprint'? (2 marks)

4. How does Max feel about the prospect of writing his own playscript by the end of the passage? (2 marks)

5. Do you think playscripts are more difficult to write than standard stories? Explain your reasoning. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a diagram of a playscript page. Label the character name, the dialogue, and the stage directions in parentheses.

Extension challenge: Choose a short scene from a book you are currently reading and rewrite one paragraph as a playscript. Remember to include a scene setting and stage directions.