



DESIGNING THE LAST DAYS OF DR. BEARING:  
INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY'S COLOR THEORY IN THE  
THEATRICAL LIGHTING DESIGN OF WIT

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a combination of a lighting design, informed by psychology's color theory, for Angelo State University's production of *Wit* by Margaret Edson, directed by Ashley Meyer, and quantitative data on the influence of the lighting design. This thesis presents the question: Can the lighting design impact audiences' emotional experience of the play? Using a survey, audience members provided feedback on the influence of lighting on both their emotional connection to the content of the play and their overall experience. The results of the survey support that lighting can influence audiences' emotional connection to a production.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Lighting design is an important component of theatrical performances. It is utilized to help fulfill the vision of both the director and the playwright. The process of creating an efficient light plot that will fulfill the four functions of stage lighting—visibility, selective focus, mood, and plasticity—takes months of design work including research, analysis, practical knowledge, and creativity.

According to Gillette and McNamara (2014), there are four basic functions of stage lighting: visibility, selective focus, modeling, and mood. Visibility refers to the audience's ability to clearly see the actors, costumes, and sets. Selective focus refers to taking that visibility and focusing on only what the director and designer wants the audience to focus on. Modeling is the way in which depth is created and keeps the actors and set from looking flat. It can also model in specific ways, such as using sidelight, lights coming from the sides of the stage, to highlight actors' and dancers' edges and vertical lines to make them appear taller and thinner. Mood refers to the intended feeling associated with each moment.

To fulfill these functions, lighting designers can only manipulate four elements: distribution, intensity, movement, and color (Gillette & McNamara, 2014). Distribution consists of multiple elements: direction, shape, size, quality, and texture. Direction, shape, and size depend on the type of lighting instrument used and position from which the light is shone on the area. The quality refers to whether the light is clear or diffused. Texture can be manipulated with a gobo, a metal disc with an etched-in pattern, or by softening or hardening

the edges of the light. Intensity is the level of brightness that strikes the stage which is manipulated through a lighting console. Movement can be the timing of light changes, movement of lights such as candles or lamps onstage, or actual movement from moving lights or spotlights. Color can be manipulated with gels, clear color media that filters out certain color wavelengths to get a desired color, and LEDs.

This semester I was the lighting designer for *Wit* by Margaret Edson under the direction of Professor Ashley Meyer, M.A. This play centers around the last days of the character Dr. Vivian Bearing, a renowned professor of English literature diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Vivian's work focuses on the metaphysical poetry of John Donne. Her outlook on life is reflective of his struggle with faith and humanity. Vivian serves as the narrator and protagonist as she retells the last few moments of her life and how she arrived here. We see her struggle with her personal identity as a stoic professor and her humanity. This is her life taking a single breath, a pause, before it continues or ends.

For this design process, psychology's color theory was utilized. Color theory analyzes the association between colors and human emotions. Through research into this concept, design decisions and color manipulations were made to draw the audience to certain emotional reactions based on the context of each moment of the play.

The question that is investigated in this thesis is of an artistic nature. Can the lighting design impact the audience's emotional experience of the play? It was hypothesized that yes, specific design choices could impact audiences' emotional connections to the play. To answer this question an anonymous online survey was created and advertised in the programs for the production and on the San Angelo Theatre Arts Facebook Group.

The importance of this thesis lies in its multidisciplinary elements. Of the stage lighting theses available online, most focus solely on the design process of a production. By introducing quantitative data and in-depth research on psychology's color theory, this thesis bridges a gap between the design process and factual data. With a double major in theatre and psychology, this thesis provides an important opportunity for me to examine the psychological effects that theatre has on its audience members and participants. In particular, the psychological effects and relationships of color, lighting, and connecting with the production.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### LIGHTING DESIGN

In lighting design, color is used for multiple purposes. The first of these is to create a natural white light for visibility. Stanley McCandless (1958), known as the father of stage lighting, created a method of fulfilling this purpose: combining a warm color, such as an amber, and a cool color, such as a pale blue, focused from the front of the acting area and at a flattering 45-degree angle, with a backlight focused from behind the acting area that separates the actor from the scenery. This method of lighting has been used across many venues and eras. A modified version of his method was utilized in my design, which will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The second purpose of color is to create a mood, atmosphere, and environment. The lighting design material that most closely matches my focus on psychology's color theory is that of Gillette and McNamara (2001). They discuss the importance of the psychological effects of color and the instinctual and learned responses to certain colors; however, they do not provide data for the color associations mentioned. A lighting design thesis by James Horban (2015) focuses on the atmosphere of scenes and how this informs the colors he uses. He states, "Vivid, vibrant color was to be my main tool to establish these wondrous moments." While Horban uses color to create his scenes, he does not focus on the color associations studied in psychology's color theory. Another lighting design thesis by Kyle-DiPietropaolo (2011) uses "colors and angles...subtly to reflect the mood of the children."

While mood is mentioned, Kyle-DiPietropaolo does not further draw on any data of the relationship between his color choices and mood.

Another important hole in Horban and Kyle-DiPietropaolo's theses is the lack of quantitative data. They utilize reflection and responses from directors, but they do not explore the audience's response using quantitative data, as this thesis does.

## **COLOR THEORY**

A very important note about color theory as a psychological concept is that it is still a new concept. It only gained traction in the 1910s when Gustav von Allesch, an experimental psychologist, became interested in how artists responded to colors. He eventually published *The Aesthetic Manifestation of Colors (Die aesthetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben)* in 1925 (Osborne, 2012). Since then, there has been a steady increase in interest in color theory as a psychological concept.

An important contributor is Faber Birren. While Faber Birren is not a psychologist, he spent most of his life as a color consultant. During World War II he created a safety color code for the United States Navy that lowered accidents by 28 percent. This safety code is used by the United States, England, Japan, Italy, and others (Birren, 2016/1961). Published in his book *Color Psychology and Color Therapy* are color associations of modern Americans, as well as the effect of color on the sense of time. Birren also describes Cecil Stokes' "abstract sound motion pictures" (2016/1961). These motion pictures, known as Auroratone films, combine color effects with the music of Bing Crosby. When used in an Army general hospital, a depressed patient viewed the film and was brought to tears. The patient was more open in therapies after this experience. The colors and music were able to make the patient

more accessible to medical personnel (Birren, 2016/1961). These concepts were used to make the design choices that will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Another association is drawn from a study conducted by Duan, Rhodes, and Cheung (2018). Duan et al. studies the impact of color on impulsiveness and arousal through having patients complete psychometric tests on different colored backgrounds. They then measured response time and accuracy. The study found that, of the six colors tested, red had the lowest impulsivity rate and the highest arousal rate. Blue, conversely, had the second to lowest arousal rate and the third to highest impulsivity rate. This information was used to further make design decisions, described in Chapter IV.

## **QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH IN THEATRE**

Chan and Au (2017) developed a model to collect quantitative data on audience experience. Their model uses four factors—authenticity, cognition, emotion, sensation, and coherence—to measure and predict overall satisfaction of a production. This model also includes demographics which is helpful in recognizing trends in the audience. This model was not used in this thesis, causing limitations outlined in Chapter VII.

## CHAPTER III

### SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Aristotle defined the six elements of drama as plot, character, diction, thought, rhythm, and spectacle (Butcher, 1924). These elements are used by theatre practitioners to analyze scripts to aid in their process. According to Dean and Carra (1989), the more thorough the analysis, the more it can be drawn from to aid the artist.

#### PLOT

##### Time

*Wit* by Margaret Edson was first written in 1993 and performed on January 25, 1995, at South Coast Repertory in California. The script does not give an exact setting for the time period; however, in the director statement, located in Appendix E, the play is set in 1991. This period was distinguished by the AIDS epidemic and the beginning of the World Wide Web. According to *Drama for Students* (2001), in 1993 the American Medical Association (AMA) created the first Patient Protection Act, and in 1997 the AMA had their first ethics conference. This sets the context for the character Vivian's cancer treatment. She is a patient in a time when the Institute of Ethics had not yet been created.

Given the period she is also likely to be a minority as a female professor. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1993), women only accounted for 33% of full-time faculty in higher education in the fall of 1992. This minority position may be part of why Vivian is "tough. A demanding professor. Uncompromising" (Edson, 1993). She must overcompensate through her reputation, especially among her male colleagues.



## Place

The specific locale of *Wit* varies from the Pilgrimage Hospital to Vivian's childhood home. Action in the present takes place in Dr. Harvey Kelekian's office where Vivian first learns she has cancer; in multiple exam rooms and testing areas of the oncology branch where she is moved from place to place as just another body; in her hospital room where she is analyzed and pumped full of medicines; and finally, in isolation where Vivian spends her final moments. In contrast to the moments in the hospital, Vivian's flashbacks take place in Professor E.M. Ashford's office where she recalls her realization of John Donne's wit; in lecture halls where Vivian recalls both her power and stoicism as a professor; and in her childhood home where she relives her first spark of love for words.

## Society

The occupational groups represented are varied from medical doctors to students. Vivian, Dr. Ashford, and Dr. Kelekian are professors; both Vivian and Dr. Ashford of English, and Dr. Kelekian of medical oncology. Dr. Kelekian is also the Chief of Medical Oncology. Dr. Jason Posner is a clinical fellow in the Medical Oncology Branch. Susie Monahan is a registered nurse in the Cancer Inpatient Unit. There are four characters that serve as lab technicians, students, the code team, and clinical fellows alongside Dr. Posner.

These occupational groups further separate the characters into social groups. There is the student group, whom Vivian teaches but for whom she does not have empathy or patience. There is also a separation between the highly educated and the less educated. This separation is displayed when Dr. Posner asks Susie, "What do they *teach* you in nursing school?" (Edson, 1993) It's also displayed when Vivian remarks that Susie's brain was "never very sharp to begin with" (Edson, 1993).

The social standards that are in place are often commented on. Dr. Posner is expected to do “clinical” in which he addresses Vivian and asks how she is feeling. The social standard is that Vivian replies that she is doing fine. These standards become a point of humor, of wit, especially when Dr. Posner asks Vivian how she is feeling when she is no longer breathing.

### Spirituality

The focus of Vivian’s scholarly work is John Donne, a seventeenth-century poet known for his metaphysical poetry. John Donne deals with humanity and sin, especially in his Holy Sonnets. Butzner (2017) states that Donne’s work displays his obsession with death, decay, and fear. Donne has a distrust of God that Vivian discusses as she “lectures” over his Holy Sonnet 5. She points out that the speaker asks to be forgotten, compared to the usual plea for remembrance. She points out that the speaker simply needs to accept God’s mercy (Edson, 1993). This concept of wanting to hide is seen again when Dr. Ashford reads Vivian *Runaway Bunny*. The bunny creates scenarios in which he turns into a different animal to run away from his mother; however, his mother always responds with a way she can find him (Brown, 1942). Dr. Ashford points out that this is an allegory for the soul and that “No matter where it hides, God will find it” (Edson, 1993).

This concept of forgiveness is not lost on Vivian. She has a strong assurance of herself and this assurance lends her to a pride that separates her from both those around her and God. Sykes (2003) states that Vivian’s illness breaks down her pride to a state where she no longer has too much pride to accept God’s grace. This is paralleled with Donne’s Holy Sonnet 14 (Gardner, 1962) in which he asks God to “batter my heart” in order to achieve salvation. While Vivian doesn’t directly ask for God’s redemption as Donne does, she

receives it. In an interview with Margaret Edson she remarks that this point of redemption is often missed. She states, "Grace...is the opportunity to experience God in spite of yourself, which is what Dr. Bearing ultimately achieves" (Martini, 1999).

## **CHARACTER**

The protagonist is Vivian Bearing, Ph.D. Vivian is a professor of seventeenth-century poetry. She is also chair of her department. Vivian is 50 years old. She is frail, thin, and bald from the chemotherapy. Vivian's objective is to leave an impact with her scholarly work. She puts pride into her work, and her reputation precedes her. She teaches one of the three hardest classes on campus, and she is uncompromising. Her main conflict is ovarian cancer and herself. She is in the late stages of ovarian epithelial cancer, the most common form of ovarian cancer (NCI, 2015). Dr. Bearing has the willpower to get through her obstacles, but as her cancer becomes more painful, her willpower becomes a plea for kindness and rest. Vivian reveals, "I'm scared...I want to hide. I just want to curl up in a little ball" (Edson, 1993).

Dr. Posner is a 28-year-old clinical fellow in the oncology branch. He is professional and confident. His objective is to understand cancer. His main conflict is the fellowship and himself. He is very intelligent, but he does not enjoy interacting with humans. Like Dr. Bearing, he would rather conduct research than spend time with another person. Jason explains that he has ideas of what to make of cancer, but he has to survive the fellowship first. Vivian replies, "The part with the human beings" (Edson, 1993).

Susie is a 28-year-old Registered Nurse in the oncology branch. She is caring and bright. She is very professional and knows how to talk to patients in order to make them feel comfortable. She is the most self-aware of everyone. Self-awareness refers to the knowledge

of one's own beliefs, thoughts, and worldviews and how these impact one's attitude and behavior. Being self-aware increases one's ability to recognize how and why they react that way. It also encourages empathy and monitoring of one's reactions to aid relationships with others (Pieterse et al., 2013).

The relationships within *Wit* are very telling, as there are not many. The only familial relationship is between Vivian and her father, which is seen in a flashback. Both of Vivian's parents are dead, and she does not have any siblings. She also does not have any personal relationships, and she tells Dr. Kelekian that it "won't be necessary" for him to contact any family member about her prognosis (Edson, 1993). Vivian does not have any visitors until Professor Ashford visits her right before Vivian's final moments alive.

## **DICTION**

The dialogue and diction of the play is very formal. Vivian respects language and even mocks when her vocabulary takes a "turn for the Anglo-Saxon" (Edson, 1993). As a scholar and lover of words, she has a wide vernacular, and she uses it. The language used by the doctors is also very formal because they have to use specific medical terms and they are encouraged by Dr. Kelekian to be very thorough.

The dialogue is written in prose, but Vivian recites poems by John Donne. The punctuation of John Donne's poems is an important topic in the play, and the importance of punctuation carries into the dialogue through periods, ellipses, dashes, and more.

## **THOUGHT**

The meaning of the play is nuanced. The title reflects an important theme in the play—wit, in both literature and life. There is also concern with self-awareness, loneliness, and ethics. As stated earlier, Susie is the most self-aware character. Vivian, unfortunately,

does not become self-aware until her final days. She has spent her life concealing what she perceives as weaknesses. She does not allow the world to see more than she wants them to, and she has become so good at hiding parts of herself that she does not believe they exist. It is only when she is near death that she realizes how she has spent her life.

Since Vivian is not self-aware, she spends her life alone. In an article by Qualter, Vanhalst, Harris, Van Roekel, Lodder, Bangee, Maes, and Verhagen (2015), loneliness can become a cycle that may be exasperated by certain intrapersonal qualities. Loneliness is also evidenced to draw more from negative views of others and their social standing (Qualter et al., 2015)—a problem in both Vivian and Dr. Posner’s life.

Another important theme is medical ethics. Throughout the play, Dr. Posner has to be reminded that Vivian is not just a research subject. She is also a human being. Renner (1999) states “If there's a villain in Wit, it's not a person or an institution, but a thirst for knowledge regardless of human consequences.” This point is explored when Susie talks to Vivian about her options of being full code or no code. Susie tells Vivian that Dr. Kelekian and Dr. Posner always want to know more, no matter the consequences (Edson, 1993).

## **RHYTHM**

The pace of the script is fast. When there are pauses, they are very intentional. For example, Vivian sits in silence for a few moments to make the audience feel as uncomfortable as she feels; however, she breaks the silence by remarking that “brevity is the soul of wit” (Edson, 1993). The rest of the play drives towards the next moment. When the tension rises, it feels as if the rhythm quickens.

## **SPECTACLE**

The physical surroundings of the play are very simple. The stage is bare, with only necessary furniture and prop pieces rolling on and off. The script lends itself to realism and expressionism. Realism is a form of drama that aims to reflect real life. Expressionism is a form of drama that projects the inner view of one or more characters. There are specific light cues: x rays, scans, and Vivian's final ascent.

## CHAPTER IV

### DESIGN

#### RESEARCH

Research for the design began with online research for images of hospitals, lecture halls, professor offices, and living rooms. This research is located in Appendix B. This research displayed a trend for me: warm versus cool. The hospital tended to be cooler and brighter while the living rooms and offices were warmer and dimmer. With this visual research in mind, I utilized research on color theory in psychology to help make further decisions.

Table 1 displays color associations of modern Americans from Faber Birren's *Color Psychology and Color Therapy* (2016/1961). This table lists colors and the different associations with each. Direct associations refer to associations based in culture while indirect refers to associations based in nature. Objective impressions refer to associations with just the color itself while subjective refers to associations when a subject is lit with the color.

Color	General Appearance	Mental Associations	Direct Associations	Objective Impressions	Subjective Impressions
Red	Brilliant, intense, opaque, dry	Hot, fire, heat, blood	Danger, Christmas, Fourth of July, St. Valentine's, Mother's Day, flag	Passionate, exciting, fervid, active	Intensity, rage, rapacity, fierceness
Orange	Bright, luminous, glowing	Warm, metallic, autumnal	Halloween, Thanksgiving	Jovial, lively, energetic, forceful	Hilarity, exuberance, satiety
Yellow	Sunny, incandescent, radiant	Sunlight	Caution	Cheerful, inspiring, vital, celestial	High spirit, health
Green	Clear, moist	Cool, nature, water	Clear, St. Patrick's Day	Quieting, refreshing, peaceful, nascent	Ghastliness, disease, terror, guilt
Blue	Transparent, wet	Cold, sky, water, ice	Service, flag	Subduing, melancholy, contemplative, sober	Gloom, fearfulness, furtiveness
Purple	Deep, soft, atmospheric	Cool, mist, darkness, shadow	Mourning, Easter	Dignified, pompous, mournful, mystic	Loneliness, desperation
White	Spatial – light	Cool, snow	Cleanliness, Mother's Day, flag	Pure, clean, frank, youthful	Brightness of spirit, normality
Black	Spatial – darkness	Neutral, night, emptiness	Mourning	Funeral, ominous, deadly, depressing	Negation of spirit, death

*Table 1* Color Associations of Modern Americans (Birren, 2016)

The color associations drawn from Table 1 were those of blue, red, and orange. Blue has objective impressions of melancholy and subduing, and it has subjective impressions of gloom and fearfulness. These impressions match Vivian's views of the hospital. Vivian states, "One thing can be said...of cancer treatment...I am learning to suffer" (Edson, 1993). These impressions also coincide with images of cold, sterile hospital surroundings.

Orange on the other hand has objective impressions of jovial, lively, and energetic and subjective impressions of exuberance and satiety. Combined with red's subjective impressions of passionate and fervid and objective impressions of fierceness, these impressions match Vivian's views of herself within her flashbacks. She recalls fondly and energetically the moment she knew words would be her life's work; she refers to herself as a force and states, "No one is as good as I," referring to her scholarship on John Donne (Edson,



1993). They also coincide with images of living rooms and offices, major locales of Vivian's flashbacks.

With these associations and the focus of the text on Vivian and her point of view, expressionism became the chosen style of design. Expressionism is an artistic style that aims to depict subjective feelings of either the artists or character(s) within the art as opposed to pure realism. Expressionism in drama aims to increase the emotional impact of a production ("Expressionism," 2017).

Another important association drawn from Birren's book is the effect of color on perceived time. When under a blue light, time tends to be underestimated, while red light has the adverse effect (2016/1961). This was utilized specifically in the flashbacks. For Vivian, she wants her flashbacks to stretch on. In the middle of a "lecture" Vivian is interrupted by Susie calling her in for yet another ultrasound. Vivian responds, "It should not be now... I have *this* planned for now... *I do not want to go now!*" (Edson, 1993). She wants more time, so the red lighting aids in the stretching of those experiences. When the flashback begins to shift back into reality, it shortens and ends with the aid of blue light.

Along with reflecting Vivian's emotions, expressionistic lighting should impact the audience emotionally. Birren (2016/1961) writes of Cecil Stokes and his "abstract sound motion pictures." These motion pictures, known as Auratone films, combine color effects with the music of Bing Crosby. When used in an Army general hospital, a depressed patient viewed the film and was brought to tears. The patient was more open in therapies after this experience. The colors and music were able to make the patient more accessible to medical personnel (Birren, 2016/1961). This accessibility and openness is needed from the audience to enable them to absorb and process the production and, thus, the lighting.

Another association is drawn from a study conducted by Duan, Rhodes and Cheung (2018). Duan et al. studies the impact of color on impulsiveness and arousal through having patients complete psychometric tests on different colored backgrounds. Response time and accuracy, which correlate with both impulsiveness and arousal, were measured. The study found that, of the six colors tested, red had the lowest impulsivity rate and the highest arousal rate. Blue, conversely, had the second to lowest arousal rate and the third to highest impulsivity rate. These associations contributed to the design of both the present and the flashbacks. Vivian was more engaged and sure of her actions in her past, as referenced in her statement of no one being better than her in reference to her scholarly work; however, in the present she is less engaged and more unsure as she admits, “I don’t feel sure of myself anymore” (Edson, 1993).

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Based on my image research, research on color psychology, and script analysis, I created my concept statement.

Since Vivian is the center of this production, the lighting design will be expressionistic, conveying how Vivian sees the world around her. The play switches between the present, the past, and Vivian’s monologues. The present takes place in the oncology wing of the hospital. The present is cold and sterile. It is filled with medical terminology and empty questions, such as “How are you?” This lack of warmth will be conveyed through the use of cool gels for the lighting. The cool colors hitting the sterile walls of the set design will culminate to create the stiff and sterile hospital that Vivian spends more and more of her time in. The past takes place in multiple locations, from Vivian’s childhood home to her lecture hall. The past holds a

sense of nostalgia and longing for Vivian, even though she may not embrace it yet. Warm gels will be used to convey this feeling and separate the past from the present. The monologues will also follow this trend, but it will vary based on how Vivian wants to present herself at the moment. It is her story, and the lighting will reflect what she wants it to be.

Texture will also be an important element in this production. Script gobos will be used to cover the stage floor during Vivian's flashbacks as a reflection of her career as a professor of literature. It will represent the natural experience that being a professor is for Vivian. A projector will be utilized to project typed text consisting of medical terminology and facts onto the stage floor during the present and some of Vivian's monologues to present the sterility and harshness of her hospital experience.

The climax of the play occurs when a code is called for Vivian, and she is left to watch everything happen to her without her control. This is a challenging scene, because it is chaotic, and Vivian is written to ascend nude. This nudity will be covered by a bright white light shining into the audience. It will also be a stark difference between the chaos of the coding and the calm acceptance of her exit. Overall, the most important element of the play is the text itself. The lighting will remain true to this. Utilizing color, space, texture, and value, the lighting will convey Vivian's perspective of her life, and how she chooses to accept herself and her illness. (McDaniel, 2018).

An important part of the design process is collaboration, especially with color and lighting, as lighting with certain colors can completely change the intended colors of the scenic and costume designs. To facilitate collaboration, production meetings are held.

Production meetings provide an opportunity for all the designers, the director, the shop supervisors, and the design professor to meet to ensure each design area is on schedule and on the same page. The meetings also ensure that the director agrees with the design choices before they are implemented to save time and supplies. At the first meeting Professor Meyer presented her vision statement, located in Appendix A. This statement provided a view into what Professor Meyer wanted the production to look and feel like. All designers were expected to keep this vision in mind throughout the process.

At the second meeting, we began discussing concepts. I expressed my intentions of using contrasting cool and warm looks as the basis of my overall design during this meeting. This coincided with the costume designer Matthew Jackson's design concept. He also used expressionism with warm-colored costumes for the characters in Vivian's flashbacks and cool-colored costumes for the characters in the present.

The scenic designer, Derek Salazar, found research images of lecture halls and hospitals that had light-colored woodgrain flooring. The stage was painted to mimic this woodgrain, and since it was light-colored, it did not affect the color of the lighting. However, it did add an interesting effect to the texture of the lighting by providing perpendicular lines. Another important attribute of his design was the color of the back wall. Since this was the background of all the scenes, it had to be a color that worked with each setting and did not envelop Vivian. Mr. Salazar decided on a light teal, seen in the production photos in Appendix D, which intensified the sterility of the hospital scenes and allowed for a neutral-enough background for the flashbacks.

Based on the analysis of the research and the needs of the play, I created my light plot and magic sheet, located in Appendix C. I began by dividing the ground plan provided by

Mr. Salazar into nine acting areas. Using a three-point lighting system, similar to that of McCandless (1958), I used a cool, R360; warm, R302; and lavender, R54, combination for each area. This combination served to fulfill the purposes of visibility and modeling. The difference between McCandless' method and mine is the positioning of the front lights. My front lights are positioned to serve as sidelights as well, in order to provide visibility to all audience members in the thrust arrangement of the theatre. Thrust refers to a stage which extrudes into the audience, who is seated on three sides, and connects to the backstage. This provided a particular challenge, since I had not previously designed for a thrust stage; however, the modified three-point lighting system worked very well.

To achieve the intended effects of color, I used a two-color top light system. One top light was warm, R17, while the other was cool, R84. This provided the option to create a warm look for the flashbacks, and a cool look for the present. I also used LED lights that enabled me to add more combinations of warm and cool colors to the scenes.

I also utilized texture to contribute to the audience's experience and encourage their continued attention and understanding. For the flashbacks, I used gobos, metal rounds with etched in patterns, of script to create Vivian's world of writing and poetry. Gobos were placed in lighting instruments shooting from both stage left and right with two aimed at each acting area. This gobo is seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Script Gobo

For the hospital scenes, I used projections of typed text to reflect Vivian’s feelings of being “read...like a book” (Edson, 1993). The typed text was distorted in Photoshop and created a warped area around Vivian as she began to get sicker and sicker. These projections can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2 Normal Projection

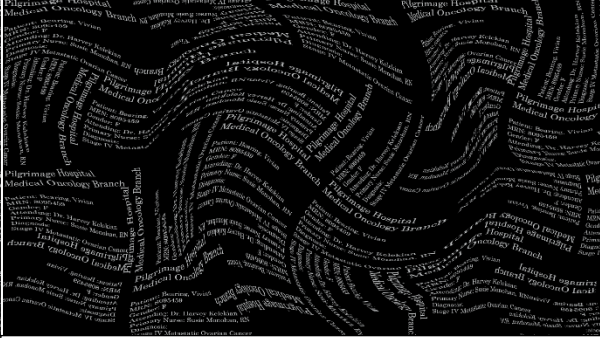


Figure 3 Warped Projection

Once the light plot was created and approved by the director and design professor, my master electrician, Clinton Moore, and I hung and focused the plot. The process of focusing the plot refers to aiming each light to its intended location. We began with the area lights as they fulfill the most basic component of lighting: visibility. Once the area lights were focused and created even lighting across the stage, we began focusing the instruments with gobos. The original plan was to have these gobos parallel to the front of the stage; however, the director, Ashley Meyer, walked in before a light was fully focused and expressed that she really liked that it was at an angle. I decided that we would play with the idea, so we focused the rest of the gobos in this manner. With all the gobos on, the stage looked like a brain, and with only those shooting left or right, they looked like DNA. I felt this was an even better reflection of Vivian and her experiences, so we left the gobos angled.

Another important change occurred during tech week: the top cool color was replaced with a different cool color. Originally, the design utilized R361, which is described as “a sharp cold blue” (Rosco). On the Friday of tech week, I noticed that the projections were not very easily seen under the cool lighting. When I took out the LEDs that were aiding in creating the cool color combination, they were more easily seen. I then realized that it was the LEDs that were washing the projections out. I knew I needed to use less of the LEDs, but I needed a more saturated cool to get the lighting look I wanted. My master electrician and I switched all the R361s to R84, described as “a true blue... [that] adds coldness to shadows” (Rosco). I then spent the evening and early morning rewriting the cool cues to lessen the use of the LEDs and increase the use of the top cools.

Cues refer to programmed lighting looks that correspond to specific moments in the play. Cues fulfill the other two purposes of lighting: selective focus and movement. By turning on certain area lights and turning off others, the audience is directed to look at the lit area(s). This helps withdraw from outside activity, such as scene changes, or encompass everything, such as Vivian's second lecture in which actors portraying students sit in the audience and are addressed by Vivian (Edson, 1993).

Cues fulfill movement with differing fade times. Fade time refers to the time it takes for the lighting look to fade out or in. The type of fade used most for this production was cross fades. Cross fades create a more natural transition by bringing up the next look while the previous look fades out. This is especially important in creating the rhythm discussed in Chapter III. By cross fading the looks instead of going to a blackout then bringing up the next look, the action can continue without stopping and waiting for the next lighting cue.

Another method used in cuing is follows. Follows connect two or more cues together by having the next cue go after a specific amount of time. Follows proved very important for the x rays that Vivian undergoes. Using special lights focused on a small area, I was able to have the lights up for a designated time equal to that of the x ray sound cue and then automatically fade out. This created the effect of bright lights flashing to take the x ray images and removed the stress of exact timing for such a short moment from the stage manager, Tessa Verner.

Production photos of specific moments with a corresponding magic sheet and sketch can be found in Appendix D.



## CHAPTER V

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Once I had completed the design portion of my thesis, it was time to collect quantitative data on the effects of my lighting design. In order to achieve this, I created a survey in Qualtrics, a research platform, to track and measure responses. The survey consisted of two Likert scale questions, two multiple choice questions, and one open-ended question. (See Appendix E for survey).

The survey was anonymous; however, the intended population consisted of attendees of the production that are 18 years of age or older and members of the production company. They were recruited by placing a QR code directing to the online questionnaire in the program that all attendees received as well as by a post on the San Angelo Arts Facebook Group. This method of recruitment was used in order to decrease interference with the production and to increase the validity of the research to help ensure that participants had actually seen the production prior to completing the survey.

Before entering the survey, participants had to agree with an informed consent form stating the purpose of the research and the assurance of anonymity. Once participants consented, they were presented with the survey. The first question of the survey, “How often do you attend theatrical productions?” was included for the benefit of seeing how informed or exposed to theatre each participant was. For some theatre goers, the more productions they attend, the more attention they can pay to the different areas of the production. However, this is just based on experience with theatre goers, and it is not based on factual data.

The second question “What design area do you feel most influences your overall experience of a play?” gauged how each participant views plays and what they expect to be the most influenced by when they see any production. This question was intended to provide more context for the following two questions.

“On a scale from 0-10, how much influence did the lighting have on your emotional connection to the content of the play?” and “On a scale from 0-10, how much influence did the lighting have on your overall experience of the play?” are very similar questions.

However, the first question examined the emotional connection to the content, which related to the color theory utilized in the design process. The emotional connection reflects on the color associations studied in color theory. The second question examined the overall experience, which drew from all aspects of the design process and included more than just the actual content of the play.

The final question allowed participants to comment on and/or identify any moments or looks that triggered certain responses for them. It also encouraged participants to discuss their reactions in a textual manner. This question would help further illustrate and provide context for their responses to the three previous questions.

## CHAPTER VI

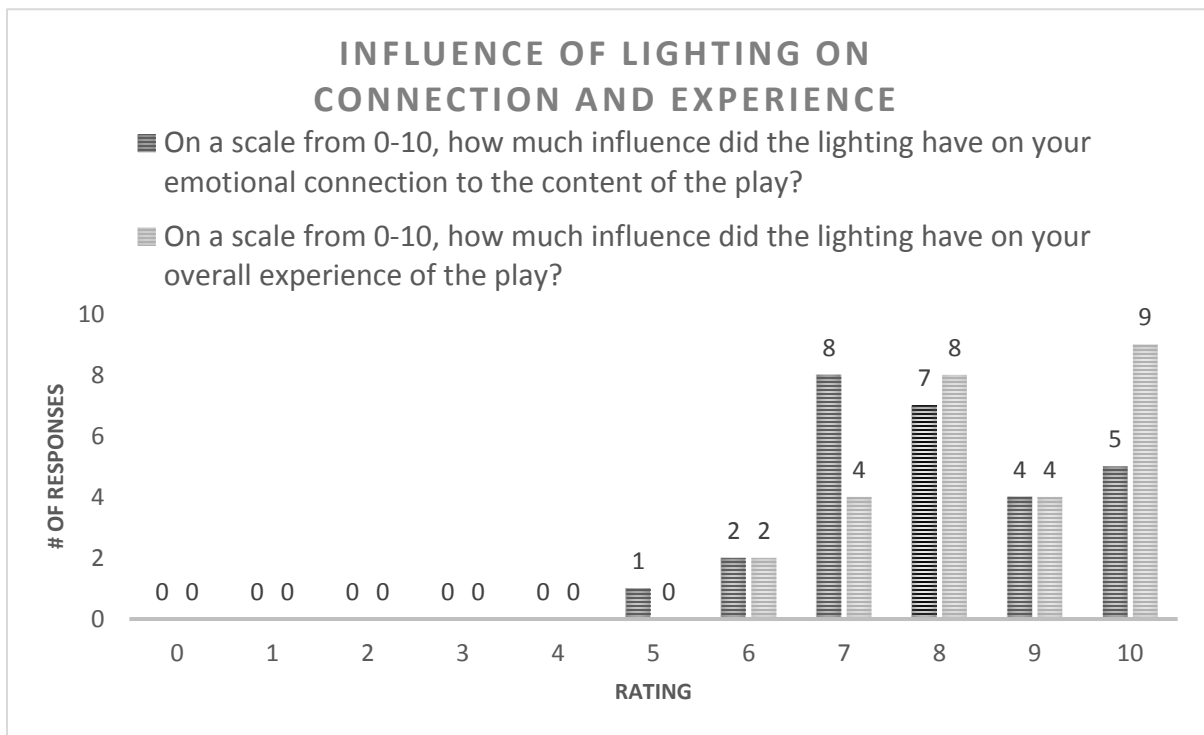
### SURVEY RESULTS

After seven performance of *Wit*, the survey results were gathered and analyzed. The final number of participants was 27. With 361 attendees, 7.4% of attendees completed the survey. Overall, the responses were positive, and participants were mostly influenced by the lighting on both their connection to the content and their overall experience with averages of 7.96 and 8.52 on a scale of 10, respectively.

Figure 4 displays the responses to the first question, “How often do you attend theatrical productions?” All participants attend a theatrical production at least once a year, with the most participants attending one every two months. 2 participants attend a production once a year; 2 twice per year; 9 once every two months; 7 once a month; and 7 once every two weeks. 51.86% of participants attend a theatrical production at least once a month.



Figure 5 displays the responses to questions three and four on the influence of lighting on emotional connection to the content and on the overall experience of the play. On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest, 1 participant reported a rating of five for the amount of influence on emotional connection; 2 a rating of six; 8 a rating of seven; 7 a rating of eight; 4 a rating of nine; and 5 a rating of ten. 2 participants reported a rating of six for the amount of influence on overall experience; 4 a rating of seven; 8 a rating of eight; 4 a rating of nine; and 9 a rating of 10. There were no responses below 5. The mode was 7 for emotional connection and 10 for overall experience. The standard deviation for emotional connection was 1.37, and it was 1.31 for overall experience.



*Figure 5* Responses to “How much influence did the lighting have on your emotional connection the content of the play?” and “How much influence did the lighting have on your overall experience of the play?”

Figure 6 displays a scatter plot of the number of responses for specific ratings for each measure of attendance. This figure displays that the participants that attended a theatrical production once every two months had the highest number of participants, 4, with a rating of 10.

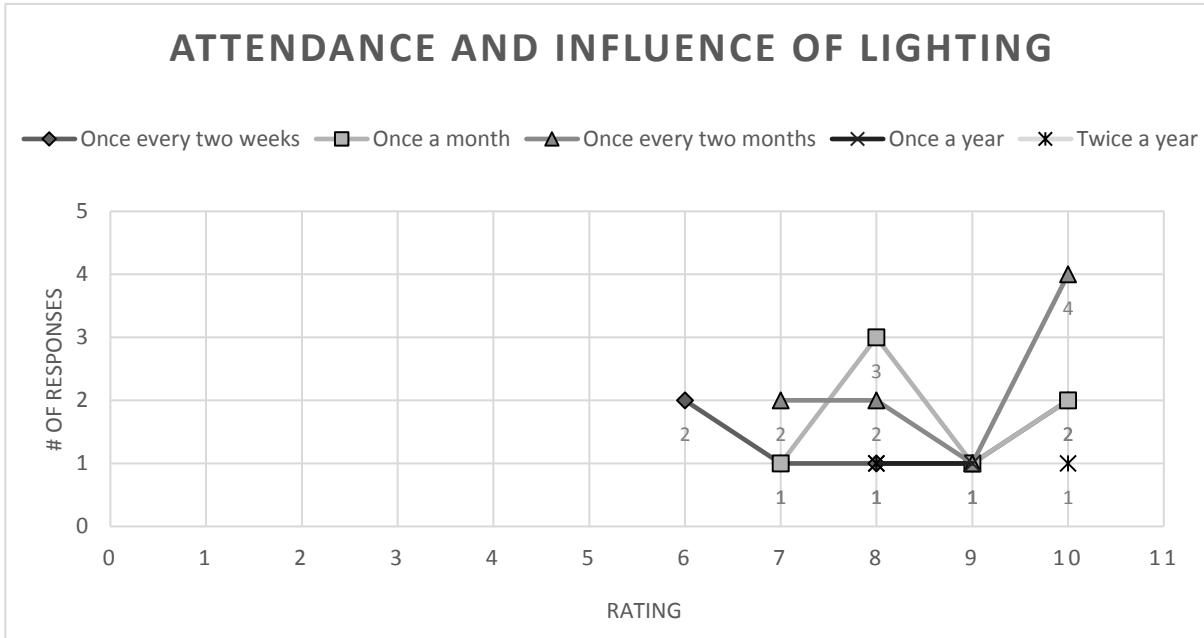


Figure 6 Scatter plot of responses to “How much influence did the lighting have on your overall experience of the play?” and its correlation to “How often do you attend theatrical productions?”

Figure 7 displays participants’ stated area of design that has the most influence on their overall experience of a play in percentage. Scenery had the most participants with 12 for 44%. Lighting followed with 10 for 37%, and sound had the least with 5 for 19%.

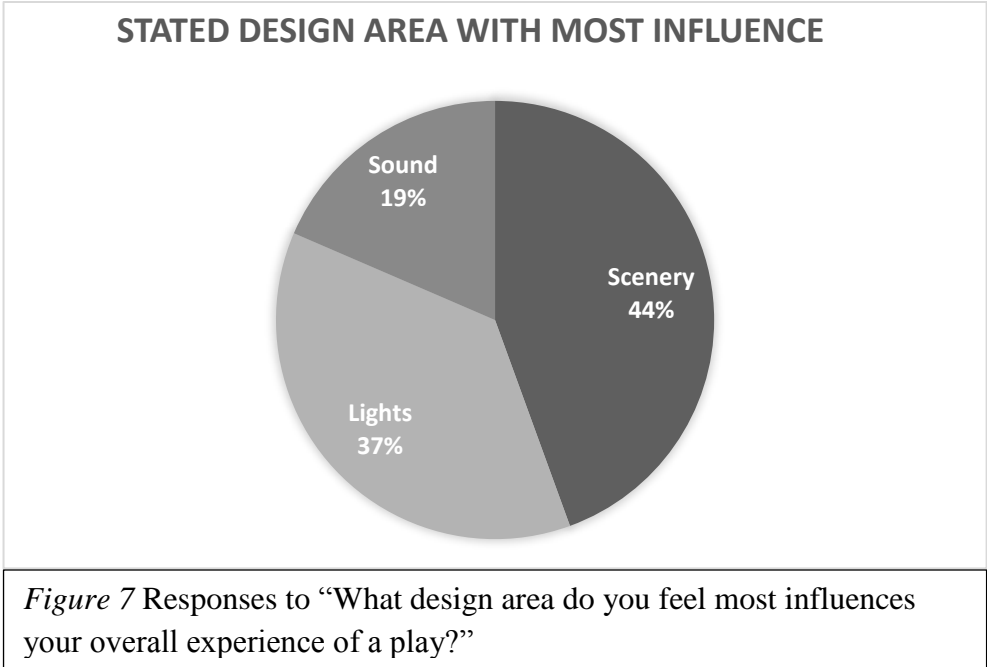
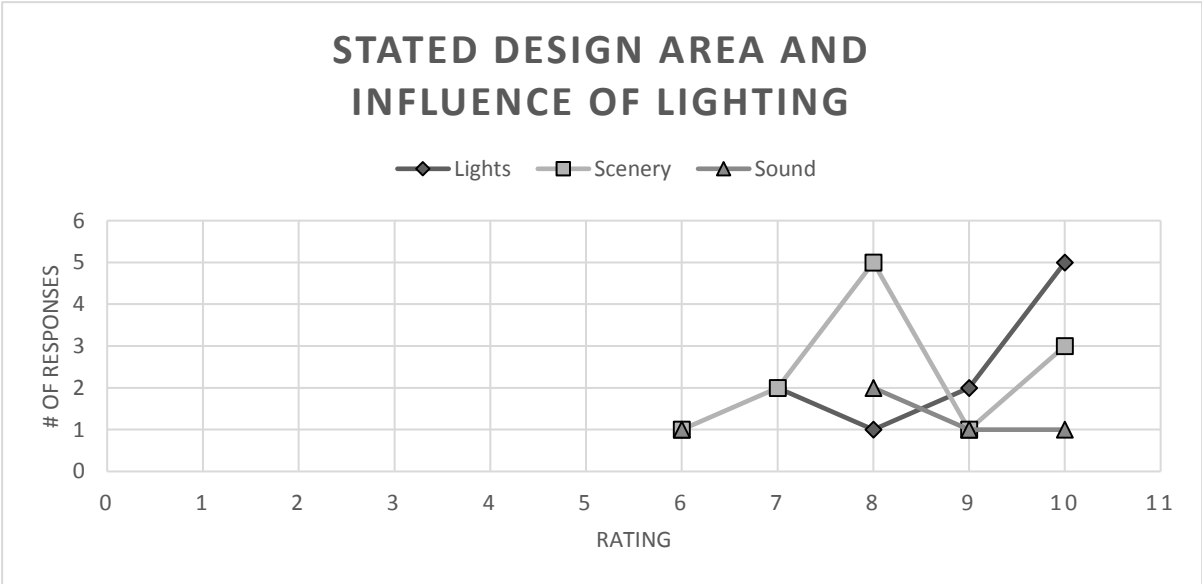


Figure 8 displays a scatter plot of the number of responses for specific ratings in relation to each stated design area. This figure displays that those that had a stated design area of lighting had the highest number of ratings of 10.



*Figure 8 Scatter plot of responses to “How much influence did the lighting have on your overall experience of the play?” and its correlation to “What design area do you feel most influences your overall experience of a play?”*

Table 2 displays comments left on the open-ended question along with their ratings of the influence on both their emotional connection and overall experience.

Influence on emotional connection	Influence on overall experience of the play	Please provide any additional comments on the lighting design of the play
8	10	the x ray spots gave me the same feeling as if it were me.
8	8	The light from the hall and the projector designs were very influential.
10	10	I loved the tonal shifts that were created with color changes. I also really enjoyed the use of the lights within the configuration of the space. The projection and the breakups also added a great amount to each scene they were used in. I appreciated the approach which was tasteful but very thorough. Great job.
7	7	For the most part, the lighting changes were very subtle. They kept the proper mood going without becoming the focus.
10	10	Wit - ASU - Lighting helped and supported the emotion of this emotional production. Lights went from portraying spotlighting all scenes, to the eventual heavenly lights that main character walked through after her death. Total, total capturing all the magic of theatricality!
10	10	Flawless all the way through
7	9	The gobos of the words on the stage.
7	8	I think that this is really the first time I've noticed how important the lighting is. There were a few times where the lighting focused in on the main character and highlighted her isolation. There were also a few times where the lighting expanded to include larger areas
10	10	I thought the lighting set the mood very nicely throughout the play. Softness helped the audience empathize with the actor.
7	10	Anytime that the lights turned to warm colors for past experiences with Vivian and cools for the present really helped me understand and connect to the story better.
8	8	The lighting was amazing and truly enhanced the play.
<p><i>Table 2</i> Comments left on open-ended question along with their ratings of the influence on both their emotional connection and overall experience</p>		

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### Survey

Based on the results, the hypothesis that specific design choices can impact audiences' emotional connections to the play was supported. When looking at the results, it is clear that the participants felt the lighting influenced both their emotional connection to the content of the production and their overall experience, with the average rating of influence being 7.96 and 8.52 on a scale of 10, respectively. The lowest rating of influence was 5 for emotional connection and 6 for overall experience. The ratings as a whole are positive and many correlate with positive feedback in the open-ended question on the survey.

The correlation between influence ratings and rates of attendance is insignificant. In contrast to the previous assumption of rates of attendance having a positive correlation with influence ratings, rates of attendance did not appear to have any significant effect on whether the participants of this survey felt influenced by the lighting or not. There is also no significant correlation between influence ratings and stated design areas of influence. There is a positive trend between influence ratings and stated influence by lighting designs. This makes sense, because the participant already believes that lighting has an influence on their experience.

Overall, the data shows that lighting design can impact audiences' experience. The quantitative research served to further thoughts on design process and results. There is now data to represent how the audience felt about the influence of lighting design and to display the importance of a well-done lighting design to a production.



## **Limitations**

A large limitation to this study was the sample size: 27 survey participants out of 361 attendees, 7.4%. The audience members were not required to take the survey, and they were not reminded of it when they received their programs or after the show. Should research like this be conducted again, better methods of advertising, such as a large poster, a more prominent place in the program, or an announcement before or after the show, would need to be implemented.

Another limitation was the set of survey questions. Looking at the results, more questions about the overall production would be useful to compare those responses to the responses concerning lighting specifically. There was also an oversight on the question of design areas of influence; costumes were not included. Another issue with the survey was that a model was not used. Should research like this be conducted again, models of quantifying audience reactions would need to be utilized. An example of this model is provided by Chan and Au (2017). Their model uses four factors—authenticity, cognition, emotion, sensation, and coherence—to measure and predict overall satisfaction of a production. This model also includes demographics which is helpful in recognizing trends in the audience.

## **Research and Process**

The research for the production itself and the process of designing were the most informative aspects of this thesis. I gained insight into the effects of medical ethics, self-awareness, and John Donne through scholarly research and the application of that research to further understand the characters' objectives and tactics. I learned that I have a much more

thorough understanding of a topic when I can relate it back to literature, specifically play scripts or visuals. By knowing this about myself I can more efficiently apply research to all areas of design and in broader areas, such as psychological studies and audience outreach.

I also now have a more thorough understanding of color theory as a psychological concept. With the research conducted on color theory, I can use certain colors to make the audience feel how the playwright, director, and myself want them to feel in future designs. I also have an understanding of my own reactions to colors and how they compare to others. The more I learn about what makes both myself and others react, the more effective I will be as an artist, manager, administrator, and activist, because I will be able to cause a greater effect with specific color choices.

When reflecting on this process, I am very proud of what I have achieved. I received an award for excellence in lighting design from a respondent of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, and I received many positive comments on my survey. Many people commented on the mood of the scenes and how they affected their experience and reactions, especially to Vivian. One comment stated, “Lighting helped and supported the emotion of this emotional production. Lights went from portraying [and] spotlighting all scenes, to the eventual heavenly lights that [the] main character walked through after her death. Total, total capturing all the magic of theatricality!” This comment conveyed the effect I aimed for with the lighting choices and provided positive feedback on a project I really enjoyed.

Despite the pride I have for my design, there are still improvements I would make in the future. The first of these is the replacement of the cool top lights. I did not test the gel color before using it to design, and I did not test the lights with the projections until very late

in the process. In the future, I would make sure that my lighting design choices did not negatively impact the projections earlier in the process. I also now know that LEDs affect projections more than conventional lights, so if there is an issue, I know what the problem probably is.

The second change would be the research process. I procrastinated on the research aspects of the process, and I was occasionally left without research to back up my design choices. I eventually finished the research and felt my design choices were reflective of this research, but in the future, I would begin research much sooner than I did this time.

Despite my procrastination and cool-top-light mishap, the design process was smooth and never felt chaotic. I was able to make decisions with plenty of time and be ready to implement them without adding unnecessary stress thanks to a very specific design schedule created by the director and design professor. To make my future designs successful I can make my own schedule based off theirs and keep in mind all the elements that made this design successful: thorough script analysis, early decisions, and continuous work to improve the design.

Overall, the process of writing this thesis was very informative. This thesis provides quantitative data, research, and process descriptions to help both myself and other designers create successful designs. It also provides an example for using psychology's color theory as a source of factual data on responses to color that can be utilized as research for all color-related design choices in any area.

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## APPENDIX A

### DIRECTOR STATEMENT

Used with special permission from director, Ashley Meyer. Original formatting has been maintained.

*“Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,”* - John Donne

The fear of death is still one of the most common fears, especially in developed nations where we have access to the best available medical advances. With the ushering in of Silicon Valley and the rapid changes to healthcare technology, people are able to control their fates a little more than they once were. As the average age of death in America increases, so does the accompanying lifespan to nurture this fear of death. We meet Dr. Vivian Bearing at this crucial moment in her own life—where she must face certain death and come to terms with the choices she’s made that have shaped who she is and what her life has become.

Just as she performs the role of teacher for so long so well, withholding parts of herself from her students in the class room, the audience can never be sure of the distinction between Dr. Bearing as the person *or* Dr. Bearing as the professor scholar. Ultimately, it is this blurred line that she explores in her struggle to accept her life at its end. As she reflects on her self-created isolation in her efforts to pursue the highest quality of scholarship and her efforts in the classroom to pass that on, she is dissected and studied in her medical “treatment” to the same relentless and painstaking level of her own research. The parallels to the scientific study of biology and the attention to detail in the study of language permeate this play. Not only must language drive the production, it is the study and execution of language that largely defines Vivian. Was the sacrifice of a family and the connections to people worth the career? Did her work define her as a person? Who became better for her work in academia? Is treatment for a disease worth the diminished quality of life? Does any of it matter?

This play also raises interesting questions about the validity and value of the humanities in higher education (though that is certainly not the focus of this story). Why must college students study classes outside of their field? Is studying poetry necessary for a pre-med student? In our story, one of these students is part of the team who prolongs Dr. Bearing’s life and hopes to use his research of her treatment to treat others, albeit from a curious and problem-solving viewpoint. Does it matter? What role did she personally play in shaping who that other person eventually becomes?

These questions arise at some point or another for everyone about their own lives, and I want the audience to confront these questions about themselves. We get to see the good and the bad of this woman's life and her struggle with death—it is a shared experience in a way. Death is a natural part of life, and boldly asking these questions and honestly working through our own answers may grant us peace. If nothing else, I want the audience to consider that the people sitting next to them are also facing these same identity crises and to remind them to act in patience and kindness. For Vivian Bearing, self-awareness comes with a huge price, but I want the audience to know they can pursue this gift without being forced into it by the prospect of death.

Though this play deals with language, advanced studies of language, scientific processes, and terminology, it is still absolutely relatable and cannot put itself on an intellectual pedestal. Humor must drive the story, as it is through the humor that we are able to truly experience and appreciate the tragic. Dr. Bearing's wit is the only armor she has to fight this battle with her disease and with herself.

In 1991, we are emerging from the beginnings of the American AIDS crisis and the huge shift in partisan politics, especially in the Republican party and the lasting effects of Reaganism on American values. The higher education models are morphing into the business models they will eventually become. Intellectualism is revitalized in the seeds of the .Com era; though in the same decade, that will take a backseat to the consequences of the internet. This is the world of our story. The scenes span the classroom, offices, and hospital rooms during this shift into the 1990s. There is a medical/sterile atmosphere. Because the pacing and attention to language are so important with this play, the design should enable seamless, effortless, and fast transitions from one moment to the next. In the staging of this production, I want a thrust stage with the stage being floor level, and the audience rows rising up around the stage reminiscent of an older medical theatre/lecture hall. I also want us to examine the relationship of technology and simple minimalism. I want the audience to play the role of the observer, those who study humans with or without empathy, but they must be a part of the play. I want to stage some things with the lines drawn between actors and audience somewhat blurred.

I believe the responsibility of the director is to midwife a play into production. I do not believe in forcing a play to fit into my vision. I believe it is my responsibility for my vision to fit the play and bring the story to specific audiences the best way possible. What life did the playwright instill in the play that we can bring to fruition? I also know that I am not the one with the best ideas in the room. I like to surround myself with other artists whose work I admire and who will challenge me. Creating a piece of theatre is always a collaborative event, and I strive to make sure every part of the process is collaborative with the whole production team. I have specific images and moments in mind, but I am always willing to allow them to evolve if I am presented with ideas that are more interesting or truthful to the team. I love play and organic discover. Though I have a specific image(s) in mind, I want the actors to feel free to experiment in how they can get there. They will be expected to be off-book very early in the process to allow maximum time for experimenting with choices and to



improve development as actors, especially as this is educational theatre. I am playing with the idea of having original music to accompany this production by a local artist—but have not decided yet.

## APPENDIX B

### RESEARCH IMAGES



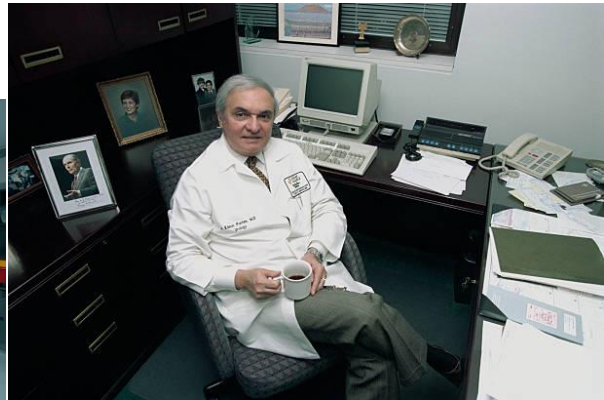
*Figure 9* Cold, bright white light  
[https://acogllc.com/?page\\_id=74](https://acogllc.com/?page_id=74)



*Figure 10* Cold, sterile hallway  
<https://financialtribune.com/articles/people/64254/university-hospitals-to-get-makeover>



*Figure 11* Cold, sterile hospital room  
[https://www.justdial.com/Kurnool/SGR-Hospitals/9999P8518-8518-150621142515-F2H4\\_BZDET](https://www.justdial.com/Kurnool/SGR-Hospitals/9999P8518-8518-150621142515-F2H4_BZDET)



*Figure 12* Dr. Kelekian's office  
<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/professor-pontes-edson-oncologist-and-head-of-the-news-photo/162566472#professor-pontes-edson-oncologist-and-head-of-the-department-of-at-picture-id162566472>



*Figure 13* Cold, sterile exam  
<https://centraloregonradiology.com/magnetic-resonance-imaging-mri/>



*Figure 14* Warmth from nurse  
<https://www.americanmobile.com/nurszone/nursing-news/7-best-things-about-being-an-oncology-nurse/>



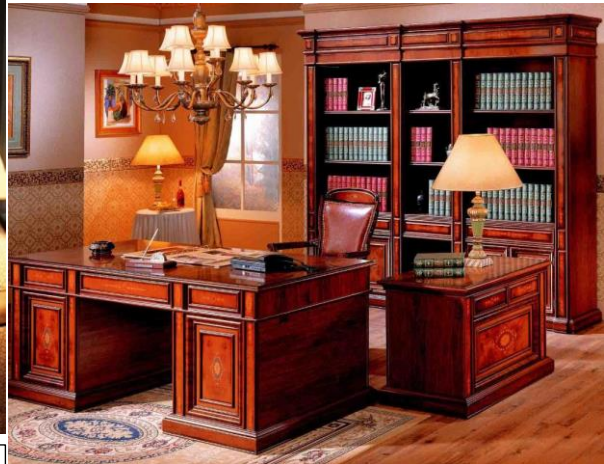
*Figure 15* Warm professor's office  
<https://ms-jd.org/blog/article/building-relationships-professors-easier-advised-done>



*Figure 16* Warm, fluorescent lecture hall  
<https://www.towson.edu/cla/>



*Figure 17* Warm, cozy living room  
<http://www.rmz-me.com/cosy-modern-living-room-ideas-free-reference-for-home-and/small-cozy-living-room-ideas-traditional-cabinet-hardware/>



*Figure 18* Warm, cozy home office  
<http://www.welcometofleet.com/best-home-office-interior-design-5-useful-tips/luxury-home-office-interior-design/>

# APPENDIX C

## LIGHTING PAPERWORK

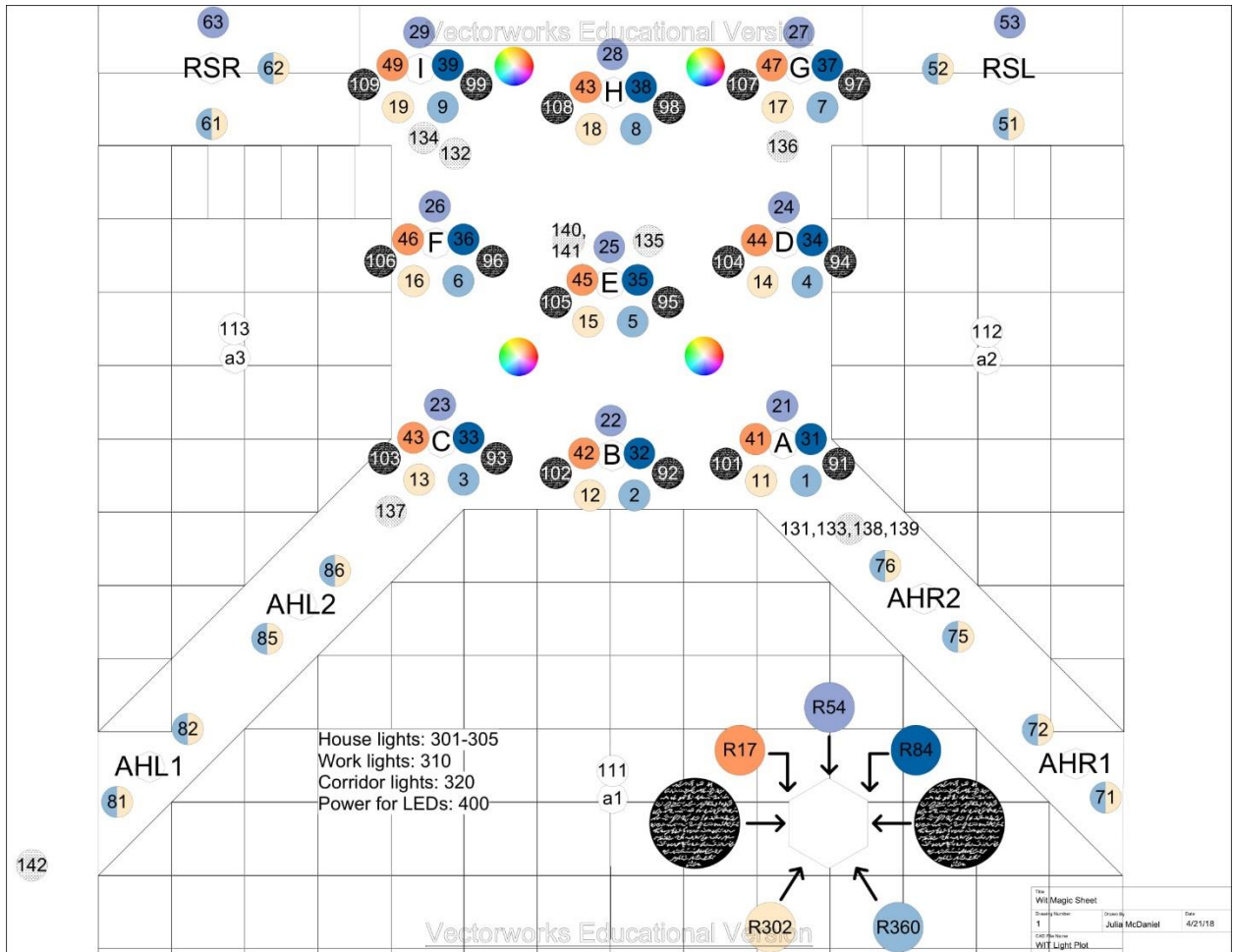
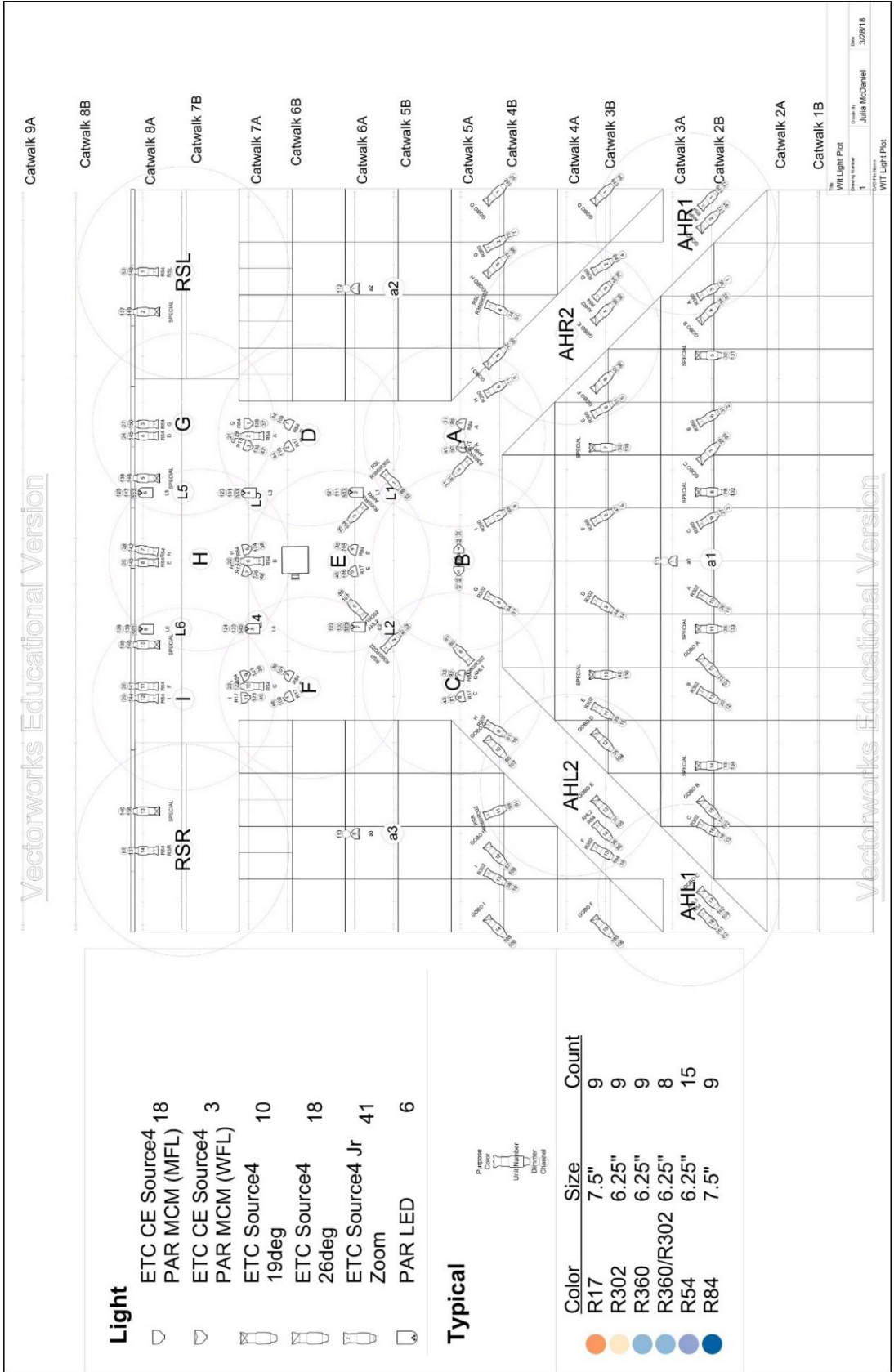


Figure 19 Magic sheet used by Master Electrician displaying areas, gel colors, and gobos



## APPENDIX D

### PRODUCTION PHOTOS



*Figure 21* Final moment. Line - JASON "Oh god."  
Vivian ascends into the light, removing her gowns, and  
baring her body as the lights fade out.

Photo by Mike Erbb



Figure 22 Scene 3 – Ashford’s Office. Line – E.M. “Do it again”

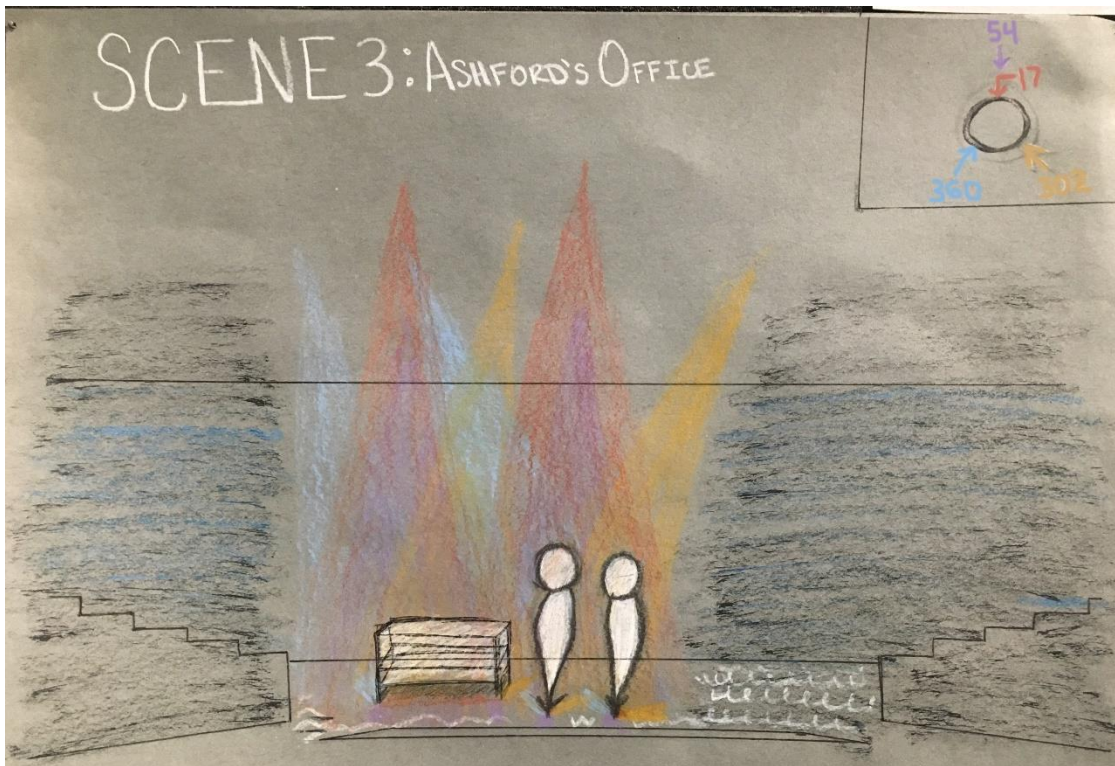


Figure 23 Sketch of scene 3: Warm look with R17 top light





Figure 24 Scene 10 – Grand Rounds. Line – VIVIAN “They read me like a book.”

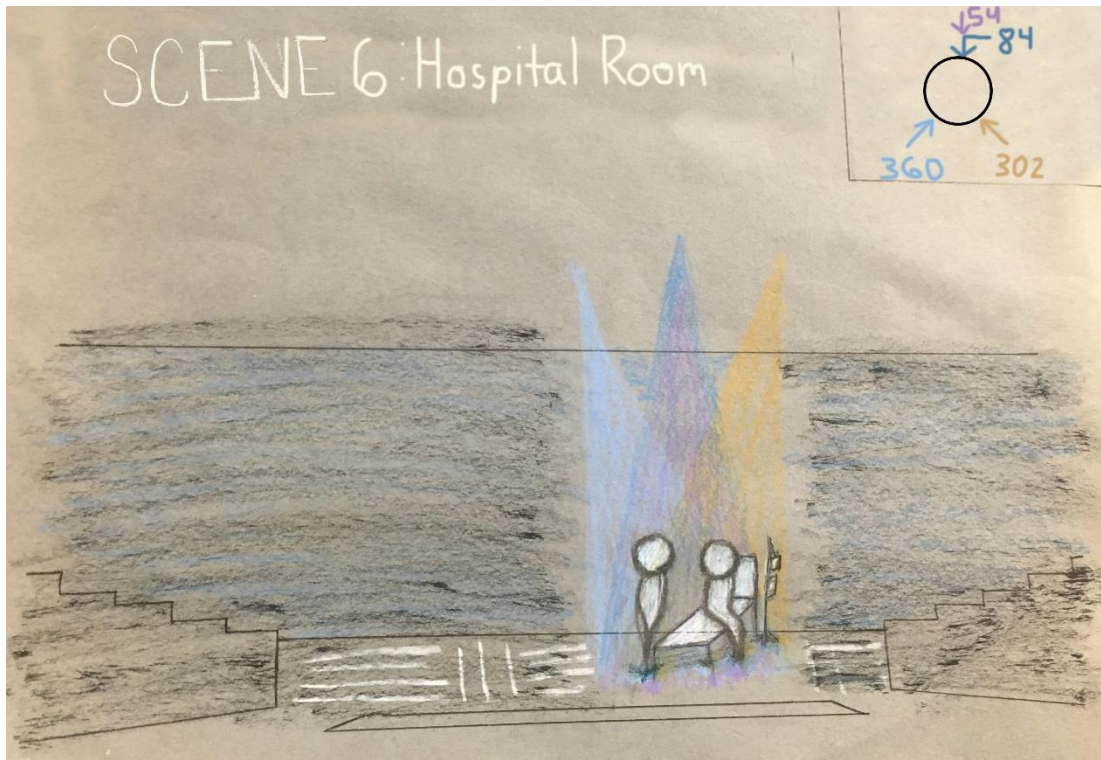


Figure 25 Sketch for Scene 6 – Hospital Room: Cold look with R84 top light



Figure 26 Scene 12 - Monologue. Line - VIVIAN "My only defense is the acquisition of vocabulary."

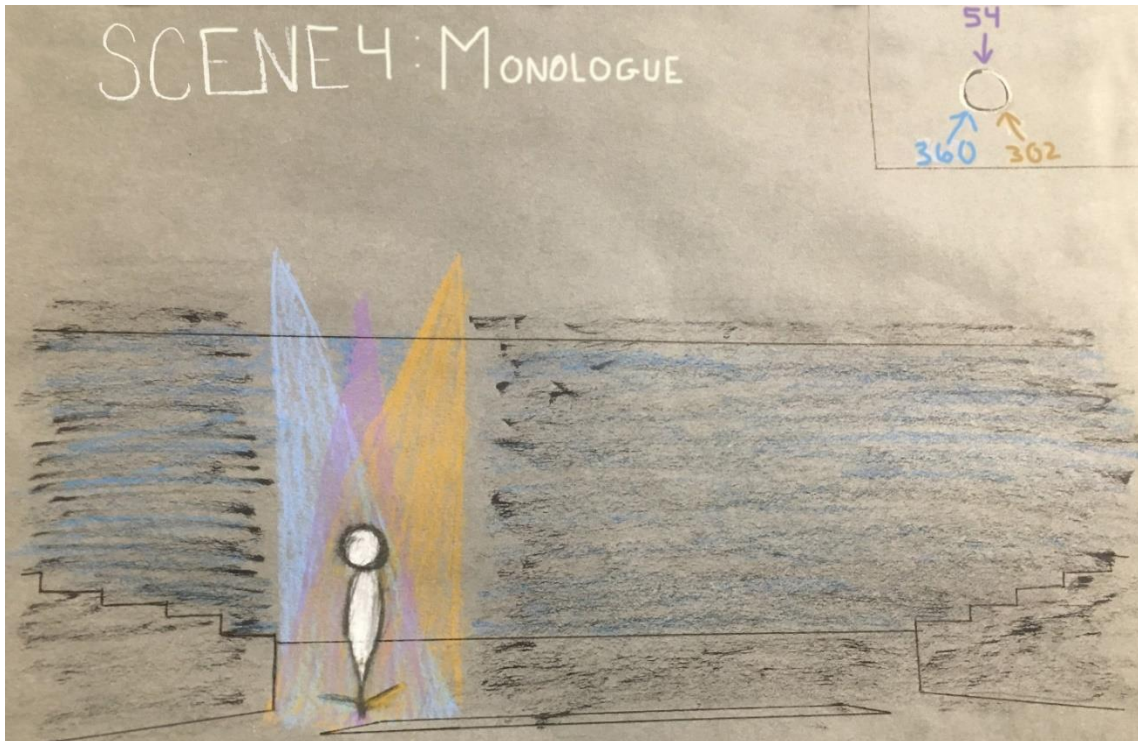


Figure 27 Sketch for Scene 4 – Monologue: Neutral look affected by mood of the monologue

## APPENDIX E

### SURVEY

1. How often do you attend theatrical productions?

- Once every two weeks
- Once a month
- Once every two months
- Twice a year
- Once a year
- Once every few years
- First theatrical production

2. What design area do you feel most influences your overall experience of a play?

- Lights
- Sound
- Scenery

3. On a scale from 0-10, how much influence did the lighting have on your emotional connection to the content of the play?

No Influence 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  Very Strong Influence

4. On a scale from 0-10, how much influence did the lighting have on your overall experience of the play?

No influence 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  Very strong influence

5. Please provide any additional comments on the lighting design of the play (certain moments that were particularly influenced by the lighting, reactions to certain lighting choices, overall opinions, etc).

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*Figure 28* Survey used to measure influence of lighting on audience

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Julia McDaniel was born in Lubbock, Texas and grew up in Seagraves, Texas. She has participated in community theatre and UIL One Act Play competitions since third grade. She began college at Angelo State University in the fall of 2014. There she designed, stage managed, and performed in various Arts @ ASU productions. She has had the honor of attending the National Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival as an Arts Leadership Fellow in 2017. She graduated in the spring of 2018 with a B.A. in Theatre and a B.A. in Psychology. She will continue working in theatre and hopes to pursue a career as an arts administrator and lighting designer.

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