SET DESIGN FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL
A CREATIVE APPROACH USING LIMITED RESOURCES

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Master of Theatre Arts

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SET DESIGN FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL

A CREATIVE APPROACH USING LIMITED RESOURCES

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Directing plays can be overwhelming, especially for those at a small high school where the focus is spread out among multiple areas. From directing the cast to selling tickets, there are so many areas to consider. Ideally, a team of people each specializing in an area, such as costuming, lighting, or set construction, will collaborate together under the guidance of the director, but in a small high school setting, this is not realistic. Many times, it is solely the “theatre advisor,” often a teacher within the high school building, who is responsible for each area and in a good year, may have a volunteer or two to help. Although the advisor may feel more qualified to be in charge of just one area, such as the acting, responsibilities such as lighting, costuming, and the set rest on his shoulders.

In addition to the numerous responsibilities of the advisor, the resources of a small high school are also more limited. The stage is usually smaller and sometimes even attached to another area of the school such as the gym or cafeteria. The budget is typically lower and must somehow stretch to cover expenses such as scripts, royalties, costuming, and the set. There is often not enough lights, not enough experienced student actors, and not enough time. With all of these limitations, it seems impossible for a smaller-sized high school to even consider a play with
multiple scenic locations, let alone fund it. It is for this advisor that this thesis is written.

The purpose of this thesis will be to provide a process for producing a play with multiple scenic locations by focusing on designing and constructing a set. Using the limited physical and monetary resources of a small high school, a specific play will be staged so that the theatre advisor may use this thesis as a guide to walk him through the process.
CHAPTER II

LIMITATIONS THAT AFFECT HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

Before choosing a play, the limitations that affect the high school director must be considered. They must be carefully analyzed so that the developed solutions for the play’s unique challenges will be accurate and practical. Since this thesis focuses on the set design and construction, areas such as the performance space, production budget, student actors, lighting equipment, and production schedule will be analyzed.

For the purpose of this thesis, Mogadore High School, an eight-year-old building in northeast Ohio will be used. It is located within the small village of Mogadore, a community just under two square miles. The high school contains both the junior high, grades 7-8, and the high school, grades 9-12. The average graduating class size is around 70 students, mostly Caucasian from working class families. It is considered a “football town” where most interest in the arts comes from family members of the few students involved.

Performance Space and Physical Limitations

The performance space analyzed will be Mogadore High School’s “auditorium” (see figure 1). It is the Commons area where lunch is eaten, special events are held, and where much of the school’s traffic occurs. The main entrance of the school opens directly into the Commons as well as the central staircase that runs
along its side. Students enter the main office directly from the Commons and purchase their lunches from the adjoining kitchen.

Fig. 1. Floor Plan of Mogadore High School Commons

In addition to the traffic, visual and auditory distractions exist. Along both sides of the Commons, as well as from the main entrance, are independent light sources. The main entrance features glass doors that directly let sunlight and any other light from the outside parking lot into the Commons. On one side, achievements are displayed in a well-lit trophy case complete with a scrolling, electronic sign and, on the other, two newly added vending machines emit a
powerful blue light and mechanical hum. Separated only by a moveable partition wall is the band room where the sound of instruments escapes during concerts and after school rehearsals. Whistles, bouncing balls, and coaches fighting for the attention of their players reverberate from the gym only a few feet down the hall.

It is here, behind a thick, green curtain that the stage is located: a shallow platform that shares rehearsal time, set construction, and special events throughout the year (see figure 2). The stage is a proscenium 16-1/2 feet deep, including the 2-foot apron, with a viewing width close to 24 feet wide. The wings are roughly 4 feet wide but can be increased depending on masking. At the back of the acting stage area is a black curtain that stretches the width of the stage and can be opened and closed using a pulley system. This curtain hides the limited storage space of 5 1/2 feet by 27 feet. Without going through the Commons, where the audience sits, there is only one entry/exit point to the stage that leads through the school’s kitchen. Through the kitchen is a single hallway where actors use classrooms as dressing rooms and wait for their upcoming scenes.
Production Budget Allocations

The funds for this production will be solely provided by the Mogadore High School's Drama Club, which acquires its money from ticket sales and fundraisers (See figure 3). For a typical three performance school year, average ticket sales range from close to $1,000 to just under $2,000 depending on the play and the number of students involved, resulting in an average of $2,500 in total ticket sales. Fundraising includes fan-o-grams during performances and concession sales both during performances and during designated high school basketball games. Each year a profit average of $200 is made from fan-o-grams, $200 in performance concessions, and $2,500 in basketball concessions. With these income opportunities, Mogadore High School's Drama Club raises an average of $6,300 each year.
Production costs vary widely depending on expenditures such as the publisher, number of scripts, costuming, set construction supplies, and promotional and program materials. In addition, there are also costs outside of those related to the production such as Drama Club shirts, dress rehearsal food, and conferences. All of these expenditures must be covered by what the Drama Club makes each year.

In a typical year, there are three productions: the fall play, the spring play, and the senior play. The spring play is usually a more recognizable play such as *Les Misérables* or *Cinderella* and typically draws a larger crowd. This play usually requires more money to produce because of the larger cast size and rented costumes. In contrast, the fall play is usually not as well known and makes less money in ticket sales. The financial goal of the senior play is to break even.

Taking all of this into account, a budget must be set to help keep the spending in check. For the purposes of this thesis, *The Westing Game* will be used as a fall play model for which to budget. Subtracting the non-production costs of items such as shirts, food, and conferences from the average income leaves the Drama Club with a total of $5,550 for all three productions. With the spring play requiring more

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**AVERAGE EXPENSES PER SCHOOL YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall Production</th>
<th>Spring Production</th>
<th>Senior Production</th>
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<td><strong>Royalties</strong></td>
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<td>$225</td>
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<td><strong>Set Construction</strong></td>
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<td>$100</td>
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<td>$0</td>
<td>$75</td>
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<td>$25</td>
<td>$0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>T-Shirts</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conferences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$150</td>
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**Total $6,430**

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Fig. 3. Mogadore Drama Club Average Expenses
finances and the senior play only needing to cover the publisher’s costs, a budget of $3,540 will be set for the spring play and $325 for the senior play. This leaves $1,685 budgeted for the fall play. Of this total, $1,000 will be allocated towards set materials.

**Acting Limitations of the Performers**

Part of the challenge in high school plays is using only high aged school students. Most plays, such as *The Westing Game*, contain characters with a range of ages, and, in high school plays, those roles are filled by high school students. Because there are rarely enough high school students to fill all of the characters at Mogadore, the Drama Club also includes junior high students to help fill the roles. In the case of *The Westing Game*, only four characters are under 20 years old and twelve of them are middle-aged or older.

In addition to age, the pool of actors from which to choose, both experienced and inexperienced, is significantly reduced in a small high school like Mogadore. On average, about 20 students audition for each play, so when casting, most to all of them will fill a role. Of the 20, about a third fall into the category of experienced and/or talented, a third into the emerging category, and a third who need a lot of work to get the basics. When all three categories are represented, casting must get creative.

**Lighting Equipment**

Eight years ago, Mogadore completed the construction of their new school, which combined both the junior and senior high school. A new proscenium stage was built, which included a new lighting system (see figure 4). In the house area are
six ellipsoidals spaced out on two bars. Directly above the stage are two parallel bars that run the width of the stage, each containing six Fresnels and three border light strips. In the floor of the wings are two additional lighting outlets, one on each side. Each of these lights are controlled by a light board located in a “crow’s nest” at the back of the Commons about 30 feet above the ground. This light board also controls the house lights, but these lights are limited to either on or off with no dimming capabilities.

Fig. 4. Floor Plan of Mogadore High School Lighting

Production Schedule

Due to the space limitations, construction of sets is executed on the stage where the space is shared between acting, set construction, classes, and special
events. As a result, the construction process of the set must be carefully planned.

Three days a week after school and on most school days during school hours, students use the stage for acting, so it must be in a condition where the students can safely perform. If pieces need painted, they must be dry before students act. If platforms or flats need built, they need to be secure enough so that an actor who accidentally bumps into them or steps on them won't be injured. A plan must be in place to allow all parties to use an unobstructed space.
CHAPTER III

DRAMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE WESTING GAME PLAY

After considering all of the limitations of Mogadore High School, the play *The Westing Game* was selected because of its relevant themes, Mogadore students’ familiarity with the story, and its ability to fit within Mogadore’s limitations outlined in the previous chapter. First produced in 2009, the play was adapted by Darian Lindle from the Newbery Award-Winning novel by Ellen Raskin. Issues such as identity and family are wrestled with in the lives of many teens at Mogadore and are addressed throughout this play.

As part of their sixth-grade curriculum, students who attended Mogadore read the novel from which the play was adapted and discussed aspects such as character relationships and plot elements. The book is still currently read by the sixth-graders, so the play will be used to enhance their understanding of the book and its themes.

Although it offers challenges in regards to the set, it seems to fit within the established limitations. Costuming can be borrowed or purchased at a minimal cost from local thrift stores and many scene changes can be done cost effectively with simple lighting changes. The number of acting roles available matches with a typical Mogadore fall production and it also offers some casting flexibility with the possibilities of doubling or adding extras in a few scenes.
Author and Playwright Analysis

Ellen Raskin, who wrote the book from which the play was adapted, grew up during the Great Depression. Although born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the state where *The Westing Game* takes place, her family was constantly on the move as her father looked for work. At first, Raskin was considered more of an illustrator than an author, illustrating picture books and designing dust jackets for more than 1,000 books (Lindle, “Darian Lindle”).

When she began work on *The Westing Game*, she had no idea what the finished product would look like (Raskin, “Introduction”). She developed the story and characters as she wrote and consulted with a friend, Ann Durell (Raskin, “Introduction”). Durell was charged with editing Raskin’s writing for children, but Durell felt that Raskin was “too wise, too funny, too ingenious” to do this (Raskin, “Introduction”). Raskin had a way of writing for children that never disrespected or talked down to them (Raskin, “Introduction”). According to Durell, Raskin felt that she was writing for the child in herself, when in reality, she was writing for the adult in children (Raskin, “Introduction”).

Darian Lindle, who adapted Raskin’s award-winning novel for the stage, is an author, playwright, and director living in Seattle. With bachelor of arts degrees in Theater, French, and Film Studies from Indiana University, she spent a year studying film in Paris (Lindle, “Darian Lindle”). As a playwright, Lindle has written a number of plays ranging from full-length to shorts. In each of her plays, she tries to create a
“fully realized” world focusing on the multi-faceted aspects from which it is made (Lindle, “Darian Lindle”).

**Dramatic Analysis**

The book from which the play was adapted is a children’s book, so the tone of the play is a bit lighter than a mystery written for adults. The mystery within the play is closer to that of a tricky game or difficult puzzle. The characters occasionally break the “fourth wall” by inviting the audience to play along. Instead of the audience passively watching the performance, they have a direct opportunity to participate in the same game being played by the characters.

Throughout the play, there is never a sense that the characters’ lives are in any real danger. The play begins with Turtle discovering what she thinks is a dead body, but the situation is almost humorous as the other characters laugh off her experience. It is later revealed to the audience that there was no dead body just like Sandy McSouthers faked his own death. Even in the instances of the bomb explosions, Angela is left with only a few scars on her face. In each of these instances, the mood is more of suspense and excitement than of terror or sadness.

**Character Analysis**

The play features a wide range of characters from different ages, ethnicities, statuses, and backgrounds. Most of the characters that participate in Westing’s game go through a process of discovering who they truly are. They are paired with what seems to be the wrong partner. At the beginning of the play, they literally write down what they feel is their position in the world. As a result of their pairings and
interactions with other characters, each of their positions changes by the end of the play.

The first character, Sam Westing, has three aliases, each with a unique personality and disguise. He was married to Berthe Erica Crow before the marriage fell apart after the suicide of his daughter. He lived the American dream by coming from poor immigrant parents to becoming the head of a multi-million dollar company. As a result, he is extremely patriotic. In addition to his patriotism, he is extremely fond of strategy games like chess, which is evident in how he turned his will into a game.

As Westing’s first alias, Sandy McSouthers, he is the “doorman at Sunset Towers and is everyone’s pal. He has a grudge against Westing and a large family to support” (Lindle, The Westing Game 114). His face is mashed and is paired with Judge J.J. Ford.

As Barney Northrup, he is a “smarmy realtor who convinces most of the Westing heirs to move into Sunset Towers. He oozes charm like a snake-oil salesman” (Lindle, The Westing Game 112). He wears a mustache.

As Julian R. Eastman, he is the “newly elected chairman and CEO of the Westing Paper Products Corporation. He takes control after the ‘death’ of Sam Westing. He is well-manicured and impeccably dressed” with capped teeth (Lindle, The Westing Game 115).

Judge J.J. Ford is an African-American “judge on the appellate court; she has a grudge against the Westing millionaire. She’s tough, but fair – just what you’d expect a judge to be” (Lindle, The Westing Game 113). She grew up the poor daughter of
one of Sam Westing’s servants but had her education funded by Westing. She is partnered with one of Sam Westing’s secret aliases, Sandy McSouthers.

Otis Amber is the delivery “boy” at Sunset Towers who is perceived as unintelligent because of his jokes. “He delivers mail, packages, and whatever else to the apartment building and environs on his bike” (Lindle, The Westing Game 112). In actuality, he is a private investigator in disguise, hired by both Sam Westing and Judge Ford, but this is not discovered until the second will reading toward the end of the play. As a detective, he is “a gruff fellow” (Lindle, The Westing Game 115). His partner is Berthe Erica Crow.

Berthe Erica Crow is the cleaning lady at Sunset Towers and a volunteer at a Good Salvation Soup Kitchen. “She dresses exclusively in black as if in permanent mourning. Crow is obsessed with sin and its penalties” (Lindle, The Westing Game 114). Revealed at the end of the play, she is the ex-wife of Sam Westing. A recovering alcoholic, to which she turned to after the suicide of her daughter, she demonstrates a special fondness toward Angela, who closely resembles her deceased daughter. She is paired with Otis Amber.

Grace Windsor Wexler, the mother of Turtle and Angela, is “a social climber and self-professed decorator ... She is unwittingly xenophobic, slightly neurotic and completely self-absorbed. She used to have a softer side but it’s been a while since she’s shown it” (Lindle, The Westing Game 112). Favoring her oldest daughter, Angela, she is inadvertently cruel toward her youngest, Turtle. Deep inside, she is embarrassed about her family background and herself (Shmoop Editorial Team). By
the end of the play, and with the help of some alcohol, she begins to see Turtle, herself, and others in a new light. Her partner is Mr. James Shin Hoo.

Mr. James Shin Hoo is the father of Doug and the owner of a failing Chinese restaurant on the fifth floor of Sunset Towers. “He is a disgruntled inventor who is so tightly wound he has given himself an ulcer. A widower, his son's academic and financial success is supremely important to him” (Lindle, The Westing Game 113). He is paired with Grace Windsor Wexler.

Angela Wexler is the oldest daughter of Grace Wexler. She is “the perfect child, she is soft-spoken, very beautiful, and very good at bottling her anger (Lindle, The Westing Game 112). She very closely resembles Sam Westing's deceased daughter, Violet. Defined by her looks and by her relationship with plastic surgeon intern, Dr. Deer, Angela struggles with her identity. By the end of the play, she gains confidence and sees herself as a “person” (Lindle, The Westing Game 145). Her partner is Sydelle Pulaski.

Sydelle Pulaski is the “secretary to the president of Schultz Sausages. Sydelle is hungry for attention and admiration; she has no close friends” (Lindle, The Westing Game 112). Starving for this attention, she dresses in outrageous outfits and uses a crutch for an imaginary disease. As she grows closer to Angela, she no longer uses her crutch. She is partnered with Angela Wexler.

Turtle Wexler is the youngest daughter of Grace Wexler. She is “a plucky girl with a braid who kicks people's shins in ‘self-defense.’ Turtle is smart, aggressive, slightly neglected and a stock-market whiz” (Lindle, The Westing Game 112). By the end of the book, she goes by her initials “T.R.” and is the only one to discover the
truth behind the mystery of the Westing Game. Her partner is Flora Miller Baumbach.

Flora Miller Baumbach is a “timid dress-maker whose daughter Rosalie died a year before the story begins. Flora always has a kind word for everyone and speaks softly so as not to inconvenience anyone” (Lindle, *The Westing Game* 113). Through her pairing with Turtle, a healing process from the death of her daughter begins. She always smiles, even during inappropriate situations.

Doug Hoo is the son of Mr. Hoo. “Doug is a high school track star with Olympic dreams, smart but not a scholar. He has a winning smile and an ability to make everyone like him” (Lindle, *The Westing Game* 113). His partner is Theo Theodorakis.

Theo Theodorakis is Chris’ older brother and guardian. He “wants to be a writer but has no time or money for study. He is a thoughtful, sensitive and sometimes angry young man” (Lindle, *The Westing Game* 114). Learning of Chris’ condition, he gave up a scholarship so that his family would have enough money to take care of his brother’s medical needs, but he sometimes resents that caring for his brother takes up so much of his life. He is partnered with Doug Hoo.

Chris Theodorakis is the “younger brother of Theo; he suffers from a neurological disease that confines him to a wheelchair. He is also barely able to speak or control his body movements. He enjoys birdwatching and is lonely for company” (Lindle, *The Westing Game* 113). Although his disease only affects him physically, he is viewed as mentally slow. Through the new medication given to him
by his partner Dr. Denton Deer, he gains more control of his body and is able to swap his wheelchair for a pair of walking crutches.

D. Denton Deer is a “medial intern engaged to Angela Wexler. He can be egotistical and has gone into plastic surgery for the money – not the love of medicine. But he is a good guy underneath” (Lindle, The Westing Game 114). Denton’s partner is Chris Theodorakis.

Edward Plum is a “very inexperienced lawyer who just passed the bar. He was hand selected by Westing as executor of the Westing will. He is competent but not very confident. He is alternately theatrical, hysterical and bumbling” (Lindle, The Westing Game 114).

Dr. Sidney Sikes is the “personal physician, old friend and confidant of Sam Westing. He suffered a crushed leg from the car accident he was in with Westing and has a permanent limp. He was a witness to the Westing will” (Lindle, The Westing Game 115).

Play’s Thematic Analysis

Throughout this play, various themes such as family, deceit, wealth, and status are addressed. While some of these themes are minor and only affect one or two of the play’s characters, others are central to the storyline and provide the entire framework.

Costumes

Both literally and figuratively, many of the characters are in disguise. The truth about themselves is somehow hidden. For some, this “costume” is intentionally put on in order to hide what they fear others may see. There is power
gained in letting others think they are something other than what they truly are. In the example of Otis, he pretends to be a stupid delivery boy. When others dismiss him, he is able to sneak around undercover as the private investigator that he truly is. For others, such as Chris, they can't escape their condition and would like nothing more than for others to see through it.

Names

Throughout the play, names play an important role. During the game, the players believe that the clues will point them to the name of the murderer. At least six different names are identified in the clues: all of which divert attention away from the true solution. Characters also change their names to present themselves as something they are not. Mr. Hoo adds “Shin” to his name in order to sound more Chinese, while both Grace and Sam alter their original name of Windkloppel into something else. Crow abandons her maiden name to avoid connection to her past and Turtle begins going by T.R., setting aside the immature child.

Appearances

For some characters, how they look seems to determine who they are on the inside. It is assumed that Chris is mentally slow because of his limited physical body and that Angela doesn’t need to be intelligent or independent because her good looks are enough to get her whatever she wants. On the other hand, Sydelle only pretends to be injured to get the attention she so deeply desires. Sam Westing uses disguises to distinguish between his aliases while Denton, a plastic surgery intern who alters people from the outside, makes his greatest contribution by helping Chris from the inside out with a new medical treatment.
Wealth

With each pair given $10,000 and a chance for millions more, each deals with the idea of wealth in a different way. For some, the money represents freedom; for others, such as Ford, it can be turned into an education. Some, like Grace, think they need it in order to be something in the world, while others, like Theo, are willing to give it away so that others may be helped. With the chance at $200 million awarded to the winner of the Westing Game, almost all of them are willing to lie, gamble, or steal to get it.

Family

In *The Westing Game*, there are characters related to each other by blood, such as the Wexlers, the Hoos, and the Theodorakis, and there are characters that are not. Most are not even related to Sam Westing, yet all are considered heirs to his estate. As seen through the relationship between Flora and Turtle, the play challenges the traditional idea of what a family is by defining it through a person’s actions rather than blood relation. Flora takes on the mother role to Turtle and provides the love and compassion lacking from Grace, Turtle’s blood mother.

Deceit

The theme of lies and deceit is closely related to that of identity in that many of the characters are pretending to be someone they are not. For some, like Berthe, it is hiding from a painful past, while for others, like Angela, it is trying to cope with a painful future. Some of these lies are meant to protect, while others are meant to damage. Even when Turtle discovers the true identity of Sam Westing, she is encouraged to keep the truth hidden from everyone else.
**Status**

Part of the plot in *The Westing Game* revolves around the clash of diverse social classes all finding a new home in the Sunset Towers apartment building. “Several of Sunset Towers’ tenants move in because they’re excited about the prospect of living in such a fancy building; they’re even more excited about other people knowing they live there. Other characters are more preoccupied with the status they’ve acquired through education, beauty, or money (or the lack of one of those qualities)” (Shmoop Editorial Team). With the possibility of winning such a large sum of money from the Westing Game, any character’s status could change in an instant.

**Symbols**

Sam Westing loves games of strategy, particularly chess. So when he “dies” and the tenants of Sunset Towers gather at his former home, the Westing mansion, for the reading of his will, it is no surprise that the undertones of a game are present. What the characters don’t realize is that this love of Westing’s will forever change their lives.

As the will is read, it becomes clear that Westing intends for each tenant to become a player in what he calls the Westing Game. Through the will, Westing reveals that his “life was taken” from him and that it is up to these players to discover who took it (Lindle, *The Westing Game* 25). The one who does will be declared the winner. The will then proceeds to dictate the rules of the game and even goes so far as to pair each of the players with a partner.
Each pair is given a set of unique clues. Throughout the play, the characters are attempting to make some sense of these seemingly random words and it is through this objective that the characters begin to discover a deeper truth about each other and themselves. Although the characters think they are playing the Westing Game in order to discover who took Westing’s life, they are actually playing to discover the path of their own.

In addition to the will, there are references to chess throughout the play as well. In the game of chess, there are sixteen pieces on a side, some of which are paired. It is interesting that although the play only includes fourteen players, the book contains exactly sixteen players, each paired with a partner.

At the Westing mansion, there is a chessboard that Theo notices. Each time Theo makes a move on the chessboard, his unknown opponent, later discovered to be Westing, counters when Theo returns. Westing also plays chess with Turtle, Theo, and Ford, with Turtle being the only one to ever win.

The successful strategy used by Westing to beat both Theo and Ford was to sacrifice his queen. This literal sacrifice also comes into play metaphorically when the solution to the clues seem to indicate Crow. Otis refers to himself and his partner Crow as the king and queen but as many of the players begin to view Crow as a murderer, the real solution escapes. Crow becomes the sacrificial queen. Just as in the literal game of chess, it is Turtle who discovers the truth and the only one to win the Westing Game.

Although perfectly healthy, Sydelle walks with a crutch in an attempt to draw the attention from the other characters. Uncertain of herself and her abilities to
make friends, she relies on her crutch as a conversation starter with the hopes of winning their affections. As the play develops, Sydelle leaves behind her crutch and discovers that she has capabilities within herself to form lasting friendships.

In the same way, Turtle's braid was a symbolic “crutch.” While Turtle wore her braid, she acted childish even to the point of kicking people in the shin if they upset her. It wasn’t until Turtle’s braid was forcefully removed through an explosion that she began to act in a more mature manner. It took the removal of her braid for her to lead the other tenants toward discovering one of Sam Westing’s disguises and for her mother to begin to truly see her as a person.

An engagement ring symbolizes marriage, but for Angela, it was closer to a prison. She already struggled with others seeing her as a person rather than just a pretty thing and a marriage would only strengthen her struggle. “For Angela, though, an engagement ring begins to signify a trap, pushing her into an uncomfortable social position, one in which she’s only defined by the man to whom she’s married” (Shmoop Editorial Team). The ring is also a reminder of her loss of independence. “Wearing her ring both gives her the identity of a doctor's wife and limits her to it – nothing more, nothing less” (Shmoop Editorial Team).

**Setting Analysis**

Although the novel was written in 1978, the play takes place during the present along the shore of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin. The play focuses its story during the fall where the average temperatures range from 32.4 to 46.7 degrees Fahrenheit and snowfall accumulating as deep as 19.5” (“Historical”). These climate
conditions particularly come into play when the characters are snowed in for a few days during November.

The play takes place in two main locations: Sunset Towers and the Westing mansion. Sunset Towers is a brand new, five-story apartment complex on the shore of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin where most of the characters reside. Contrary to the name, Sunset Towers neither faces east nor has any towers. It is a “glittery” and “glassy” building with lots of one-way glass, crystal chandeliers, and at least one mirrored wall (Raskin, *The Westing Game* 1). It is large enough to house two restaurants and was designed to meet the needs of each resident: not too pricey but classy enough.

Sunset Towers could be seen as an elaborate game board with each of the tenants as the game-pieces. The building was specifically built to satisfy the needs of each of the tenants. For the Wexlers, two walls of the living room had floor-to-ceiling glass where Lake Michigan could be seen, a small third bedroom for Turtle, and rent cheaper than what their house cost in upkeep. Flora’s apartment also had a lake view, Judge Ford’s had three-inch thick carpet and enough room to host a party, and the Theodorakis brothers’ apartment had floor-to-ceiling windows for Chris to bird-watch while sitting in his wheelchair. Each apartment was customized to lure each of the heirs into renting them so that the “Westing Game” could take place.

Within view of Sunset Towers was the Westing mansion, the former residence of Sam Westing, head of a multi-million dollar company. Mystery surrounds the house, as no one knows for sure if anyone still lives there after the tragic events within the Westing family. It seems creepy and dangerous with
seventeen shuttered windows and large french doors (Shmoop Editorial Team).

According to the character Otis, the last person to enter the house did so on a bet, but only lasted one minute before he came “tearing out like he was being chased by a ghost – or worse” (Lindle, *The Westing Game* 13). Thought to be empty, the tenants of Sunset Towers are alarmed when they see smoke billowing from the old chimney. This is the place where Turtle finds what she thinks is a dead body, where the heirs are taunted with the ideas of fortune and partnership, and where Sandy “dies” (Shmoop Editorial Team).

To help visualize what Westing’s mansion may look like, visual resources of a wide range were collected. Figures 5 through 9 represent a sample of this collection. Figure 5 shows a modern apartment. It has high ceilings with limited interior walls to create an open, roomy atmosphere. Its furnishings have modern, curved contours of wood surrounded by a bright color palette with heavy white trim. The room appears very inviting with its wide doorframes and large windows where natural sunlight pours in. There are no deep shadows or dark corners, expressing that there are no secrets being hidden within this room.
Figure 6 has a very elegant yet ominous mood. Allowing lots of natural sunlight through their slender, arched frames, three extremely tall windows provide the focal point of the room. The crystal chandelier and somewhat translucent curtains provide the elegant atmosphere, but the darkness of the wood floors, walls, and trim give the room an eerie presence. Mystery is suggested by the overwhelming darkness.
Fig. 6. Arched Window Frames. Three Arched Windows; Digital image; *Artifex*; N.p., n.d. Web. 28 June 2015.
Although an image of a dining room, figure 7 could represent the game room in which most of the action within Westing's mansion takes place. There is a large wooden table surrounded by matching chairs commanding the focus of the room. Although the windows are large, decorative yellow curtains cover a portion, letting in much less natural light. The yellow wallpaper covering the walls exaggerates the orange tinted wood, suggesting that the varnish has had plenty of years to turn color. The room is ornately furnished, expressed through the pattern of the matching chairs, the golden chandelier and matching sconces, and the large rug covering the entire floor. It's as if the décor of the room has been with the family for generations and the current owner has no intentions of altering it.
Figure 8 suggests an older, more sophisticated atmosphere. Surrounded with matching wood panels, the furniture is trimmed with ornate details. The chairs seem constructed for conversation rather than relaxation with their steep vertical backs and wooden frames. The details and precise location of each piece of furniture seems chosen for a specific purpose much like how Sam Westing placed each of the heirs in his game.

In sharp contrast to the lightness and simplicity of figure 5 is the gaudy décor of figure 9. An oversized rug with multiple patterns covers the floor upon which several ornate chairs rest. High pillars with strong marbled texture support the high beams of the ceiling with golden furnishings resembling the Corinthian columns of the ancient Greeks. The senses are overwhelmed as the room screams that the
owner has money, lot’s of money, and wants the viewer to know it. In the back is another room, equally as gaudy, which is separated by a large archway. The thick curtains drawn back within the archway stand ready to be released, hiding the room’s secret meetings from the rest of the house.

Fig. 9. Gaudy Staircase and Pillars. Brown Harris Stevens; Woolworth Mansion Interior; Digital image; Daily mail.co.uk; N.p., 05 Sept. 2012; Web. 27 June 2015.

Play Structure

The play quickly moves from one location to the next with most of the story taking place at either the Westing mansion or Sunset Towers. The Westing mansion is used only twice during the play, once in each act, but significant time is spent there. In both instances, Westing’s will is read. Within Sunset Towers, however, multiple locations are used. Each of the tenants’ apartments is used at least once,
along with the lobby, hallways, restaurant, and outside parking lot. In addition, a hospital room and a few nondescript areas are used.

Although the play is divided into two acts, there is no specific division of scenes. The action moves from one location to the next with little to no time for scene changes. There is, however, distinct periods or events where each act can be divided, as noted in figures 10 through 23. Within each of these created scenes are different requirements, such as new locations, projections, and props that need to be organized. Organizing the requirements of not only the play as a whole, but of its scenes helps the director plan for and develop solutions for his theatre’s unique space. Patterns may emerge, such as similar set pieces, which allow the director to simplify scene transitions. For the actor, it provides a concise overview of his scenes so that he can better adapt to what is required of his character.

In Act 1, there are eight of these divisions: 1) Introduction, where the characters talk to the audience, 2) September, where Northrup sells the apartments of Sunset Towers to the heirs, 3) Halloween, where Turtle takes the bet and explores the Westing mansion, 4) Next Morning, where we learn of what happened to Sam Westing, 5) First Reading of the Will, where the heirs are paired and the rules of the game are disclosed, 6) Snowstorm, where the heirs are first acquainted with their clues and each other, 7) Next Day, where clues are analyzed, and 8) Wedding Shower, where Angela is burned during the explosion.

In Act 2, there are only six divisions: 1) Restaurant, where the heirs discuss the recent bombing, 2) Hospital, where the effect the bomb had on Angela are discovered, 3) Clues, where clues and heirs are analyzed and the team of Ford and
Sandy discover that the clues lead to Crow, 4) Day of Second Will Reading, where the heirs make final preparations for final will reading, 5) Second Will Reading, where the heirs discover the truth about each other, and 6) The End, where we learn the fourth identity of Sam Westing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1: Scene 1 – Introduction</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Effects</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>Props</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondescript</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projections</td>
<td>Newspaper clippings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 10. Description of Act 1 Scene 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1: Scene 2 – September</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-11</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Effects</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>Props</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Towers – Rotate to each apartment</td>
<td>Binoculars – Barney to Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projections</td>
<td>Cards of heirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Two months ago…”</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 11. Description of Act 1 Scene 2
### Act 1: Scene 3 – Halloween

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-18</td>
<td>Turtle – Witch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angela – Wedding Dress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Effects**: None

**Locations**
- Sunset Towers
  - Parking Lot
  - Wexler Apartment
  - Hoo Apartment
  - Theodorakis Apartment
  - Outside of Westing Mansion

**Props**
- Binoculars – Chris
- Flashlight x2 – Doug, Turtle
- Cell Phone – Turtle

**Projections**
- “Two months later, on Halloween…”
- Recording of Turtle’s progress through mansion

---

**Fig. 12. Description of Act 1 Scene 3**

### Act 1: Scene 4 – The Next Morning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Effects**: None

**Locations**
- Sunset Towers - Nondescript

**Props**
- Mp3 player – Turtle
- $24 x3 – Doug, Theo, Sandy to pay Turtle
- Letter – Otis to Angela

**Projections**
- “The next morning…”
- Podcast of news report

---

**Fig. 13. Description of Act 1 Scene 4**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Act 1: Scene 5 – First Reading of the Will</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pages</strong></td>
<td>Special Costuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 21-32</td>
<td>o Denton – Scrubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Effects</strong></td>
<td>o Sydelle – Bright dress with purple, wavy stripes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Thunderclap</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locations</strong></td>
<td>Props</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Westing Mansion</td>
<td>o Crutches – Sydelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Handbag – Sydelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Shorthand pad and pencil – Sydelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Will – Plum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Envelope x7 – Heirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Clues x7 - Heirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Projections</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o “At the Westing mansion…”</td>
<td>o Signatures of Julian R. Eastman and Sydney Sikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Cards of Turtle and Flora</td>
<td>o Cards of Sandy and Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Cards of Chris and Denton</td>
<td>o Cards of Crow and Otis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Cards of Mr. Hoo and Grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Cards of Sydelle Pulaski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 14. Description of Act 1 Scene 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Act 1: Scene 6 – Snowstorm</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pages</strong></td>
<td>Special Costuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 32-44</td>
<td>o Sydelle – Checkerboard costume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Effects</strong></td>
<td>o Angela – Conservative party dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Doorbell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Bomb explosion</td>
<td>o Candles x2 – Theo, Doug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locations</strong></td>
<td>Props</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Sunset Towers</td>
<td>o Clues x2 – Dougal/Thed, Angela/Sydelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Nondescript</td>
<td>o Bulletin board postings – Sydelle, Doug, Mr. Hoo, Ford, Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Sydelle’s Apartment</td>
<td>o Appetizers – Heirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Ford Apartment</td>
<td>o Crutches – Sydelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Sydelle’s notes – Mr. Hoo to Sydelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Cell phone - Doug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Projections</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o “Imperfect Pairs of Heirs”</td>
<td>o “HIS N ON TO THEE FOR”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Cards of Angela and Sydelle</td>
<td>o “GOOD HOOD FROM SPACIOUS GRACE”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o “+ KING QUEEN PURPLE WAVES (ON) NO MOUNTAIN (EMPTY)”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 15. Description of Act 1 Scene 6
### Act 1: Scene 7 – Next Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44-55</td>
<td>Coat - Crow</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knock/Doorbell</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Towers</td>
<td>Phonebook – Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondescript</td>
<td>Phone x2 – Ford, Detective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another nondescript</td>
<td>Knitting supplies - Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodorakis Apartment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydelle’s Apartment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crow’s Apartment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another nondescript</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford’s Apartment</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The next day…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“SKIES AM AHNING BROTHER”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“FOR AND PLAIN OF GRAIN SHED”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card of Crow and Otis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card of Theo and Doug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ON TO THEE FOR HIS N ~ NH4 NO3 (ammonium nitrate)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“+O T I S”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper clipping of Westing next to woman with covered face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 16. Description of Act 1 Scene 7

### Act 1: Scene 8 – Wedding Shower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55-56</td>
<td>Shower Guests – party dresses</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bomb explosion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nondescript</td>
<td>Gifts x3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cards x3</td>
<td>Watch – Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch – Angela</td>
<td>Tall carton wrapped in gold foil</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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</table>

Fig. 17. Description of Act 1 Scene 8
### Act 2: Scene 1 – Restaurant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57-59</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Effects**
- None

**Locations**
- Sunset Towers - Restaurant
  - None

**Projections**
- “The heirs are getting closer to solving this mystery... are you?”

---

### Fig. 18. Description of Act 2 Scene 1

---

### Act 2: Scene 2 – Hospital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59-60</td>
<td>Angela – Hospital gown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Effects**
- None

**Locations**
- Angela’s hospital room
  - None

**Projections**
- None

---

### Fig. 19. Description of Act 2 Scene 2
### Act 2: Scene 3 – Clue Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60-80</td>
<td>Angela – Hospital gown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Special Effects
- Doorbell
- Explosion
- Singed braid - Turtle

### Locations
- Sunset Towers
  - Ford's Apartment
  - Restaurant
  - Hospital
  - Flora's Apartment
  - Nondescript
  - Another non descript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notebook – Sandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envelope – Crow to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flask – Sandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal – Turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note – Turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note – Sydelle to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin posting - Turtle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Projections
- Card of Sandy and Ford
- Card of Mr. Hoo and Grace
- "OF PURPLE WAVES FOR HIS FRUITED SEA GOD"
- Card of Angela and Sydelle
- "GOOD HOOD FROM SPACIOUS GRACE KING QUEEN PURPLE WAVES (ON) NO MOUNTAIN (EMPTY) ABOVE THY BEAUTIFUL AMERICA WITH MAJESTIES"
- "GOOD SPACIOUS ABOVE WITH GRACE ON THY PURPLE AMERICA MOUNTAIN HOOD TO WAVES FROM MAJESTIES BEAUTIFUL"
- Card of Theo and Doug

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hoo’s on First: Eatery of Athletes – Grand Opening!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;FOR PLAIN GRAIN SHED AND MOUNTAIN&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;AM O, SEA, MOUNTAIN&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;ABOVE SPACIOUS GRACE GOOD AMERICA HOOD WITH QUEEN KING BEAUTIFUL MAJESTIES FROM THY PURPLE WAVES ON (NO) MOUNTAIN (EMPTY)&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;GOOD HOOD FROM ABOVE SPACIOUS PLAIN GRAIN ON WITH BEAUTIFUL WAVES AMERICA GRACE THY PURPLE MOUNTAIN MAJESTIES&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 20. Description of Act 2 Scene 3
### Act 2: Scene 4 – Day of Second Will Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Effects**
- None

**Locations**
- Sunset Towers
  - Ford’s Apartment
  - Nondescript

**Props**
- Cooler – Mr. Hoo
- Card of Mr. Hoo and Grace

**Projections**
- “Saturday finally arrives...”
- Card of Ford and Sandy

---

Fig. 21. Description of Act 2 Scene 4

### Act 2: Scene 5 – Second Will Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Special Costuming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82-109</td>
<td>Cow – Coat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Effects**
- Click of lock on door
- Fireworks exploding

**Locations**
- Westing Mansion

**Props**
- Envelopes – one per pair
- Sheet – Doug to Sikes to Sandy
- Stretcher – Otis
- Notebook – Angela to Turtle
- Gavel – Ford
- Gun – Otis
- Paper – Plum
- Briefcase – Plum

**Projections**
- “Imperfect Heirs – Perfect Pairs”
- “Flora Baumbach, mother and friend / Turtle Wexler, financier”
- “Answer: $11,587”
- “$0.50”
- “Chris Theodorakis, ornithologist / Denton Deere, neurology intern”
- “Answer: Westing was a good man”
- “J.J. Ford, judge / Alexander McSouters, fixed”
- “No Answer”
- “James Hoo, inventor / Gracie Windkloppel, restaurateur”
- Card of Ed Plum

**Special Costuming**
- Turtle – Shoulder length hair
- Angela – Bandage on cheek
- Chris – Forearm crutches
- Sydelle – Red and white stripes
- Otis – Shoulder holster for gun

---

Fig. 22. Description of Act 2 Scene 5
Fig. 23. Description of Act 2 Scene 6

Basic Physical Demands

The Westing house is used once in each act and both times for the same purpose: the reading of the will. The room where everyone gathers is the Game Room and needs to be large enough to fit all 14 heirs and the lawyer, Plum. A chess-table/board is present and needs to be functional so both Theo and Sandy can play.

At Sunset Towers there are many locations the characters use. In Act 1, the apartments of Chris and Theo, the Wexlers, Sydelle, Ford, and Crow are used. Additional locations of the Lobby, Parking Lot, and a few nondescript locations are used as well. Chris and Theo’s apartment needs an area for Chris to bird-watch. While Chris is bird watching, there needs to be an area for Dr. Sikes to limp across towards the Westing mansion. The Wexler apartment requires that Angela be standing on a chair or other elevated area while being fitted for her wedding gown. Ford’s apartment needs to be large enough to accommodate nine people who break into subgroups while mingling at a party. The script mentions that her apartment should have a bar where Doug serves drinks, several chairs for the guests, and a large African painting. Sydelle’s and Crow’s apartments do not require special set pieces and need to accommodate two people each. In the Lobby, Angela is sitting
down, knitting, while waiting for Denton, so it should be large enough to accommodate four people. The Parking Lot needs to be large enough to accommodate five people. In addition it must be large enough for Sydelle to cross close enough to be within eye shot of the others, yet far enough so she can’t hear what they are saying. One of the nondescript locations is the setting of a wedding shower and needs to accommodate at least six people and at least four gifts, including a tall one that will explode.

In Act 2, at least eight different locations are used: the apartments of Ford, Chris, and Flora; Mr. Hoo’s restaurant; a Hospital room; a hallway; and a few nondescript locations. Unlike in Act 1 where Ford’s apartment needs to be able to host a party, Act 2 only requires the apartment to accommodate up to three people. In this Act, there should be a functional door for Otis to both knock on and enter through. Both Chris’ and Flora’s apartments only need to accommodate two people and do not require any special set pieces as long as Chris’ is handicap accessible for him to move through in his wheelchair. Mr. Hoo’s restaurant will need to accommodate twelve people. Although not specifically mentioned, it is assumed that they would be using the restaurant furniture. The Hospital room requires that Angela be lying or sitting in a hospital bed while up to three people visit. Here, a door is needed for an envelope to be slid under. The Hallway is right outside of Ford’s apartment and should be smoke filled from the explosion, but no special set pieces are required. In one of the nondescript places, no specific set pieces are mentioned, however, Turtle asks an unseen/assumed character to see Sandy before Sandy enters.
CHAPTER IV
THE DIRECTORIAL APPROACH TO THE PLAY

Only after careful research and analysis can a director begin to make decisions about how the play will look. It is from this process that a director begins to imagine how to visualize these various elements, such as set design, lighting, and possible projections, within the limitations of his resources.

One of the first decisions a director must make is his concept of the production. Although the plays may be the same, each director has a unique approach to performing it within the limitations with which he will be dealing. Some directors may have the space to bring on large set pieces from the wings for each scene change while others must rely on lighting. Some directors, depending on personal interests, his local community, or the makeup of his actors, connect more or less with specific themes from the play and will choose to emphasize or even ignore them. With each choice a director makes, the play becomes more unique, resulting in new experiences.

Set Design

One of the first decisions to be made in this play is how realistic it will be. Will the apartments include elements of an actual apartment such as furniture, windows, and furnishings? Or is there a central theme running throughout the play
that should be emphasized instead? To answer these questions, not only should the theme research be revisited, but also the audience demographics.

Typically, the audience for Mogadore’s plays is largely filled with the family of the cast and crew, sprinkled with teachers and students. They are used to realistic plays that depict its various locations through simple set pieces, such as a bench, or completely constructed locations with all the furnishings.

What is unique about this play, however, is that Mogadore’s 6th graders will have read the novel from which it is based. Throughout their reading process, the 6th graders will be keeping a journal with the hopes of looking for clues to solve the book’s mystery. Just like the students, the characters in the book are also playing a strategic game designed by the character of Sam Westing. With this in mind, the first choice will be to create a game-like atmosphere for the audience.

To communicate this, additional research must be performed to discover those visual elements that will help the audience make the connection between the story and the game. Since the character Westing enjoyed the game of chess and because of the many references to that game throughout the play, the focus will be placed specifically on the game of chess.

Figures 24-28 are some visual samples from this research. Figure 24 depicts the king piece standing alone against a solid black background. The tall, cylindrical shape resembles the marble columns from figure 9 and might be effective at portraying both the realistic mansion and the symbolic chess pieces. The piece also appears to be illuminated from within, casting its reflection upon the checkered floor. Could pieces, such as this, be constructed throughout the stage? If so, could
they be lit from within at strategic moments to draw emphasis to the game that is being played by the characters?

Figure 24. Illuminated Chess Piece. Digital image; Delawarechess.org; N.p., n.d. Web.

Figure 25 inspires some creative ideas about the relationship between the characters as people and the characters as pieces in a game. Like in the game of chess, each person in the image stands alone on a specific square of the game board. They appear unable to move unless guided by an outside force. When they do interact, it is deliberate and planned much like the characters in the play. Sam Westing becomes the invisible, guiding force manipulating each of his “heirs” to the apartments and relationships he chooses in order to create the outcome he planned.
Figure 26 opens the door to alternative ways to represent a chessboard. Instead of the traditional square piece, the “squares” are created simply by overlapping shapes, in this case circles. The checkered chess pattern is still created, but it takes on a much more organic and lifelike feel than the rigid squares. Furthermore, the board is not all at one level, but raised in certain areas to create a more interesting, three-dimensional appearance. Would this alteration better communicate life as a chess game through its organic shapes?
In the midst of these more complicated, symbolic ideas is the simple silhouette in figure 27. It is much flatter than the full round sculptures required in figure 24 and may provide a more manageable way for the high school students to construct the set. The face shapes could simply be cut out of flat material with a thin strip of something pliable, like cardboard, for the depth. What is also interesting is how the shape resembles the letter “w,” the first letter of Westing’s last name. Could a connection be made between the chess game and characters’ lives in this way?
From the research process and from asking questions, many discoveries, both obvious and subtle, can be made. In this case, the checkerboard pattern and contrasting colors seemed to be the strongest choices. But how will these elements be incorporated? How much emphasis should be placed on the abstract idea of chess versus keeping it realistic? How many of these elements can there be before the audience becomes confused? Sketches are helpful for experimenting with these choices by getting ideas out of the head and into a more visual format.

Figure 28 represents some of the earlier sketches in this process. In this particular sketch, there are three columns that represent the wealth of Sam Westing, much like from the visual reference of figure 9, along with a checkerboard floor to tie in the chess theme. The center column is similar to the shape of the king from
figure 24 while the other two columns could represent other pieces. Simply using columns and a checker floor reveals that a fully furnished apartment does not seem necessary to communicate the setting of Westing’s mansion. Simplicity could work, especially when dealing with the quick pace of the scene transitions. In this idea, however, the chess theme seems to get lost as the floor could just be interpreted as a marble, tiled floor.

Fig. 28. Realistic Conceptual Design Sketch

Pressing the chess theme further, is figure 29. Instead of realistic columns that slightly resemble chess pieces, actual life-sized chess pieces were drawn that slightly resemble columns. The figure in the middle helps to establish the scale of the varying sized pieces. This approach helps to connect the checkerboard floor to
the game of chess and also creates a strong illusion for the game of chess.

Furthermore, by juxtaposing the characters on the stage with the game pieces, it suggests that the characters themselves are game pieces.

Fig. 29. Abstract Conceptual Design Sketch

Although strong in communicating the game of chess, figure 29 may be a bit too abstract, causing the audience to understand the play to only be about chess. Furthermore, establishing the multiple locations, such as the parking lot, mansion, and hospital room may become too difficult, resulting in the audience not being able to track with the storyline.
Through the process of deciding whether to use an abstract or realistic approach, careful attention must also be paid to the play's requirements from the set. Due to the spatial limitations, it is not possible to build a set for each of the many locations of the play. In addition, the play shifts from one location to the next so often that taking time for set changes would slow down the tempo of the play. Compromises need to be made that still communicate the story.

Using a door to solve these issues would help establish the various locations, allow for quick “set changes,” and maintain the combination of abstract and realistic approaches discovered from the sketches. Simply walking through a door helps an actor communicate that he is entering into a new location and with the addition or subtraction of simple set pieces, such as a table, multiple locations can be established within the same area.

Expounding upon Judge Ford’s line that she feels like a “pawn” in Westing’s game, doors to her and other characters’ apartments could double as pawn pieces from chess as well as the door needed for the hospital room. Reflecting Judge Ford’s thought, each character becomes a pawn in Westing’s game of chess. Figure 30 represents a sample sketch from these experiments.
The realism of the rooms is established with the doors and additional prop pieces such as tables and chairs, yet the abstraction of the chess game is maintained by the checkerboard floor and the more subtle chess pieces. Inspired by the simplistic design of figure 27 is a silhouette of a pawn protruding from the doorframe yet continuing its contour within the door itself. Depending on the context of the lines and whether or not the door is closed, the chess piece is either emphasized or de-emphasized in a simpler way than the self-illumination idea from figure 24. Juxtaposed next to a person creates the illusion that the pawn is just
another character in the play. Just as in a game, this allows the audience members to make choices and allows for their increased engagement in the play.

Establishing Westing’s mansion where the will is read, the lobby of Sunset Towers, and the parking lot provides additional challenges, however. Due to spatial limitations, the need for quick location changes, and the combination of abstraction and realism, the possibility of combining all three locations into one can be explored. A distinction should be made between interior apartment doors and the main entrance into the complex. While single doors work for the individual apartments, a double door could be used to represent the main entrance into the lobby. Glass doors could also further distinguish the exterior door from the interior apartment doors.

At the second location, the will is read within the game room of Westing’s mansion. From the context of the play, it must be large enough to fit 15 people along with the various gaming stations, so the room would be quite large. Using the double doors proposed for the lobby would not be much of a stretch and could satisfy both requirements. In addition, the parking lot locations only require that the characters be outside, looking out toward Westing’s mansion. It is also plausible for those locations to take place just outside the main entrance of Sunset Towers lobby, again being satisfied by the proposed double doors.

Figure 31 represents possible designs for the double doors. Incorporating the arches from figures 5, 6, and 9, the tops of the doors arch toward each other. The wood paneling from figure 8 surrounds the windows within the doors and also the
surrounding windows to the left and right. The vertical door handles resemble those of outside entrance doors that might be seen in the entrance to Sunset Towers.

Fig. 31. Westing Mansion Double Door Sketch

Since the pawn is used to represent the characters playing the game, another piece should be used to represent Westing and his mansion. If we also combined Westing’s mansion with the entrance to Sunset Towers, this symbol should also represent both, since it was he who brought all of the characters to both locations. While the king seems to work because it is the most important piece to the game, it isn’t very mobile and the character of Otis refers to himself as “King” Otis. The queen, however, seems to function as a better alternative.

The queen is viewed by many as the most important attacking piece. It is mobile and mimics the moves of other pieces, such as the rook and bishop, just like
Sam Westing disguises himself as other people, such as Barney Northrup and Sandy McSouthers. Crow’s partner, Otis, refers to her as “Queen Crow” and Westing’s game purposely led the characters to the answer of “Berthe Erica Crow,” later discovered to be his ex-wife. This answer, however, was only a ruse, diverting the characters’ attention elsewhere just like how he would often win his chess games by sacrificing his queen. In this analogy, Crow becomes the queen that is sacrificed. In addition, the tops of some queen pieces resemble the letter “w,” the first letter in Westing’s name. The queen, then, becomes a more interesting motif for the entire play.

Following this train of thought, figure 32 represents a computer-generated sketch from these explorations.

In figure 32, we see the simple, flat silhouette shape from figure 27. Instead of using the “w” to represent the king, however, it is used to represent the queen, a stronger metaphor. While the doorframes are squared, the arch is incorporated along the top as part of the queen figure. Like in figure 26, overlapping shapes creates the checkered pattern but in a more organic way. The queen is also marbled like the pillars from figure 9 to communicate the wealth of Westing.
As seen in figure 26, the use of platforms or raised areas should be considered, especially with limited space. In scenes with overlapping people, platforms are helpful for making more actors visible to the audience. They also create a more interesting balance, can help to establish status, and help to separate scenes.

There are a few scenes where almost the entire cast is on stage at the same time: the Westing mansion game room scenes where the will is read and the restaurant scene. In a real life situation, the amount of space would not be an issue because there is no audience that needs to see everyone, but in a play, its a different matter.

Without platforms, the tendency for actors is to form a giant semicircle so that both they and the audience can see each other. This is very unnatural looking
and hinders the movements of the actors. By using platforms, actors can overlap each other and still be seen. This layering effect not only helps actors to be seen by the audience, it also provides a more natural looking environment where they are able to move about the space more freely.

In the case of *The Westing Game*, platforms of different heights will be used for two of the acting areas. Since the upstage area will be used as the front steps of the Westing mansion and Sunset Towers and will be set further back on the stage, it makes sense to raise up this area as shown in figure 33. About two or three steps high will provide the necessary height and allow for actual steps to be added in order to help create the illusion of front steps.

![Fig. 33. Platform Design](image)

A platform for one of the two downstage acting areas will help to distinguish one from the other. The plan is for the upstage double doors to be placed slightly off center toward stage left. These will also be placed on the upstage platform. Taking this into consideration, placing a platform downstage right will help to balance the
stage. To keep these acting areas distinguished from each other, this platform should be lower than the upstage platform and higher than the stage height.

**Lighting Design**

With the decision that single areas on the stage will represent multiple locations, special attention must be paid to the lighting design. Within the play, there are six different apartments within Sunset Towers being rented by the characters plus the lobby, parking lot, restaurant, front steps of the Westing mansion, and its game room. Given the spatial limitations of the stage and the character requirements of each location, only three areas will be used. Each area will represent more than one of these locations.

As figure 34 shows, there are only six lights that can provide front lighting for each of these areas, so two will be designated for each of the three locations. These lights need to be focused so that not only the actors and set pieces can be seen, but so that the other areas are not lit. Some locations, however cannot be contained within just one of these designated acting areas and will require a combination of acting areas. With this in mind, attention must be paid to the edges of these acting areas. The lights will need to overlap and blend with the other areas so that if two are being used to represent one location, there is no gap. These two acting areas should blend to combine into one acting area for those locations.
Of the three designated acting areas, one needs to be a larger area that cannot combine with the other acting areas. For this reason, the two designated front lights will not be sufficient. Additional lighting will be needed to cover the area. To provide this extra lighting, the front row of overhead stage lights will be used.

Figure 35 shows the six Fresnels that are located on this front bar, but not all should be used. Lighting at too steep of an angle creates deep shadows on the actors faces, specifically the eyes. To accommodate this, using the Fresnels farthest from the acting area will decrease the sharp angle, lessening the shadows. Fresnels 7 and 16 are far enough away where they are not too steep and can be used to help cover the area and reduce shadows.
Fig. 35. Front Row Fresnel Focus

With the limited number of lights and obstructions, backlighting will not work. To supplement this lack of lighting, overhead lights can be used. Ideally, the back row of overhead lights would work, but there is a masking curtain that obstructs their beam when they are aimed in the area of the front two acting areas. As a result, this lighting will need to come from the front row. On this front bar, there are four undesignated lights, so two can be used for the front two acting areas. One light can be focused on each of the two areas to provide a substitution for the missing backlights. The same can be accomplished with the larger acting area by using the back row of overhead lights. In this case, however, two lights should be used to cover the larger size of the area. Figure 36 shows this light designation.
Once each acting area is covered by lights, attention should be paid to how they can create and enhance the various moods throughout the play. Dramatic moments such as Angela’s self-searching, Sandy’s “death,” and the Halloween night bet are great examples of how lighting can enhance the mood.

At the end of Act 1 is the height of when Angela is wrestling with who she is and who she wants to be. Before entering her apartment for the wedding shower, the script calls for a moment when she hesitates and looks at her engagement ring. To emphasize this moment, Angela will walk to the center of the stage as if walking down the hallway to her apartment. The lights from the previous scene will fade to black as this tiny area where Angela is will be softly lit with a blue. Just before she reaches the door, she will stop and slowly look down at her ring, showing her wavering commitment. This soft blue light will help to emphasize Angela’s
emotional state as well as strongly contrast with the surrounding scenes’ festive warm light. Figure 37 shows the lights from which the blue will come.

Fig. 37. Angela Special Lighting Focus

In Act 2, Sandy fakes his death. Instead of a somber, funeral like atmosphere, it comes as a shock to the other characters and they begin to fear for their own lives. There is not an instant moment when Sandy dies. Rather, the characters slowly notice him choking and then fall motionless to the floor. Only after Dr. Sikes arrives moments later and pronounces Sandy dead do they fully realize the seriousness of the game they are playing.

To help emphasize this “death” and the change in attitudes of each of the characters, the simple, yet strong color red can be used. This scene takes place in the game room of the Westing mansion and uses the entire stage. The back curtain of
the stage provides a backdrop for this entire scene. Flooding the entire back wall with the red color during this moment would provide a strong visual aid.

Typically, cyclorama lights could be used to provide this wash of color, but Mogadore’s stage is not equipped with any. Along each of the two overhead bars, however, are six strips of border lights, and the back row is located approximately four feet away from this back curtain. As shown in figure 38, aiming these border lights toward this back curtain provides the needed wash of color similar to the missing cyclorama lights.

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 38. Cyclorama Substitution Focus

The Halloween night bet scene is not only another dramatic moment, but presents the challenge of simulating a different time of day. Most of the other scenes take place indoors where the time of day is not crucial to the story of the play, but this scene is different. Here, Turtle meets Doug exactly at midnight just outside the
front door of the abandoned and rumored to be haunted Westing mansion. Accepting a bet, Turtle tries to hide her fear before entering the old, dark mansion.

This acting area has six lights already designated for it: two front ellipsoids, two front row side Fresnels, and two “backlight” Fresnels. As figure 39 shows, changing the colors of these lights provides opportunities to change the mood or time of day for this acting area. Applying a color in the bluish, purple range can simulate moonlight, so one ellipsoidal and another Fresnel will be equipped with this color. The other ellipsoidal and Fresnel will be equipped with a warm light, such as bastard amber, to balance the cooler light for the general lighting that takes place in other scenes.

![Fig. 39. Lighting Gel Color](image)

By adjusting the balance of each set of lights, different effects can be achieved. With both lights equal to each other, a neutral light is created which can
be used for all of the general lighting throughout the play. To create the eerie, nighttime effect, the cool colored light should be strengthened while the warm colored light weakened. Playing with the balance determines just how subtle or strong the effect will be.

**Projections**

Just as the characters spend much of their time trying to figure out their clues, the audience spends much of Act 2 watching the characters attempt to solve them. While it is crucial to the story, watching actors read clues has potential to bore the audience. To help further engage the audience during this potentially slow section of the play, projections will be used.

While the characters attempt to decode their clues, the clues will be projected onto a screen for the audience to see. Just like the characters, the audience now has an opportunity to play the game. The screen becomes the clues inviting the audience to become a player.

Having clues projected onto a screen opens the door for other uses as well. They could help orient the audience to the individual characters or even help establish special effects. The play opens with a quick introduction to each family as they rent an apartment from the character Barney Northrup. Displaying images of each family along with their names will help the audience to identify them quicker as they appear throughout the play. In addition, these relationships then change as the characters are assigned teammates. Since most of Act 2 bounces back and forth between the teams while they solve their clues, projecting the teams and their
progress will help the audience focus more on solving the riddle than remembering who is who.

Depending on how the special effects, such as an exploding gift, are incorporated, projections could assist. There are several explosions where a video or image could quickly project at the moment each occurs. In addition, there is a scene where Turtle explores the dark, empty mansion at night. Instead of watching a flashlight shine about around a dark stage, this event could be pre-recorded at another location and projected during each performance.

“It is very important, moreover, to keep in mind that the function of the scenographer is always part of something larger than just the successful completion of a personal effort” (Payne 25). When designing the set, it is crucial to collaborate between all parties involved, especially the director. Each offers a unique perspective and specialized insights that must be considered. Once everyone is in agreement of the direction, the plans should be given to the stage and tech crews for construction. As the plans are brought to life, alterations and adjustments may need to be made to account for new ideas or challenges along the way. With this in mind, figure 40 represents the proposed floor plans for the production.
Transforming the Physical Space

Part of the intrigue of theatre is its ability to create new worlds. As an audience member enters the front doors, they are, many times, encouraged to leave the real world behind and to enter a new environment. With their imaginations, audiences can travel through time or experience the life of another. When the theatre doubles as a cafeteria, as in the case of Mogadore High School, it is difficult to maintain this illusion. As a result, attention should be paid to not only the physical space behind the curtain, but to the space surrounding the audience.

To help the audience accept that they are no longer in a high school cafeteria but entering into the world of *The Westing Game*, pipe and drape will be used. As shown in figure 41, seventeen sections of black drapes will surround the audience as they enter the theatre. Each section will be eight feet tall and hide cafeteria items such as microwaves, vending machines, and trophy cases. Using simple drapery should help transform the space from a high school cafeteria into a theatre.


Production Schedule

As mentioned in chapter 2, careful attention must be paid to scheduling the use of the stage. The plan will be for the actors to have full use of the stage after school on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 2:45 until 4:45. On Tuesdays and Fridays, the stage crew will construct the set from 3:00 until 4:30. When possible, the stage crew will end each construction day by clearing as much of the stage as possible. This will allow the actors to rehearse on the stage the following days. In addition, the stage will also remain safe to use for the Theatre class during the school day.
CHAPTER V

REFLECTING ON THE DESIGN

After the production is over, and many times even before, it is helpful to reflect back on the choices that were made. Regardless of the degree of success or failure, this reflection can serve as a valuable experience for future productions.

Chess Theme

Figures 41 through 43 show how the chess theme was incorporated into the set. Rather than painting a chessboard pattern directly onto the floor, the decision was made to lay separate 4x4 plywood tiles directly onto the floor. This allowed for the painting to be done in a separate location so as not to interfere with the actors during rehearsals. It also allowed for experimentation of marbling techniques.

Rather than alternating two solid colors to create the chessboard floor, a marble technique was applied to the alternating colors. Students experimented with different ways to create this effect until an appropriate one was found. This was then repeated onto each tile until they were screwed directly into the stage floor.

Figure 42 takes place inside the game room of the Westing mansion. The characters are locked inside the room just moments after Sandy was “murdered.” In the background, Sydelle and Mr. Hoo try to pry the locked game room doors open while the other characters attempt to console Turtle (green turtleneck with white jacket), the closest friend of Sandy. In the midst of the chaos, Turtle’s mother, Grace
(red shirt), drunkenly crawls toward her daughter to get a closer look at the woman Turtle is maturing into.

Fig. 42. The Aftermath

Figure 43 shows an example of a non-descript location. Theo wheels his brother Chris onto the stage, while Judge Ford (left) and Berthe (right) await to simultaneously read their invitations to the reading of Mr. Westing’s will. With the doors closed, the chess figures stand alongside the figures as characters in the play, rather than as doors to a specific location.
Fig. 43. The Invitation

Inside of Judge Ford's apartment is depicted by figure 44. With the door open, the image of the chess piece fades away and the door becomes the front door of an apartment. Delivery boy Otis (center) delivers a letter to Judge Ford (left) and her partner, Sandy (right). Spread out across the table are research notes gathered by the partners about the fellow “heirs” in Sam Westing’s game.
In viewing the final product, the idea of the characters representing chess pieces could have been pushed further. The fear was that using larger chess pieces throughout the stage would have confused the audience, but in hindsight, it may have enriched the story instead. The nature of the script and acting was very realistic and could have tolerated this abstraction. Looking at this idea on paper alone seemed too much, but viewing it juxtaposed next to real live actors with spoken lines revealed it might have been the better choice.

**Lighting**

Using lighting to separate the acting areas proved to be effective not only to distinguish between acting areas, but also to move set pieces. While one area was lit, another area was in black and allowed for actors to move themselves and set pieces to and from these darkened areas without being a distraction to the acting that took

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*Fig. 44. Judge Ford's Apartment*
place within the lit areas. So effective, additional set pieces could have been moved to better help the audience identify the various locations throughout the play.

For example, in Act 1, the two downstage acting areas were only used as apartments. In Act 2, however, one of these areas also became a hospital room, as seen in figure 45. During the play, to help the audience understand the new location of the hospital room, the character of Angela was dressed in a hospital gown and sitting in a wheelchair with a blanket covering her body. Other than from the context of the lines, the audience may have understood Angela to be dressed like this in her apartment rather than at the hospital. Adding a prop or two such as an IV stand, hospital curtains, or a red cross hospital symbol would have helped the audience to more quickly understand the new location and to focus their attention on the plot rather than on determining whether the actors were in a new location or not.
The gel colors for the lighting proved to be mostly effective. The illusion of being indoors within an apartment was effectively created, and there was a clear distinction between daytime and nighttime during the outdoor scenes. The nighttime scenes, however, could have been clearer. During the outdoor, nighttime scene in front of the upstage double door, cerulean blue gels were used to create a nighttime effect. Although an eerie effect was created that worked well for the Halloween night scene, it seemed a bit too dark and abstract for the other nighttime scenes. Being limited in the number of lighting fixtures, a choice needed to be made between the more abstract, cerulean blue and a more natural blue. In hindsight, a lighter and more natural moonlight effect such as a color in the lavender family may have been a more effective compromise.
In the original plans, washes of color in the background were going to be used to help establish moods for strategic scenes. Normally, a cyclorama would be used to accomplish this, but the available border lights were used instead. Although a black curtain stretches the width of the stage, it doesn't reflect color from the border lights very well. To accommodate this, white fabric was draped against the back curtain to better reflect the colors from the border lights. While experimenting with this effect, the white fabric seemed too bright during those scenes that required a black backdrop. As a result, the effect was not used. For future productions, alternatives may be explored such as lighting up the already existing black back curtain. Although the lights would not be very bright, this subtleness might be enough, depending on the mood that would be needed.

Platforms

The use of platforms worked very well to provide balance to the stage, overlapping of actors, and separation of scenes. As seen in figure 42, actors were effectively overlapped within the small space of Mogadore’s stage so that all could be seen. If actors needed more of the audience’s attention at a particular moment, they were placed on the floor in front of a platform, while those requiring less focus were placed behind, raised up on a platform so they could still be seen and contribute to the scene. Special attention was required when choreographing the blocking because within each scene, the focus rotated between the actors. The movement of the actors and the staggered heights of the actors provided an interesting balance to the stage and effectively separated scenes.
**Projections**

The use of projected images proved to be invaluable in helping the audience track with the play. The beginning of most plays involves a lot of setup, introducing the audience to the setting and the characters. Sometimes, an audience is expected to remember the names and faces of each character with only a quick mention of who they are. However, within the game context of this play, an audience’s attention may be better spent trying to solve the clues rather than remembering character names. For this production, a projection, such as in figure 46, was displayed as each character was introduced during the opening minutes of the play.

![Character Introduction Projection](image.png)

*Fig. 46. Character Introduction Projection*
As characters partnered up and relationships changed, another series of projections were used, showing the new partners on the same projection. As seen in figure 47, each character was assigned a color, like in a game, that reflected their traits. These colors were placed behind the characters each time their image was projected.

Fig. 47. Partner Projection

As partners began to solve their clues, new pieces of information were revealed. For those audience members participating in the game, another series of projections were created that displayed this information. As seen in figure 48, the clues appeared underneath the characters who discovered them. These projections were positioned in such a way that they could linger throughout the duration of the scene without being a distraction to the acting that was taking place.

In each of these projections, the central chess theme was subtly shown using the same horizontal chess pattern that faded into the solid black background. The background of each character was cut out so they could be easily paired with
another character, depending on the moment in the play. Once the game began, the projections took on more of a game card appearance, similar to those used in the game of Clue. The colors organized the players into teams and revealed traits to the audience.

Care was also taken with each character’s pose to reflect a personality at that moment in the play. In figure 47, Grace is seen in the passionate color of red with large gold jewelry and a pose expressing how she wants to be perceived as better than everyone else, while in figure 48, Angela is surrounded by a soft pink and an expression revealing how uncomfortable she is with who she is. In cases where there was a dramatic character change, such as Turtle, the pose and costume changed by the end of the play.

![Fig. 48. Clue Projection](image)
Each character was cloaked with strong shadows. Throughout the play, each character becomes a suspect and the deep shadows suggest that there may be a hidden side to the characters that has yet to be revealed. Originally, the characters were looking away from the camera to further suggest a secret, but the decision was made for each to look directly at the camera, inviting the audience to directly engage with the play.

In addition to the characters and their clues, these projections were also used for some of the special effects like explosions and fireworks. Although the audience was clearly able to understand that one of these effects, such as an explosion, was happening, it may have been a bit redundant. Between the sound effects, lighting changes, and fog from a fog machine, these effects were created effectively without the need of additional projections.

**Budget for the Westing Game**

Based on figure 3’s average expenses per school year, $1000 of the fall play’s budget was allocated toward set construction. For *The Westing Game*, the actual cost for the material came in under budget at $821.65. In order to accomplish this, creativity and resourcefulness were critical.

As previously mentioned, projections were used throughout the play. Projectors typically range in price from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. Instead of buying a new, or even used, projector an unused projector within the school district was located by networking with fellow employees. As a result, this unused projector was borrowed for the production at no cost while scrap pieces of wood were used to mount it above the stage. In addition, repurposing material from
previous productions, such as scrap wood and brackets, allowed for the reduction in costs. This also allowed for additional money to be spent on the more complicated doorframes. To avoid the difficult process of squaring up doorframes so that the doors both swing and latch properly, the saved money was able to purchase pre-hung doors that were fastened directly to the stage floor and platforms. More time, as a result, was able to be spent on other areas of the set, such as experimenting with the marble tile technique.

As the director makes and reflects upon his decisions, it is important to remember that he is not alone in the decision making process. Students, although inexperienced, can offer valuable insight or unique perspectives that the director may not have considered. Their approach may be a bit more practical because of their direct interaction with the play's environment. It can also be a bit more unconventional because they may not be considering all the practical elements or limitations that the director wrestles with during the design process.

This process of analyzing the performance space, available resources, and potential plays in order to develop an effective concept and design can be used for every production. Through this approach, experience can be gained as the director learns how to adapt previous successes and failures in order to enhance future productions. Each production offers new challenges that must be creatively solved. Reflecting on previous solutions provides a foundation to build upon as each production takes on a unique characteristic. By careful analysis of his available resources and their limitations, the director can boldly approach each potential play without having to shy away from its perceived obstacles. Through this process, any
story can be produced by allowing its challenges to become opportunities for unique and creative solutions.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


