APPROPRIATING COLOURS IN SET DESIGN FOR CHILDREN'S THEATRE IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper illuminates the integral role of set design in children's theatre, specifically exploring the infusion of colour from a child's viewpoint to enrich their theatrical encounters. Informed by Schonmann's and Weincek's insights into children's theatre and set design, and grounded in the experiential value of artistic methodology, this study employs a representational art concept to craft set designs that resonate with the sensibilities of young audiences. Through a focus group discussion with Ghanaian children aged eight to thirteen, a preference for polychromatic colour schemes emerged. Harnessing these preferences, the research develops a set design tailored to elevate the overall theatrical experience for children. Employing a formalistic approach, the study describes the incorporation of elements in the design and interprets the significance of colours. By understanding children's colour perspectives, this research aims to convey their ideas, express emotions, and facilitate effective communication. Ultimately, the study empowers children as active participants in the theatrical experience, fostering interpretation, interaction, and questioning on their own terms.*

KEYWORDS: Appropriating, children's theatre, colour, polychromatic schemes, set design.

INTRODUCTION

Children's Theatre represents a unique theatrical approach that incorporates diverse aesthetic and artistic elements to provide an inclusive and engaging experience for young audiences. Within this theatrical domain, children actively contribute their experiences, concentration, and imagination, fostering learning through observation and critical thinking (Schonmann, 2006). However, despite its dual nature as an educational and theatrical endeavour, there has been a noticeable imbalance, with the educational discourse taking precedence over its artistic aspects (Schonmann, 2006; Reason, 2010). This overemphasis on the educational aspects may limit children from experiencing a holistic theatre, where all elements, including aesthetic and artistic considerations, come into play.

Observations of various children's drama performances and entertainment shows in Ghana reveal a lack of primary emphasis on colour in portraying the performance preferences of children. While Children's Theatre typically focuses on specific plays for a children's audience, Kiddafest, for instance, being a festival-style event encompasses a variety of performances, including drama skits, dance, music, acrobatics, and painting. The multifaceted nature of Kiddafest's shows provides an opportunity to utilize colours to enhance the diverse range of play possibilities. However, upon evaluating sets designed for the festival from 1994 to 2014, it became evident that the use of colours had diminished, transitioning from a vibrant array to a plain (monochrome) backdrop. The researchers, in the absence of a clear tradition for colour usage in set designs, relied on the general perception that children favour neon colours to create designs that would appeal to them. Recognizing the limited studies on how children relate to colour choices in scenery, this research aims to explore the untapped potential that children's perspectives on colour hold in enriching their performance spaces and overall development.

Children, Set Design and Colour: Ghana in Perspective

The impact of colour on children's thoughts and their interaction with the environment within a play is significant. According to Block and Wolf (2013) and Gillette (2000), colour serves as a potent tool for designers, acting as a powerful stimulus within a design composition. Recognizing that children have a natural affinity for colour, a set designer can leverage this aspect to enhance their theatre experience and appreciation. Children's colour inclinations, when strategically incorporated, contribute to creating an unforgettable set experience, serving as a communicator that speaks volumes of ideas to them (Curry & Gaines, 2011). This colour exploration becomes an integral part of their experience, leading them to discover more about themselves and their environment, expressing themselves, and exposing them to a world filled with their choices.

The development process of children is a critical factor in shaping their theatre experience. Kipp and Shaffer's identification of four stages of children's development (2010) highlights the importance of aligning the colour choice process with the concrete and formal operational stages relevant to the age group engaged in the theatre experience. Considering the developmental needs of children is essential for protecting their concerns and nurturing their self-confidence. Therefore, when designing set design for children, it becomes imperative to intertwine their developmental needs with their receptive levels, ensuring a harmonious connection with the performances and designs created for them.

In the realm of children's theatre, set design stands out as a crucial element in conveying artistic and aesthetic experiences. Among the various components utilised in communicating with the audience, colour emerges as a pivotal factor. Regrettably, based on the experiences and observations of the researchers, the practice of set design in Ghana appears to overlook the incorporation of children's perspectives on colour to enhance their set experiences and influence their understanding of theatre. This oversight might be attributed to the habitual reliance on designers' colour choices, potentially indicating a prevailing focus on the educational or didactic aspects of theatre, rather than its artistic dimensions.

Contrastingly, colour constitutes a vibrant facet of children's explorative experiences, playing a substantial role in aiding them to express themselves, project their emotions, and capture attention. Notably, the use of colours significantly contributes to enhancing children's comprehension of a play. Thus, concerns arise regarding the portrayal of colours in set presentations that complement the unique environments of children's theatre.

Consequently, this paper adopts a theatrical approach to delve into set design as a pivotal artistic element in children's theatre. The researchers, through the exploration of colours, designed and constructed a set for the play *Feathers* by Philip Ridley. The primary focus was on colour as the central element in set design, aiming to enrich the overall children's theatre experience. The study, conducted in Ghana, West Africa, specifically delimits its scope to children's reactions to colours, encompassing both performers and the audience within the theatre experience. This research experimentally engaged children within the middle and early adolescent age brackets, ranging from eight to thirteen (8–13) years. It is important to note that the study did not extend its consideration to children's responses to shapes in the set, as well as the colours of costumes and light.

Children Theatre: Philosophical Underpinning

Understanding the philosophical underpinning of Children's Theatre is crucial for addressing the needs of children when immersing them in the theatrical experience. This knowledge serves as the foundation for analysing the role of theatre in fortifying and developing the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of children. Notably, two distinct schools of thought regarding Children's Theatre have emerged among scholars such as Slade (1973) and Goldberg (1974). The first school of thought advocates for performances by and for children, contending that children better appreciate drama enacted by their peers, asserting it as most beneficial for them. Conversely, the second argues that Children's Theatre should involve skilled adult actors performing for a children's audience. Despite this dichotomy, both approaches share a common trait – a focus on the child as the primary recipient or audience, representing conventionally accepted approaches to Children's Theatre.

Goldberg (1974) emphasises the specificity of Children's Theatre as a distinct subgroup intended exclusively for children, stating that it is an audience-centric experience. Similarly, Schonmann (2011) underscores the inseparability of Children's Theatre from children, asserting that every aspect of its performance explicitly centres around the child. In essence, the young audience becomes the focal point of any targeted theatrical experience, with each element designed to contribute to the comprehensive development of children. This places the child at the core of the performance, defining Children's Theatre as a form in which plays are executed by either children or adults, all directed towards an audience of children.

However, for the purpose of this study, a specific approach is adopted – a child performer to a child audience. This choice is made to provide children the space to explore their unique world within a more creative ambiance, fostering learning. It also affords them the opportunity to engage with theatre on their own terms, enabling them to project their voices and perspectives in relation to their own performances within their defined space. This approach emphasises empowering children to actively shape their theatrical encounters, contributing to a more authentic and enriching experience.

The design of an environment for a theatrical performance extends beyond aesthetics; it is about creating a space that not only stimulates the actors but also captivates the audience. Set design plays a dual role, serving both actors and the audience, acting as a conduit connecting the audience to the world of the performers. This duality makes set design a powerful tool for focusing the audience's attention and organising their understanding of the play. Recognizing set design as a construct of space is vital, especially when considering it as a crucial element fulfilling children's spatial needs within their theatre experience. Creating an environment is fundamental to engaging children effectively.

Set Design as Children's Spatial Need

Studies in the realm of children's spatial needs have predominantly focused on their physical environments, such as libraries, schools, and play areas, with limited exploration of set design for children (Feinburg & Keller, 2010; Hendricks, 2013). This limitation hinders a comprehensive understanding of spatial considerations in the context of children's theatre.

Children's perception of space is intricately connected to how they observe, understand, and identify elements in their environment. Cohen (1985) emphasises the importance of children's spatial information, enabling them to encode spatial cues and enhance their performance. Spatial arrangements profoundly impact their performances, contributing to both physical and cognitive development. Consequently, set designers for Children's Theatre must incorporate elements within the environment that align with children's influence and experiences. The compositional arrangement of a set for children should involve interactive use of elements like shapes, lines, forms, and colours to mimic objects in nature, fostering a connection with their surroundings.

Moreover, set design should produce designs that resonate with the target audience, reflecting their content and effectively communicating the play's messages. Stanković and Stojić (2007) stress that the constructed elements of space can support children, helping them to function within their abilities and stimulating processes that contribute to improvement. Therefore, set designers need to understand the physical space children require for holistic development, ensuring the overall composition of their performance space is interactive, meeting both their aesthetic and cognitive needs and expectations. This approach allows children to participate in challenging activities that contribute to their intellectual and physical growth, enriching their theatre experience.

Set Design for Children's Theatre: Characteristics

Set design for Children's Theatre encompasses distinct visual characteristics and aesthetic demands, forming a unique artistic language specifically tailored for young audiences. Schonmann (2011) emphasises that theatre for young people should develop its own characteristics and aesthetic language, creating meaning and excitement. The set designer, akin to actors and other contributors in the theatre, plays a pivotal role in communicating with the child audience. Design elements such as colour, lines, forms, and shape must align with children's ways of perceiving and using them, creating an aesthetic that resonates with the young audience.

Heft (1988) reinforces the importance of decisions taken in producing Children's Theatre, advocating for an understanding of how children exploit colours to read and understand designs. Waksler (1986) concurs, highlighting that decisions made within the scope of children's comprehension help them interpret their world differently from adults, allowing them to make decisions about design elements on their own terms. Effectively, the approach to set designs for children should foster playful yet meaningful and interactive spaces, inspiring intuitive and childlike interactions during theatrical experiences.

Slade (1973) emphasises that the best child play happens when opportunity and support are consciously provided by adult minds. Levy (1990) also underscores the responsibility designers hold in meeting the expectations of children's perceptions of the scenery, tailoring designs to correspond to their mental powers and sensory abilities. Wiencek (2009) further emphasises the designer's role in guiding the audience, asserting that if the audience is not following the lead, it means the designers have not done their jobs effectively.

Set designs for children should strike a balance between simplicity and intellectual engagement, capable of provoking their thoughts about the play. Simplicity, as mentioned by Arkhurst (2015), ensures that the design communicates ideas easily understood by children. These designs should convey messages about the period, setting, age of characters, among other elements, in a manner compatible with children's understanding abilities. Recognizing the diversity in age groups, designers must be aware of their target audience's age brackets, blending various elements to create a synergy in the design that effectively expresses the intended message.

Moreover, colour, an inseparable element of design, can be exclusively adopted to create a play's environment, reflecting its mood, characters, and atmosphere while contributing to the aesthetic and artistic enhancement of Children's Theatre. This focused use of colour allows designers to craft a visually stimulating and emotionally resonant theatrical experience for young audiences.

Appropriating Colours for Children

Appropriating colours for children involves considering how the use or application of colours aligns with a specific place, person, or occasion. The concept of appropriation in this context implies the deliberate arrangement of colours, their intensity, and the meaning they hold for children, all contributing to their appreciation and interest. This appropriation has the potential to enhance children's understanding of their environment and their relationship with it. Importantly, appropriating colours for children serves as a medium to effectively address their

aesthetic, physiological, and psychological needs, enabling them not only to internalise meanings but also to utilise colours for their interactions within a given context.

Colour specialists have defined several key elements in the appropriate use of colours, emphasising factors such as preferences, effectiveness, appropriateness, and suitability. Limited research has been conducted on colour within the framework of the term 'appropriate,' but its implications are significant. In the realm of children's environments, appropriation reflects the ideas, meanings, and values attached to elements that children use to enhance their communication within a given space. The contextual nature of appropriation, as seen in ecological psychology, highlights its significance, depending on how users intend to maximise it for their specific purposes. Thus, appropriation emerges as supremely important for the well-being of children, shaping their preferences, the meanings they derive, and how effectively they convey another layer of meaning and appreciation.

Elaborating on the term "appropriation" sets the stage for the study to delve into appropriating children's colour choices for the set design of Philip Ridley's play, *Feathers*. This will be detailed subsequently, outlining how these colour choices were utilised to achieve the study's purpose and enhance the essence of colour in children's set experiences. Appropriation, in the context of colours, signifies its suitability in application, meaning, and the conveyance of messages that enhance children's understanding while meeting their artistic needs. Its use should align with children's abilities, contributing to their development and improving their reactions and interactions within their environment. This exercise not only nurtures unique expressions in children but also guides them through satisfying moments in the world of the play, enriching their experiences and tuning their inner spirits.

METHODS

The researchers employed a combination of interviews and sampling methods to explore the impact of colours on children's set design preferences and their understanding of performances. The methods involved interviewing children to gather insights into their colour choices, which subsequently informed the colour scheme for the set design. Additionally, post-performance interviews were conducted to gauge the children's impressions, particularly focusing on the application of colours in the set design.

Recognizing the significance of various elements in children's performances, akin to adult performances, the research aimed to tailor the theatrical experience for children, considering their unique perspectives. The primary goal was to delve into the exploration of colours through the lens of children, aiming to create set designs that influence and enhance their understanding of performances.

The sampling method employed was quota sampling due to the homogeneous nature of the units involved – children within the age brackets of eight and thirteen (8–13) years old. The sample group comprised fifty (50) respondents from the Solid Rock Foundation School, a private school in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. To ensure representation, a subsample size of ten (10) respondents was drawn from each of the age brackets. The chosen sample falls within age brackets where children possess the cognitive capacity to express their thoughts effectively, use expressive language, and demonstrate sophisticated social interaction skills,

providing a comprehensive perspective on the impact of colours at developmental middle school and early adolescent age.

The research employed an artistic methodology within the realm of qualitative research, allowing for a reliance on intuition, inspiration, and imagination, as emphasised by Ukala (2006). This approach embraces artistic experientiality, a core aspect for artistic creation and interpretation, according to Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden (2005). The utilisation of this methodology facilitated the creation of exclusive set designs for the play *Feathers*, derived from a thorough analysis of the script and the designers' experiential insights. The artistic freedom provided by this method allowed the designer to conceptualise and inform the final designs through engaging in various design processes, as outlined by Gillette (2000).

Building on this, a discussion focused on the play *Feathers* was initiated. In a prior meeting with the children, the storyline of the play was shared to pique their interest, making it easier for them to comprehend the narrative during subsequent discussions. The children perceived the play as interesting, filled with both joy and sadness. The discussion centred on the characters, the setting, and the colour choices of the respondents, which would contribute to the set design. This approach aimed to reveal the nature of the characters and align their actions with the expectations of the audience. The discussion involved describing the characters and vividly detailing the setting to create images in the participants' imaginations of the individual locales required to complement the play's actions.

Furthermore, based on the pictorial descriptions of the individual set units, participants were encouraged to provide colour preferences for specific elements of the play. For instance, a majority of the participants from both age levels expressed unique colour preferences for Shylyla's house, including pink, yellow, purple, blue, and white. This collaborative and imaginative process allowed the children to actively contribute to the colour choices that would shape the visual elements of the play, enhancing their engagement and connection with the theatrical experience.

Synopsis of the Play *Feathers*

Feathers, an abridged version of Philip Ridley's play *Feathers in the Snow*, revolves around the central character, Lena, a young woman who finds herself caught in a love triangle between two young men – Stefan, a well-meaning suitor, and Jared, a strong and passionate individual. Lena's choice to accept Jared's love over Stefan's leads to a chain of events that significantly impact their lives. The turning point in the play occurs when Stefan, feeling rejected and desperate, resorts to frightening the couple's daughter, Shylyla. This traumatic experience renders Shylyla mute and motionless, trapped in a frozen silence born out of fear. The magical intervention of a blazer feather becomes the catalyst for Shylyla's healing, breaking the spell and restoring her happiness and ability to speak. Driven by love for his daughter, Jared decides to save her by abducting the prince's sacred blazerbird. However, this impulsive action triggers a series of consequences, including war, the loss of lives, and the displacement of people. In the aftermath of the chaos, Shylyla and the Blazerbird find themselves displaced and encounter Two two, who, driven by hunger from the days of war, satisfies his urges with the Blazerbird. Despite the loss of her dear friend, Shylyla decides to keep the remaining feathers of the Blazerbird, filling the void left by its absence. *Feathers* explores themes of love, sacrifice, loss, and the profound impact of choices on individuals and their relationships. The play weaves
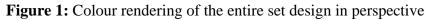
together a captivating narrative filled with magical elements and emotional depth, offering a poignant exploration of the human experience.

Set Design: Interpretation, Compositional Description and Analysis for the Production

The set interpretation, compositional description, and design analysis of the set for *Feathers* adopt a formalistic approach, focusing on the compositional elements and principles that constitute the visual language of the entire design. This formal approach involves analysing how the set is visually composed, coordinated, and assembled, considering elements such as unity, balance, harmony, proportion, variation, contrast, emphasis, and rhythm. As a production designed for children, the set consciously incorporates these elements to align with children's artistic expectations, grounding the design in the reality of their experiences and enhancing their understanding of the play's environment and the actors' actions.

To achieve this, a combination of curved lines, horizontal and vertical lines were employed to create both curvilinear and rectilinear shapes, predominantly forming the profile of one part of the set. Additionally, irregular lines were utilised to define the shapes and organic forms of the trees, consciously manipulated to convey the vibrant energy associated with children.

Figure 1: Colour rendering of the entire set design in perspective

Source: *Researchers' working journal*

The final set comprises five distinct locales, each representing a different exterior setting: a house for Shylyla, a ruined house, a path, a block of houses, and a forest. These locales are staged on an open 'proscenium-like' stage, measuring 15 feet in length by 33 feet in width, creating the impression that the audience views the actions on stage as if framed within a proscenium. The larger playing areas, such as the forest, path, and Jared's house, were strategically designed to accommodate most of the actions within the play, providing dynamic and visually engaging spaces for the unfolding narrative.

Colour Scheme Analysis and Interpretation

The colour scheme analysis and interpretation within the set design for *Feathers* highlight the role of colour as a vital medium of aesthetic communication. In this context, colour serves to unify all other elements within the design, contributing to the enlivening of the representational art concept for the play's set design. The intentional emphasis on colour's primacy is aimed at bringing forth the other compositional content of the set, directing attention to the descriptively evident aspects of the design. Here, the analysis delves into how children's colour choices and their associated connotations were carefully considered and set apart to appropriately complement the set for the actors. The colour scheme, therefore, plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall visual appeal of the set, aligning with the preferences and expectations of the target audience – children.

The use of colour as the undercurrent of the play establishes a strong connection between the main character, Shylyla, and her surroundings. This connection is achieved through the strategic use of medium saturation of colours, with a focus on appropriating colours based on children's preferences and meanings assigned to them. As highlighted earlier, the preferred colours for Shylyla's house include pink, yellow, purple, white, blue, and brown.

Figure 2: Colour rendering of Shylyla's house

Source: *Researchers' working journal*

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the dominant use of pink, particularly in the expansive area of Shylyla's house, serves to emphasise her character and condition. Children characterised Shylyla as a little princess who loves colours, particularly pink. Eiseman (2006) identifies pink as a representation of innocence, love, and sweetness in a child, aligning with the meanings assigned by the children. The pink hue creates emphasis on Shylyla's character as the princess of the home, reflecting the love and compassion her parents have for her and establishing an emotional connection between parents and their children's needs.

The yellow hue, used to wash the door area, enhances its appearance, making it seem larger. According to the participant (the children), yellow signifies happiness, joy, gold, and brightness. In the design, the yellow hue serves as an accent, symbolising the limit of Shylyla's joy and movement confined to the house. The complementary relationship between the yellow and purple hues adds harmony to the design. Parker and Smith (2003) note that complementary colours appear directly opposite each other on the colour wheel, and the balance achieved between the warm yellow and the cool purple contributes to the overall vibrancy of the design. The contrast between these two colours not only maintains balance but also makes the design visually appealing to a diverse audience. Essentially, the thoughtful appropriation of colours based on children's perceptions and meanings adds depth to Shylyla's environment, enhancing the audience's engagement and understanding of her character within the play.

The participants' association of blue with representations of the sky, loneliness, and soothing qualities guided its use in the simulated window design. The blue hue was strategically employed to proportionally segment the window into four equal parts, contributing to the overall balance of the design. Brewster and Shafer (2011) highlight that balance in design provides restfulness or stability, aligning with the serene and calm qualities attributed to the colour blue. In this context, blue serves as a visual metaphor reflecting Shylyla's defrosted or cold situation, symbolising her emotional state before the vibrant sunset hues bring her to life.

Blue, identified as cool and calming, complements the warm tones of pink, yellow, purple, and white, representing the blazing sunset. Funch (2000) emphasises that children choose colours to express their emotions, and the use of blue in this design effectively communicates Shylyla's cold disposition. The recurring white curved lines running along the door and below the window reinforce Shylyla's psychological state, symbolising the revival of hope in her unresponsive condition. These white lines contribute to the harmony in the design, aligning with Funch's notion that achieving harmony in children's art increases their growing sense of confidence.

The relationship between warm hues (pink and yellow) and cool hues (purple, white, and blue) not only achieves harmony but also reflects children's immersion in play. Funch (2000) suggests that creating harmony in children's art enhances their confidence, and the vibrant colours in the design captivate the children, enhancing the overall performance experience.

Furthermore, the choice of colours allowed the children to enter the protagonist's psychological consciousness, fostering empathy with Shylyla's outer reality within the play's action. The contrasting brown hue used for the cellar prevents easy identification by soldiers searching for Blazerbird, symbolising the lengths Jared and Lena go to protect their daughter. It also foreshadows the displacement of the entire family, emphasising the house as a symbol of emotions and stability, where the basic needs of children are significantly pursued.

In effect, the thoughtful application of colours in the design not only reflects the emotional states of the characters but also engages the children by creating a visually appealing and harmonious environment within the play.

In portraying the neighbours' abode, the chosen colour palette, derived from the children's preferences, was expanded through mixing and blending to create the block of houses, as illustrated in Figure 3 below. The proportions of each shape relative to others conveyed the idea of proximity, establishing a visual connection and mutual relationship between the

neighbouring houses. While the arrangement of shapes was rigid and monotonous, the introduction of varied colours added a sense of harmony to express them in a visually engaging manner. Block and Wolf (2013) suggest that harmony in design brings order to disorder, organising unrelated objects into groups with sequential relationships.
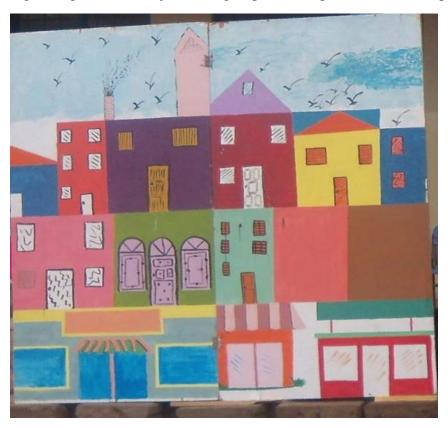

Figure 3: Colour rendering of the simulated block of houses

Source: *Researchers' working journal*

The variation in colours within the block of houses aimed to avoid a bland visual experience and instead engage children, fostering a sense of order and beauty in the design. The harmony achieved contributes to creating a visually appealing environment that captivates the children's attention and enhances their overall perception of the play's setting. According to Waddell (2020), children often translate their experiences in an impressive way, and the block of houses becomes a meaningful representation for them, signifying that each neighbour has a home within this communal structure.

The individual colours and their arrangement form a collage image, guiding the children's eyes over the variety of colours and contributing to the vibrant visual appeal of the block of houses. This representation aligns with Waddell's notion that children interpret their experiences in a distinctive manner, finding meaning and value in the visual elements presented to them. As Allison (2013) notes, art is created to convey meanings and harbour values that transcend their material base, emphasising the significance of representational art as an effective means of communication for children.

Figure 4 is a ruined house and the colour scheme comprises orange, orange-red, blue, white, and black. The analogous nature of the orange-red and orange hues created a harmonious palette that is aesthetically pleasing.

Figure 4: Colour rendering of the ruined house

Source: *Researchers' working journal*

The addition of blue stripes, especially around the door area, served to complement the orange hue and added visual interest to the design. Despite the expectation of using darker values for a ruined house, the introduction of these colours, suggested by some of the participants, conveyed the idea that the house was once beautiful before its ruin. The blue stripes played a significant role in portraying the confusion that had affected the occupants of the house due to the unrest caused by the loss of the king's blazerbird. While the overall colour scheme was harmonious, the introduction of the blue stripes provided a contrasting element that enhanced visual interest and conveyed the idea of turmoil within the design. The thick jagged lines in black reinforced the effect of a ruined house and, in contrast with the harmonious colours, emphasised the devastation caused by war. The use of white helped to break the monotony of the orange hues, creating variation and symbolising the desolation of what was once a stable home, now rendered uninhabitable.

The design of the ruined house aimed to evoke a sense of contrast, emphasising the impact of war on the environment and the displacement of its inhabitants. The carefully chosen colour palette and the incorporation of contrasting elements contributed to the overall aesthetic appeal and conveyed the intended narrative about the ruined house.

The next design in focus is a path and the colour treatment focused on green and brown hues, symbolising nature and vegetation, according to the participants interpretations. The darker green patches in the path design created the impression of a once grassy path that had been frequently trodden, subtly blending with the overall colour composition of the forest. The

deliberate choice of colours for the path aimed to evoke a natural and familiar environment while maintaining visual continuity with the surrounding forest.

The design of the path utilised brown and a darker shade of green to represent the ground, creating a visual impression of the earth. This choice of colours aimed to convey the idea of a natural and familiar path, symbolising the healthy relationship and bond between the neighbours who frequently gathered along the path to share comments on the story. The brown hue specifically stood for the strong connection and camaraderie that existed among the characters. In line with the play's narrative, the path was a meeting point for the neighbours, highlighting their shared efforts to collect fruits, leaves, and flowers to alleviate Lena's pain during childbirth. Both the green and brown hues symbolised the healing effect of nature on individuals and their surroundings.

In the treatment of the forest theme, darker values of colours such as black, brown, and green were employed, along with higher values of a few other hues. The dominant use of green conveyed the concept of a forest, contributing to the representational nature of the design. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: The forest rendered in colour

Source: *Researchers' working journal*

This colour choice aimed to create a believable environment for the children, grounding the play in a setting that they could easily recognize and relate to. The emphasis on child-friendly colours for the trees within the forest design aimed to stimulate the children's imagination and make the overall experience more engaging for them. By incorporating recognizable elements from nature, such as trees, the forest design contributed to the immersive and captivating nature of the play for its young audience.

The design of the forest incorporated natural elements like trees, water, and animals, aiming to appeal to children's familiarity with and experiences in nature. The two large dead trees were

depicted using a darker brown hue to convey the impression of lifelessness. To inject some semblance of life into these trees, a similar value of green was applied to certain parts, as green is commonly associated with vitality and nature. Additionally, green, black, and brown hues were randomly applied to the trunks of coconut trees and other tree types, creating aesthetic appeal and variety in the design.

A lighter value of grey hue was employed to simulate the appearance of tree bark on the branchless trees, enhancing the tactile feel of their surfaces. This arbitrary use of colours not only contributed to the visual aesthetics of the design but also reflected children's inclination to use colours in a subjective and expressive manner. Stewart (2008) suggests that the arbitrary use of colours in designs serves various purposes such as facilitating learning, representation, and allowing for children's self-expression. The application of green, brown, and black hues in an arbitrary fashion helped to exaggerate the design features, introduce variety, and align them with the representational concept tailored for children. The repetitive use of these colours connected different parts of the design, promoting harmony and unity while generating focus and interest for the children.

Overall, the forest design aimed to evoke a sense of hope and optimism, emphasising Jared as the central figure, bringing hope to his daughter. It highlighted his role as a responsible father willing to take risks, such as venturing into the forbidden forest against the king's orders, to ensure the safety of his family. The portrayal of Jared's courageous encounter in the forest added a dynamic and visually appealing dimension to the overall image, creating an engaging experience for the children.

The colours preferred by the children, along with their associated meanings, were effectively utilised in the set design to illustrate the mutual relationship between characters and the play's environment. These colours played a crucial role in stimulating the children's attention, helping them understand the connection between characters and their surroundings. The subtle gradation in colour, from bright hues for the block of houses, ruined house, and Shylyla's house to lower-value colours for the forest, contributed to a balanced design and created a sense of movement across the stage.

The colours also revealed other design elements such as lines, shapes, and forms in a geometric manner, preparing the ambiance for the young audience before the actors' entrance and fostering an intimate atmosphere for their enjoyment. The chosen colours demonstrated their interrelation with the significance of the feathers in the life of the main character, Shylyla. The therapeutic role of colour in reviving Shylyla's unresponsive condition mirrored the healing effect of colours on children, creating an aesthetically appealing environment for their set experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study successfully delved into the realm of colour from the perspective of children, contributing to the development of colour content for the set design of the play *Feathers*. The purposeful use of colours elicited varied aesthetic, psychological, and physiological responses in the young audience, addressing their physical and aesthetic needs. Awareness of the target audience's preferences and connotations associated with colours played a vital role in creating a meaningful, interactive, and interpretable set design, showcasing the significant contribution of set design to the artistic and aesthetic functions of Children's Theatre.

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