

On screen, the Marvel Universe is brought to life through elaborate special effects and camera tricks. Onstage, it is important to have a clear vision and to think theatrically when stepping into the world of superpowers and super villains. When realizing your vision for this play, consider the following:

CREATE A CONCEPT

Whether through the use of projections or with a set made from recycled materials, when bringing heightened reality to life onstage, a strong directorial concept is key. The theatrical elements you choose to use should match the scale of your production and these choices should remain consistent throughout the play. No matter what your directorial concept is, remember that part of the excitement of theatrical effects is the audience seeing how the effect works. Knowing how something works – and how clever the directorial choices are – is part of the fun!

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

One way to give a nod to the roots of the story is by reflecting the colorful two-dimensional comic book world in design elements and directorial concept. You can create action signs out of foam core that read “Bam!,” “Pow!,” etc., and have members of your ensemble use them to accentuate action-packed moments in fight sequences. You can also incorporate pre-recorded sound effects, or create live sound effects (think onstage Foley art) to heighten the action and call back to the comic book world. See the stage combat document for tips on fight choreography.

EMBRACE THE ILLUSIONS

Utilize costumes, sets, puppetry, props, and even members of your company to bring fantastical moments to life onstage.

MANIPULATING SIZE AND SCALE

When size and scale are important to the storytelling, a simple shift in level onstage can do the trick. One character standing on a raised block while others remain on the stage floor can give the impression of one being physically larger than the others. Puppetry can also be a great tool. Using a puppet to portray a character can allow them to do things a human actor could not, like fly, crawl up a wall, or appear far smaller or larger than another character. Remember, one character can be portrayed in many different ways throughout the show.

UTILIZING YOUR CAST

The actors’ delivery and reactions will be the most important element in the storytelling, but consider other ways you can use the ensemble to help create this comic book world. Manipulate props, set pieces, or even other actors in order to achieve different effects. Actors can also be an incredible source of inspiration. Encourage them to share their ideas for trickier moments!

CHANGING LOCATIONS

When shifting from one location to another, one time to another, or even one reality to another, be sure to be consistent in the convention you use to denote this shift. When changing locations, consider using backdrops or flats with casters that can rotate to suggest the shift or use projections for a very quick and efficient transition. To clearly portray multiple locations onstage at once, consistently block scenes set in the same location in the same areas of the stage. Lighting shifts can make transitions from a realistic setting to a more heightened reality clearer to the audience. Adding music to underscore transitions can also help the audience track the story.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

In the theater, all you need to put on a show is a story to tell, actors to tell it, and an audience to hear it. In this spirit, these plays can be successfully produced with minimal production elements. Actors can bring in items of clothing from home that speak to the character they play. Different characters or ensemble groups can be dressed in distinct color palates in order to delineate them from one another. Key props can also be sourced from everyday household items.

Since many of the Marvel Spotlight plays include similar locations (e.g., high school, bedroom, city streets, etc.), a unit set can serve two or more plays produced in one evening or in rep. Consider platforms on two or more levels to provide visual variation, and add a bed, locker, desk, etc., to anchor location simply and effectively. Lighting, then, can help transition the story between locations, as can music. Consider underscoring action sequences and transitions to keep the pacing tight and to establish mood.

If your performance space has access to an upstage screen, you may consider renting the projection package of Marvel background artwork, which can keep transitions simple and your audience's focus on the play. For more information, contact your Samuel French licensing agent.

When it comes to staging your show, the simplest choices can often be the most effective. By keeping the focus on the story and aiming for clear dramatic beats, added moments of theatrical magic or creative special effects will be even more powerful. If you choose to add technical elements into your production, make sure they are always in service of the story. They should enhance and clarify the storytelling rather than distract the audience from the action happening onstage.