ista | Global Learning Through the Arts

ista FESTIVAL

FESTIVAL FRAMEWORK

Integrating Core Components for Meaningful Festival Experiences

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Introduction

ISTA festivals are immersive, multidimensional journeys for students and educators. At their heart are four interwoven components that provide structure, purpose, and creative provocation. When thoughtfully combined, these elements elevate the learning experience and uphold ISTA's values of ensemble practice, intercultural understanding, and artistic inquiry.

The ISTA Festival Framework serves as both a guiding philosophy and a practical structure. It ensures clarity, coherence, and pedagogical depth across all festivals. It is more than a planning tool — it is a unifying statement of artistic inquiry that connects creative choices to broader educational goals and global learning through the arts.

Each festival becomes a "living curriculum" — a cog in ISTA's larger educational mission — embedding research, practice, and values into a vibrant, student-centred, collaborative process.

Core festival components

- ISTA Global Challenge – ***The Why***
- Festival Story – ***The What***
- Cultural Experience – ***The Where***
- Area of Learning – ***The How***

ISTA Global Challenge – *The Why*

Why is this big idea worth exploring together?

The ISTA Global Challenge is an annual provocation that unites all festivals under a shared, globally relevant theme. Designed to be active, imaginative, and thought-provoking, these challenges ignite inquiry, critical thinking, and artistic response. More than a passive topic, each Global Challenge acts as a call to action — encouraging young people to explore urgent global issues through the lens of the arts. It invites them to question, reflect, and create in ways that connect the personal with the political, the local with the global.

To support local relevance and creative depth, each festival interprets the Global Challenge through a **Festival Focus** — a sub-theme that offers a more specific lens or conceptual entry point into the wider provocation. The Festival Focus helps shape the festival's inquiry question(s), anchoring the exploration in the unique context of its story, setting, and ensemble. These sub-themes ensure that while all festivals contribute to a unified global conversation, each remains distinct — culturally grounded and artistically authentic.

Together, the Global Challenge and Festival Focus form the conceptual foundation of every ISTA festival, providing the throughline that connects the Festival Story, Cultural Experience, and Area of Learning. This layered approach to exploration ensures that students are not only responding to meaningful ideas — they are doing so in ways that are reflective, relevant, and creatively rigorous.

Core Festival Components

Cultural Experience - *The Where*

Where are we grounded and inspired?

A localised, meaningful encounter with the people, places, and culture of the host city. More than a field trip, the Cultural Experience roots the festival in a sense of place and shared memory. It provides a common reference point for all participants — regardless of background — and becomes a source of collective inspiration throughout the creative process.

In a global community of disparate perspectives, it is the moment of convergence — grounding us here, together, now.

Festival Story - *The What*

What story guides our exploration?

The Festival Story is a shared, open-ended narrative or conceptual structure that sparks curiosity, provokes imagination, and guides collaborative theatre-making. It offers a culturally accessible entry point and is open to interpretation across diverse student backgrounds.

It may take the form of a myth, a poetic idea, a set of images, a quote, or a thematic motif — but always serves as the central creative stimulus for exploration. It grounds the work in meaning while allowing students and artists to shape the form and content of their theatrical response.

Area of Learning - *The How*

How are we learning & developing through the art form?

The Area of Learning identifies the core artistic skills, techniques, or creative processes that shape student development during the festival. It is not a theme or topic — it is the method of exploration. This is where ISTA's pedagogy becomes practice.

This component asks:

- What specific theatre skills or competencies are we developing?
- How are we growing as creative collaborators?
- Which artistic tools are we applying and reflecting on?

Examples of Areas of Learning include:

- Physical storytelling and chorus-based ensemble work
- Non-verbal and gestural communication
- Theatre design and the use of space as narrative
- Improvisation, devising, and collective creation

The Area of Learning provides clarity on how the festival engages students as artists. It also supports the intentional development of soft, transferable skills such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, confidence, and creative thinking.

Crucially, the Area of Learning aligns with the Festival Story and Global Challenge, ensuring that students are not only exploring powerful ideas but doing so through structured, skill-rich, and developmentally appropriate artistic practice.

Festival Framework Statement

Each ISTA festival is anchored by a **Festival Framework Statement** — a concise, guiding narrative that integrates all four components into a single, coherent line of inquiry.

This framing statement becomes the **north star** — shaping planning, delivery, reflection, and communication across the life of the event.

Why the festival framework matters

- **Deepens artistic and educational outcomes**
  Fosters student skill-building, reflective inquiry, and authentic creative growth.
- **Strengthens global and cultural connections**
  Bridges the local with the global, enhancing intercultural understanding through grounded experiences.
- **Offers clarity, structure, and provocation**
  Supports the creative journey with a well-defined entry point and a meaningful direction.
- **Aligns with ISTA's core values**
  Embeds ensemble-based learning, inquiry-led theatre-making, and student-centred pedagogy in every festival.

Connecting to the ISTA Ensemble Method

The Festival Framework and the ISTA Ensemble Method are intrinsically linked. The Framework provides the structure — the "what, why, where, and how" of each festival. The Ensemble Method brings that structure to life through a dynamic process of shared ownership, exploration, risk-taking, and collaborative creation.

The Framework sets the direction.
The Ensemble Method becomes the journey.

Together, they ensure every ISTA festival is an intentional, embodied, and transformative act of global learning through the arts.

An Arts Framework Designed to Support Inquiry-Based Learning

The ISTA Festival Framework is intentionally designed to foster inquiry-based learning by placing big ideas, real-world contexts, and artistic skill-building at the heart of each festival experience. Rooted in the principles of conceptual learning, the framework empowers students to explore globally relevant provocations through imaginative, student-centred theatre-making. Each of its four components — the Global Challenge, Festival Story, Cultural Experience, and Area of Learning — guides learners through a structured yet open-ended journey of questioning, exploration, and creative response.

By engaging with concepts through embodied, collaborative processes, students don't simply learn about the world — they make meaning of it through artistic practice. This approach nurtures deep conceptual understanding while developing transferable skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Aligned with international models of holistic learner development, the ISTA Festival Framework ensures that young people leave each festival not only with a richer understanding of theatre, but with a stronger sense of identity, empathy, and global awareness.

EXPLORE MORE

Discover how the ISTA Ensemble Method transforms arts learning

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