
AS

Drama and Theatre

7261/W – Interpreting Drama
Report on the Examination

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General Points

Examiners reported seeing some very good scripts from well-prepared students who had clearly been given the opportunity to practice writing on their set texts and live productions in timed conditions on many occasions throughout the course. There were also instances of student work that suggested that these opportunities had been limited.

Some students were able to quote both from their set texts (and from productions seen), to support well-structured and focused responses. Others either failed to quote at all or approached quotation in a way that was unhelpful in supporting their ideas. Unsuccessful use of the text includes:

- referring to page numbers
- using truncated quotations separated by ellipses
- quoting individual words and phrases that could come from any part of the play.

There were several instances of scripts where students appeared not to have appreciated that Section A is marked out of 50 marks, whereas Section B is worth 30 marks in total. Students who divided their time equally between the two sections were unlikely to achieve the same degree of success as those who took the differential into account.

In both Sections A and B, students have to answer two questions. They should not repeat the introductions that they have written for Part 1 in their answers to Part 2 – time spent doing this could have been much better utilized in developing specific examples to support the focus of the question. Examiners reported seeing this occurring very frequently.

Teachers are reminded that in both Sections A and B, students should provide sketches if they are answering questions on design. Examiners reported seeing relatively few sketches.

Section A

All questions in Section A are divided into 2 parts. Part 1 **requires** reference to the social, cultural and/or historical context of the play. Part 2 does **not**. If students omit to refer to social, cultural and/or historical context in Part 1, they are unlikely to access the higher mark bands. Reference to context in Part 2 may well be made relevant to the thrust of the question and therefore attract credit but will not compensate for not having addressed context in Part 1. It is therefore imperative that students are prepared to refer **usefully** to social, cultural and/or historical context in Part 1.

Whilst it is important for the student to demonstrate contextual knowledge, a page (or sometimes more) of generic information relating to the background to the play or its genre rarely allowed the student the time to then fully answer the question as set. The most successful responses were those where the knowledge was embedded into the body of the answer at appropriate moments. Examiners reported seeing much pre-prepared material on social, cultural and/or historical context which added nothing to the student's approach to the question.

The wording of the second part of questions in Section A are:

Explain how you would (perform/direct/design) **a different section of the play**.

Examiners reported seeing several instances where students wrote about several different moments taken from several different parts of the play. In these cases, examiners were only able to credit the most successful moment taken from a single 'different' section of the play. If students wrote, in Part 2, about a moment from the same section as that prescribed for Part 1, the work

attracted no credit. Many examiners reported that students failed to write to the specific focus of the question and this resulted in responses that were generalised and lacking in precision. The focus of the question is there to support the student, i.e. in the time allotted it should enable a well-prepared student to write about only one aspect of the play.

Students should also note that in questions that demand an audience response, this should be considered actively rather than merely suggesting what an audience should see or understand about a character. Conversely some students emphasised the audience response in questions that did not require this, thereby resulting in a lack of focus. When considering the strategies that are used to convey meaning, students would be well-advised to consider the appropriateness of their ideas and their compatibility with either the characters' function or the action of the section.

The best responses were precise in terms of discussing the vocal and physical qualities required to deliver the text. However examiners reported many instances where students made comments relating to pitch, tone and volume that not only appeared to reveal a lack of understanding regarding the mechanics of acting but also relied heavily on assertion to create the desired effect.

In order to avoid a 'disjointed' response to the question, students should aim to work methodically through the specified section avoiding a 'snapshot' approach. Frequently students spent far too long on the opening of the section with the result being that they then only touched upon other, often, more significant elements of the text.

For Part Two a 'section is defined as a continuous unit of action, interaction, monologue or dialogue extending beyond a single page of text.' Examiners reported instances of students writing about less than this, which clearly limited the success of the response.

Finally examiners reported seeing some confusion regarding theatrical terms and some poor expression. The word 'proxemic' was endemic, with students writing about actors opening, closing, widening, narrowing and heightening their proxemics when actually they would be advised to simply say 's/he moved closer to....'. Both this word and the word 'gait' were rarely used correctly and in the latter case, frequently spelt incorrectly.

Questions

Section A

Sophocles: *Antigone*

Question: 01.1

A small number of students tackled this question. Invariably these were weaker answers than those to option 2. Sketches were occasionally, but not uniformly, provided. Some students revealed a secure knowledge of the conventions of the classical Greek stage; others did not.

This question attracted some 'transpositions' of the action. It was not immediately apparent how the play would be served by setting Creon's palace in a casino and Antigone's 'tomb' in a lock-up garage, situated beneath the casino. Some answers revealed many contradictory ideas, beginning with a bare stage and an altar but somehow transitioning into a full-scale tiered mountain side as the answer progressed with the inevitable tiering section to accommodate royalty, chorus and 'commoners'. Many students offered focus on things that would not be considered to be 'set design' – lighting, dead bodies, costumes etc.

Question: 01. 2

Responses to this question were generally not particularly successful. Most students chose the final scene but there was little precision in considering what the preferred effects were or indeed how these would be achieved. As with part one there was frequently a loss of focus with students straying from set design.

Question: 02.1 and 2

This was the most popular question on the paper. Some good answers were seen. Most students chose to focus on audience responses of sympathy or admiration for Ismene however some even suggested that the audience should despise her for trying to steal Antigone's glory. Students who suggested a positive response were more likely to be able to create performance ideas that would succeed in eliciting this response. Those who wanted the audience to hate Ismene struggled with the details especially if they actually wrote about how individual lines would be delivered, which sadly, even in more appropriate audience responses, was all too often not the case.

Social, cultural and/or historical elements tended to focus on the position of women in Ancient Greek society. Better answers also included focus on the significance of burial in the society and the role of the gods. Better answers included several short, pithy quotations supporting precise performance ideas selected from different moments in the prescribed section that took the reader from Ismene's entrance on stage, her confession of guilt, her appeal to Antigone, her reproof of Creon and her removal by guards.

The best answers revealed Ismene's state of mind and elicited quite a complex response from the audience. Weaker answers did not see complexity in the role and went for simple and often predictable or clichéd ideas.

Shakespeare: *Much Ado about Nothing***Question: 03.1 and 2**

No students attempted this question.

Question: 04.1

Examiners reported seeing some good answers to this question. Students were divided between those who tried to show how Beatrice's attitude towards Benedick was changing in the course of this scene and those who were comparing her attitude in this scene to her earlier feelings about Benedick. Examiners credited both approaches.

Social, cultural and/or historical elements tended to be about the need for women to marry and Beatrice's unconventional approach to love and marriage and where this was embedded into practical ideas, there were some very good details.

There was some sensitive detail on the interaction between Beatrice and Benedick with due attention to her listening and response at the beginning of the section as well as the oft quoted lines in which she demanded Benedick to 'Kill Claudio'. Weaker answers would not let Beatrice soften her attitude towards Benedick and/or saw it as a defeat and in these cases defiantly attempted to make the focus of the question into a response about her power and control.

Question: 04.2

Popular choices were Beatrice's opening scene with the Messenger and her first interaction with Benedick. Some subtlety in re: Beatrice knew Benedick 'of old' and had had her heart broken and

these answers led to some discussions that revealed appropriate audience responses of admiration, sympathy and amusement.

Goldoni: *The Servant of Two Masters*

Question: 05.1

This was the less popular of the two questions on this text and many students who tackled it did not actually deal with the focus of the question; the comic climax, preferring instead to spend time on the opening section when Truffaldino tells Smeraldina to be patient. There was also considerable misunderstanding of what constitutes a lazzi with much cartwheeling and back flipping often at times that would actually slow down the build to a comic climax.

Those students who took a more directorial overview tended to include Florindo and Beatrice but none of the others in the scene, a considerable lack of overview was evident.

Social, cultural and/or historical aspects tended to be focused on the history of commedia and/or Goldoni's revolutionary abandonment of masks in a move towards 'naturalism'. Others overly focused on Truffaldino's motivation of 'sex and food'.

One or two reasonable answers drew comedy from Truffaldino's antics.

Question: 05.2

Some students appeared to be perplexed about Part 2 and turned it into a performer's question. Silvio's role was not fully understood but most got 'soppy'. The scene with Pantalone in Lombardi's courtyard was the most frequently selected often with an over emphasis on 'sulking'.

Question: 06.1

This question was tackled by very few students and those that did so with only limited success. Social, cultural and/or historical references tended to be about the commedia role of Il Capitano or about Goldoni's revolutionary changes to the improvised skit and, perhaps surprisingly, there was very little attention on the letters. Answers to this response frequently had a limited attention to delivery of lines with more focus on Truffaldino's antics than on Florindo.

Question: 06.2

The majority of students chose the scene with the trunks and the 'discovery' of Beatrice's death. This received quite good treatment with apt focus on Florindo's flood of grief; wailing, cushion-biting and suicidal tendencies.

Ibsen: *Hedda Gabler*

Question: 07.1

Many students wrote with reasonable assurance about Tesman's character. Better students saw him as a self-absorbed but second-rate academic whose 'love' for Hedda was built on the illusion that their relationship is normal. Interpretations, when stated, saw him as a 'mummy's (aunt's) boy' who has never grown up. Many students viewed him as loyal to Eilert and with a strict understanding of the difference between right and wrong.

Some interesting responses recognised his fear of Hedda and what he was beginning to see she is capable of. Those students who were less probing in their approach to the text wrote about his deeply romantic love for Hedda and suggested that he worships her. Some suggested that he had a brilliant mind.

Almost all considered him boring and some said he is meant to be irritating, whilst others stated their erroneous belief that Tesman is a pillar of the aristocracy, revealing a lack of understanding of the role.

Many of the students who answered this question, however, did not explicitly identify their interpretation of his character at all nor did they use the text sufficiently, with some using only one or two word quotations.

Social, cultural and/or historical elements tended to be about the role of women in the nineteenth century and their lack of authority both within and outside the home.

Some completely misunderstood the context of the opening of the prescribed section. Some suggested that he has a hangover; some that he has stolen Eilert's manuscript and in one or two cases, that this was the first time the audience had seen the character.

Question: 07.2

The majority of students selected the section where Hedda persuades Tesman that she has burnt the manuscript for his sake alone. They focused on his weakness and gullibility. There were a few good realisations of Tesman, pulling himself up or revealing excitement when it dawned on him that Hedda might actually love him. The prospect of the baby and Tesman's astounded reaction to the news also elicited some apt practical suggestions.

Other students selected the scene in Act One where Tesman weakly allows Hedda to insult Aunt Julle and stands by, letting it happen. This was generally not done especially well, and the chosen section was a little too brief to be treated purposefully.

Several students focused on the end of Act One and on Tesman's line about Hedda's reliance on General Gabler's pistols. 'For my sake, eh Hedda?' – these answers tended to be very short and under-developed.

Question: 08.1

Although this question was less popular it was sometimes more successfully achieved, the direction of the play's climax sometimes contained good detail. Judge Brack attracted the most detailed attention and his interaction with Hedda in discussion over the pistols and the imminent scandal generated some effective practical suggestions.

Good answers considered Brack's physical, as well as verbal, intimidation of Hedda as he loomed over her, sitting on the stool, staring ahead blankly. Brack twirling his moustache or adjusting his monocle in a self-satisfied way as Hedda's steely determination shifted from survival to self-annihilation was occasionally very well captured.

Some did not appreciate that Hedda's insistence on 'tidying' her desk was a ploy to retrieve the second pistol. There was also some misunderstanding of the relationship between Tesman and Thea at this point in the play, as some would-be directors had them giggling together at the writing desk with Tesman's hands inching towards Thea's as they attempted to make a start reconstructing the manuscript. Some good work was seen on Hedda's discomfiture at the prospect of evenings spent with Brack.

Social, cultural and/or historical aspects were again mainly devoted to 'a woman's place' with only a very few noting Ibsen's interest in heredity (a nineteenth century preoccupation) or in the

commercial necessity of Hedda marrying a man who represented everything about the bourgeoisie that she despised.

Brecht: *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

Question: 09.1

There were few responses to this question, many of which demonstrated very restricted and often incorrect reference to Brechtian theory based often on work seen in their own centres. The assertion that Brecht always adopted a 'minimalistic' set is untrue and students would be advised to look at Casper Nehar's designs for some of Brecht's work in order to recognise this. Sadly therefore, many of the set designs for this answer suggested little more than an empty stage and a few, inappropriately used, placards. Very little attention was paid to the question's demand to accommodate the need for different locations as everything was set in the same space but with a not-so-subtle use of placards.

Question: 09.2

By choosing to adopt a bare stage many students then found it difficult to make any informed decisions for a different part of the play and the idea that a set can create preferred effects, was almost completely ignored. However there were a handful of responses where students had clearly thought about how a set design might be used to create the chosen effects in a different section of the play to that discussed for the previous question.

Question: 10.1

This was the more popular of the two questions on this text and all but a few students understood the function of the Fat Prince. There were some attempts to demonstrate his selfishness but, once again, there was considerable misunderstanding, explanation and use of Brechtian acting concepts. Gestus was used to convey anything that was vaguely related to character and Spass was interpreted as meaning anything that was comic with no recognition of the notion of juxtaposition. Students should be aware that 'Slap and Tickle' is not a term that Brecht ever used.

In relation to multi-roling, costumes were changed on-stage, of course, but as this often included a 'fat-suit' disrobing, were potentially less than easy. The Monk often made a very brief but drunken appearance in answers to this question.

As with the previous question, social, cultural and/or historical understanding was generalised 'Brecht', with some students also writing about his exile and the rise of Hitler.

Question: 10.2

The Fat Prince's encounter with Azdak was not tackled well, with many examiners reporting the impression that students did not really understand the plot of the play, why Azdak should be involved in the 'election' of a new judge or why the clipped speech was so important.

Fo: *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*

Question: 11.1

Unfortunately this question was not often undertaken with a great deal of success. Many students clearly engaged with the text and had some understanding of the Maniac's character, however they often failed to get to grips with the focus of how he manipulates the other characters, instead describing his action (often quite comic) but almost lacking in any reference to the other characters on stage with him.

Question: 11.2

Answers to this part of the question were generally more successful as most students were able to offer a preferred audience response. However, as indicated in the general remarks at the start of this report, a response should be active – not merely ‘showing’ the audience something. Another quite frequent error with this question was the lack of explanation as to the context of the section being considered and/or very short sections which barely fulfilled the rubric.

Questions 12.1 and 12.2

No students attempted this question.

Butterworth: *Jerusalem***Question: 13.1**

Examiners reported seeing some reasonable answers to this question; students clearly relished Johnny’s anti-authoritarian stance and his use of obscenities. There was sometimes some quite subtle engagement with the ways in which Johnny shifts his approach to Fawcett and Parsons and how his attitudes vary from insouciance to downright insult and then, surprisingly, include a kind of hurt defensiveness when he hears about the petition.

Social, cultural and/or historical references were about Englishness and/or about the real-life model of Johnny (from Pewsey) that Butterworth based the play on.

Question: 13.2

Most students chose the end of the play and his talk with Marky and there were some reasonable details of how the final incantation might be delivered in order to create the impact of shock. Unfortunately many students wrote in very descriptive terms for this, often with a lack of reference to Johnny’s performance – resorting to more generalised directorial methods.

Question: 14.1

Examiners reported seeing only a handful of responses to this question. Of those that did attempt it, the chief problem was a lack of precision with only very generalised directorial ideas which often lapsed into little more than narrative.

Question: 14.2

Whilst the few students who did attempt this question revealed some understanding of Phaedra’s character there was little recognition of the control she has over Johnny and even less understanding of how this might be conveyed in performance. Students should be aware of the need to ensure they have enough knowledge of all the characters in their chosen text, even those that might be considered more ‘minor’.

Section B**Live Theatre Production**

Examiners reported that many students were unprepared to answer on both acting and design questions or had failed to recognise that each was worth the same number of marks and therefore answers of roughly equal length are needed in order to achieve well on this part of the exam. It is also important that the chosen production offers opportunities for both parts of the question. It is vital that students choose an appropriate production for the question and are able to discuss the moments being considered in some detail, with precise reference to the focus of the question.

In preparation, students would be advised to consider how best to concisely explain the context of the moments being discussed so that examiners have a sense of what is being described/analysed.

Students should consider how they communicate their understanding of both the work of designers and of performers. Mark schemes contain useful details of the type of vocabulary/concepts that a student might discuss. However, it is equally important that these terms are understood and not merely quoted parrot fashion. The same point that was made in Section A regarding meeting the focus of the question applies equally to this part of the paper. Finally, some students failed to realise that they needed to answer both sections of the question on one production.

Popular productions this series included *Things I Know To Be True*, *People, Places, Things*, streamed productions of *Hamlet*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts* and *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk*. Students have about 50 minutes to answer two questions requiring analysis and evaluation of two completely distinct aspects of a chosen production. It was obvious from some of the weak and very weak scripts seen that many students had only seen **one** production during their course and that they effectively had no opportunity to match the most appropriate production to the demands of the question.

Question: 15.1

This was quite a popular choice, although not always done well. Some students wrote about *Warhorse* discussing, with some clarity, the sounds of artillery and horses whinnying and whining linked comparatively well to a mood of terror. Some more successful answers related to the noise of crowd reactions to the fire in *Ghosts*, discussing a mood of fear and terror, developing into the full-on sound effect of the flames destroying the orphanage.

Some wrote about scenes from the modern adaptation (Actors of Dionysus) of *Antigone*; clashing swords and actor generated/recorded sounds of Eteocles and Polyneices destroying one another at the beginning of the play and Antigone's 'cage'/prison doors slamming later.

Unfortunately many answers tended to lack the necessary technical detail to create a convincing impression of what they had witnessed on stage, although a minority did understand how the sounds had been created and amplified to maximise an effect for the audience. There was some mention of fading and volume and surround sound.

Question: 15.2

In the modern adaptation of *Antigone* students chose to discuss the relationship between Haemon and Eurydice and focused on Haemon's problems in communicating with his mother who was depicted as aloof and cold; there were some good details here. Also popular were digital/streamed versions of *Hedda Gabler* and *Lovesong*. Very popular amongst students was a discussion of the relationships that featured in *Things I Know To Be True* and included most frequently: Fran and Pip, Fran and Bob and Mark and Bob.

In less successful responses students tended (as in all part 2 questions) to describe what the actors **did**, rather than how they used their skills.

Question: 16.1

Examiners reported that responses to this question were the least successful seen across the whole paper. The question appeared to appeal to those students least well-equipped to answer it and the question itself was rarely understood.

Some students wrote about set and costume entirely separately. Occasionally the descriptions were accompanied by sketches that were of little use because of their lack of detail that the student would have been better spending the time describing the work.

There were some very tenuous attempts at discussing unified effects with students trying to suggest that a white costume linked with the white roses (*Things I Know To Be True*).

Students who had written about *Two* matched the outfits of the 'Barmaid' with the bar. Moth's costume matched the Juke-box.

In *People Places Things* they wrote about the hospital gown worn by 'Emma' and the hospital bed that she lay in to create a unified effect. Generally there was a great deal of assertion.

Question: 16.2

Frozen was a comparatively popular choice of production and some students discussed Jason Watkins' performance in some detail making it quite clear how he gained a sympathetic response. Unfortunately, as with all the answers on performers, students tended to describe what the actor did – opened a suitcase, got out various DVDs held them to his chest, chuckled etc. rather than how skills were used.

Some wrote slightly more appropriately on Hamlet's soliloquies and/or Ophelia's first and final appearances where there was some discussion of skills.

Students wrote about the 'Barmaid' in *Two* and her performance of Lesley with some subtlety. Oswald in *Ghosts* garnered sympathy, Emma in *People Places Things* created some comedy and in *Things I Know To Be True*, everyone created sympathy but especially Rosie, Bob and Mark.

Question: 17.1

This was the most popular and the most effectively answered pair of questions. Maybe because students felt that they could actually see the lighting effects. The ubiquitous *Things I Know To Be True* was very popular, with some detailed and quite technical analyses of the lighting in the opening sequence with Bob and/or Rosie and of Mark on the shed in the rain. Sadly some spent too long on the first moment and then either struggled to find a second moment or had insufficient time to complete with any detail.

There were also effective explanations of Ophelia's exit in *Hamlet* after her mad scenes when she walks into the light. More sophisticated responses linked the impact of the lighting to the narrative/themes, for example in *People Places Things*, Emma's psychotic condition being mirrored by the lights.

In *Warhorse*, there were some reasonable explanations of the artillery landing in France and happy days in Devon.

Question: 17.2

Much of what has been said about responses to Q16.2 applies here, however the primary problem with answers to this part of the question were that students sometimes failed to recognise the need to write about the mood or atmosphere in the audience and instead discussed the mood changing on stage, whilst this might be in exactly the same moment, there is a need to consider the audience as per the requirements of the question.

In preparation for this part of the examination, students would be well advised to consider the potential for different moods other than merely funny or sad. There were however some very effective answers to the ever-popular *Woman in Black* where the students were able to explain precisely what it is that the two actors do in order to have the audience at one point amused and in the next, shrieking in fear.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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