

# DRAMA

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Paper 8286/02

Written

## General comments

This year five Centres entered candidates which shows the interest in the subject is growing. Of the available texts, four proved to be popular: *Antigone*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Children of the Poor*. A large number of candidates engaged with the production concept for *Children of the Poor* by Mervyn Thompson. It is exciting to see candidates working with material from their own culture.

A range of abilities was again shown. The more successful answers showed candidates had not only analysed the play but more importantly had really engaged with its performance possibilities. Candidates who can explore the process of how a piece of drama is prepared and put on the stage using the correct terminology attain marks at the higher level of the mark scheme. Candidates who tend to describe the plot with only a few performance ideas tend towards the middle to lower end of the spectrum. Candidates, who obviously struggle with the concept of performance, make little reference to the text or incorrect references and those who see the staging in terms of film achieve marks at the lowest end of the scheme.

It is advisable that candidates plan an overall production concept for their plays. When candidates plan for a specific performance space answers tend to be more successful as they have a better insight into how the stage space can be used.

In the questions relating to Acting, candidates who had imagined themselves in the role or who had possibly taken part in a production gave the clearest answers. It must be remembered that in a two-hour examination candidates cannot cover all the material. They must be guided to choose specific examples of text that they can discuss in detail to make their points.

Using the correct stage terminology is helpful as they discuss movement and use of space. Some candidates are still confusing their stage right and left. It must be remembered that the stage is described from the actor's viewpoint.

There were several examples from a variety of Centres showing candidates had engaged with the text and its performance possibilities. Candidates should be encouraged to see their texts in performance. It is highly recommended that candidates attempt some form of performance of all or part of their texts. Candidates should also be encouraged to research the play in its original context as well as imagine or perform the play in another time frame.

The use of clearly annotated diagrams was helpful. These could be further enhanced with candidates using either a designer's drawing or an aerial view.

An occasional weakness in essays was candidates failing to write about two contrasting scenes or recounting far too much plot.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1 – Classical Tragedy**

**Antigone      Sophocles**

#### **Question 1(a)**

This question required candidates to explain how they would *perform* the role of Antigone or Creon in order to reveal their relationship with reference to *two contrasting* scenes. Some candidates tended to recount plot but many identified clearly the relationship between the two roles and were able to show how they might be performed. Candidates find writing about acting at times difficult and perhaps need to explore more fully how real actors approach the role of a character.

It is useful to begin the essay with a brief concept for the production to help contextualize the performance. Candidates tended to discuss portrayals that referred to the ancient Greek performances yet were quite modern in approach. It would be helpful for candidates to identify the type of performance they are aiming for.

Candidates should avoid vague terms such as, “Director would maybe push them”. Instead candidates should take ownership of the performance and write “she pushes them”. Some candidates described what their characters would look like and how visually they might contrast, which was valuable.

Candidates should avoid overly lengthy introductions and conclusions especially when the question is simply rephrased. The best essays were fluently written and clearly stated how the characters could be performed on stage using voice, body movement, and space and drew on elements of performance e.g. the mood to be created. One candidate wrote vividly about how the character was breathing heavily and what gestures were to be used.

Successful answers showed candidates who could imagine themselves playing the role. Weaker answers showed understanding of plot, social context and character but struggled with the detail of *how* this could be shown on stage.

#### **Question 1(b)**

This question required candidates to write about lighting ideas for a production and how it could help to communicate the themes of the play. Candidates attempting this question needed some specialist lighting knowledge. One candidate wrote clearly about using spotlights to focus on Antigone and Creon. Another wrote vividly about a gobo effect on the floor that represented the different meanings of space around a character. This showed an understanding of symbolism and was an interesting idea. It is not helpful to write about dark lighting and not advisable to have actors speaking in darkness unless it could be clearly justified. Again candidates should have previously researched the role of a lighting designer and feel secure in their knowledge before attempting this answer. Candidates need to be able to use specialist terminology.

#### **Question 1(c)**

This question required candidates to write as a director explaining how they would want the audience to respond to Antigone and Creon using two contrasting scenes, and how they would direct the actors.

Candidates should avoid slang phrases when describing aspects of the characters e.g. “downbeat” or “over the top”. It was useful when candidates gave a precise quote from the text and then gave their directorial interpretation. Candidates are advised to choose specific moments to analyse and direct in detail rather than writing about too large a section. The director is not just responsible for movement and voice and it was useful when candidates mentioned costume or masks, although further detail should be given if these items are included. A mask would affect the way an actor moved and spoke so this could be described in detail. Candidates explored a variety of views; some wanted the audience to sympathise with Creon and not with Antigone and it was interesting to see how they argued their ideas using performance possibilities.

## **Question 2 – Medieval Mystery or Morality plays**

***Everyman*      Anonymous**

### **Question 2(a)**

One candidate attempted this question explaining how voice, body, movement and space revealed the relationship between Everyman and two other characters.

This question, as with others, needs knowledge of the original context and a decision about the type of performance to be undertaken as this affects the use of techniques and elements.

## **Question 3 – Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama**

***A Midsummer Night's Dream*      Shakespeare**

### **Question 3(a)**

This question required candidates to explain how they might play either Titania or Oberon to highlight the change in their relationship. Candidates had to refer to the use of voice, body, movement and space and how their character responded to the other character. Two contrasting scenes were required. Candidates answering this question engaged well with the production possibilities. Text was cited and performance discussed. Candidates explored attitude and use of voice and movement. The best answers were able to place their actors in the context of a performance that enabled them to explain how the stage space could be used. Weaker answers tended to recount too much plot. It must be assumed that the Examiner knows the text and focus must be placed on performance in relation to the text and its context.

### **Question 3(b)**

This question required candidates to explain how they would design the woodland scenes of Acts 2 and 3 using space, colour, light and texture. Candidates had clear ideas about the scenes. It is important in this question to ensure the four specific areas are referred to as asked in the question. Enthusiastic descriptions brought the answers alive. This question does not specify only a set design so candidates were credited with discussing the fairy costumes, lighting and other components that make up the woodland scenes. Candidates who designed for a specific stage were confident in expressing their ideas.

### **Question 3(c)**

This question required candidates to describe and explain their production concept from the point of view of a director. They had to justify their interpretation by making specific reference to two contrasting scenes.

This was a very popular question and some interesting concepts were described with palpable enthusiasm. It was obvious when candidates had either seen or been involved in a production as not only were descriptions vivid, but understanding shown about how processes might happen. For example, the construction of metal trees to show the fairy kingdom was well explained and justified. Candidates showed their understanding of how to create a theatrical environment. A frequent error however was the idea that Shakespeare's original theatre was "in the round". Occasionally candidates were so involved in their descriptions and analysis that they did not clearly show the two contrasting scenes.

## **Question 4 – Comedy of Manners**

***The Importance of Being Earnest*      Oscar Wilde**

### **Question 4(a)**

This question required candidates to explain how as an actor they would portray the relationship between Algernon and either Jack or Cecily with reference to two contrasting scenes. Successful answers identified the original context of the play and consequently how this would affect the use of voice, body, movement and space. Several candidates had good insights into the characters and were able to identify specific aspects of relationship they wished to highlight. Weaker answers tended to recount large amounts of plot with a few references to simple movement.

#### **Question 4(b)**

This question required candidates to write about a stage design for the garden in Act 2 and the drawing room in Act 3 and to explain how they could create an appropriate sense of period and location. Candidates obviously enjoyed writing about the possibilities of these locations. There were some elaborate, realistic sets and some which used simpler representational sets. Stronger answers included details of their choices with justification from the text. Weaker answers were uncertain as to how a set can be created on the stage and fell into the trap of a more filmic approach with real trees and flowers. Candidates should design for a particular stage and have some idea of how the use of box sets, wings, apron and actor-audience relationship might affect the performance. Some clearly annotated sketches were used. Strong drawings were clear and took the form of either an aerial/birds eye view or a designer's sketch. Candidates should be aware of the correct use of stage left, stage right and upstage, downstage.

#### **Question 4(c)**

This question required candidates to write about casting ideas for the roles of Jack and Gwendolen. They had to explain, with close reference to two contrasting scenes, how they might be directed to create comedy for the audience. Candidates often had clear ideas about the roles but struggled with comedic ideas. The original context for the play would have been helpful to explore here. Candidates needed to be able to identify where the comedy lies in these characters and their situations. They needed to be able to show how delivery, timing, movement and use of space etc. could be used specifically to bring this out. The characters themselves are stereotypes and can offer great scope for comedy in their appearance, movement and speech.

#### **Questions 5 and 6**

No candidates answered these questions.

#### **Question 7 – New Zealand Theatre: Looking at Ourselves**

##### ***Children of the Poor* Mervyn Thompson**

#### **Question 7(a)**

This question asked candidates to explain how they would perform the role of Albany Porcello in order to engage the sympathy of the audience. Candidates needed to refer to voice, movement, body and space as well as refer to how the character responds to others on the stage. Two contrasting scenes were required.

Stronger answers clearly engaged with the play and had a real sense of performance. These essays included descriptions not only of what Albany looked like but how he spoke, how he used the specific space and related to the chorus and his mother. Weaker answers tended to focus on what Albany looked like and relied on retelling the plot to gain sympathy. Specific scenes that were powerful would have helped with answers, e.g. the death of the baby, the chaplain scene, Big Mother scene and the court. Several candidates had clear ideas about how techniques can be used to create a specific intention.

#### **Question 7(b)**

This question required candidates to explain their costume designs for the Porcello family to increase the dramatic effectiveness of the play. Many answers consisted of traditional "poor" costumes: ragged clothes and dirty faces. Stronger answers explored more stylized and symbolic approaches and took into consideration the information given in the introduction to the play by Mervyn Thompson.

#### **Question 7(c)**

This question required candidates to describe a production concept for the play to convey one or more of the central themes of the play.

This was a popular question and all candidates were able to identify at least one, and often more, themes in the play. Many could show how they might present those themes particularly through costume and makeup. Candidates who had obviously taken part in or seen a production engaged fully in a stylised production which related to Thompson's original concept. Sophisticated answers spoke of entrapment and showed how the use of specific set pieces and props on the stage space could show this. The strongest answer related the candidate's concept for the chorus directly to Thomson's introduction to the play and used a well selected quotation.

## **Summary**

In order to gain the highest marks candidates must be able to refer to specific moments. Lengthy quotations however are not necessary. Candidates should know the context and background to the play and understand what the playwright's intentions were for its original performance. The candidates must have identified the performance possibilities and be able to describe these in detail. They need to understand how their performance will be effective. Original and subtle ideas are encouraged but simple ideas carefully thought out and justified with references to the historical and social context are equally acceptable. Texts do not need to be presented in their original settings: in fact candidates should be encouraged to be imaginative. It is important that candidates use specialist terminology correctly. Candidates do need insight into the process of performance.

Overall there were many good answers that showed that candidates have enjoyed engaging with text and visualising performance possibilities. Candidates should be encouraged to see and take part in as much theatre as possible and research a variety of staging possibilities. Texts should be **explored practically** as much as possible even if full-scale productions are not possible. Some Centres may have limited facilities. This must not discourage them from finding ways to present their plays in the facilities they have available to them.