

# DRAMA

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**Paper 8286/02**

**Written examination**

## **General comments**

This year four schools were involved in the examination, answering questions from *Antigone*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Everyman*, *Children of the Poor*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Purapurawhetū*. The growing popularity of studying New Zealand Drama was reflected in schools' study and performance of Mervyn Thompson's *Children of the Poor* and *Purapurawhetū* by Briar Grace-Smith.

A range of abilities was demonstrated in the examination.

Candidates should be very clear early on about the 'Overall Production Concept' (OPC) and should aim to develop this in detail. Candidates who took this approach, and were consistent with it throughout their answer were generally able to access marks at the top of the mark scheme. However, candidates should not give options or try to mix eras in their OPC. It is possible to be aware of the social, historical, and cultural impact of the play whilst focussing on one production concept.

Effective answers used short but relevant quotations from the play extract to justify their interpretations. Good choice of text, rather than huge quotations, is recommended due to the time constraints of the examination. Seeing the play in performance and therefore understanding the staging possibilities enabled candidates to access the higher end of the mark scheme. Staging a play in a specific place enabled candidates to discuss the use of space with real insight. Candidates who were more plot driven in their answers, suggesting only limited ideas for staging (either acting or direction), could only achieve marks at the lower end of the mark scheme.

Candidates should use correct terminology to be specific about their production intentions. The stage should be discussed from the actor's point of view – some answers referred to movement around the stage in a rather vague manner.

There was a tendency for some candidates to answer the question from a theoretical viewpoint – how the actor was thinking and feeling – with little practical interpretation. In the questions relating to 'acting', candidates who either imagined themselves in the role, or who had actually taken part in a production gave the most effective answers. Candidates are encouraged to take ownership of their production intentions and, rather than suggesting "perhaps the character jumps to the left on the stage", should give more definite directions such as, "she jumps to the left", giving a specific textual reference.

Occasional weaknesses in recounting of plot instead of answering the question, were evident. Some papers were weakened by the candidates having one strong answer where they clearly engaged with the text in performance but failed to answer the second question with as much depth or understanding. Candidates should be careful not to make sweeping, unsubstantiated comments, and terms such as "dark lighting" indicated candidates' lack of understanding of the production technologies available for performance.

The use of clearly annotated diagrams as well as the use of colour was helpful in understanding the design concepts.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1 CLASSICAL TRAGEDY**

***Antigone* Sophocles**

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

The question required candidates to interpret the role of Ismene from an actor's viewpoint in two contrasting scenes. Candidates were required to outline how they would want the audience to respond to the role and how they would go about achieving these aims.

Detailing with apposite information from the OPC would assist the actor's interpretation of the role and a short textual outline would be helpful to the clarity of the answer. Long plot outlines or, in fact, totally plot-driven answers were not helpful in answering this question.

Strong answers provided firm acting advice for the role of Ismene and took on the role for themselves. These candidates were very clear about how they would move in the space, interact with other characters on the stage, and used effective textual referencing to support their acting interpretation. Candidates who were specific about the use of body, voice, movement and space giving clear information as to gesture and facial expression with clear understanding as to why they had made these decisions were more successful.

Candidates should be careful to answer each part of the question with equal detail. An actor on stage does not just use their voice, and the response should focus on all the dramatic techniques available to them.

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

Candidates were required to outline costume ideas, and designs for masks in two scenes of the play with close reference to the text. An explanation of how these ideas would help to communicate the themes of the play to the audience was also needed.

Candidates needed to be aware of the time in which the play is going to be set. This means that the OPC should be described in detail so that the design decisions are based on this concept. It was also very important for candidates to understand the context of the play but this should not have been the main focus of the answer. Some candidates tried to answer the question using two different interpretations. This was unhelpful and did not effectively communicate the themes of the play. This question focuses on mask design, and candidates needed to demonstrate some technical knowledge of how to create a mask as well as the acting techniques required to perform with one. The reality of changing masks on stage was not taken into consideration in some answers. Drawings of the masks would be helpful when responding to this type of question.

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

This question required candidates to explain how, as a director, they wanted the audience to respond to Creon and Haemon in their scene of confrontation, and how they would direct the actors in order to achieve this.

This question was primarily about direction and therefore answers needed to specifically direct the actors in the space and in their interaction on stage. It would have been helpful if candidates had outlined their OPC and justified directorial decisions in line with this together with direct textual referencing. Referencing should be as brief as possible, and needs to support the directorial commands for the actors.

Recounting the plot was not helpful and candidates needed to focus on body, voice, movement, and space as well as mentioning costume, staging, set, and technologies that might influence the actors' performances. Good answers focused on their intentions as a director with effective reference to the text.

## **Question 2    MEDIAEVAL MYSTERY OR MORALITY PLAYS**

***Everyman*    Anonymous**

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

The question required candidates to explain the aspects of *Everyman's* character that they wished to communicate in performance with close reference to two scenes.

This was an acting question and required candidates to answer using details of body, voice, movement, and space. Details of the OPC and some indication as to the stage they were performing on were helpful in this response.

Good answers gave detailed responses on these production concepts, and also provided information about set and costume designs. Candidates clearly focused on the two scenes required whilst also explaining how their performance developed throughout the play. Personal experience of a live performance of the play was extremely beneficial to the candidates who chose to answer this question.

### **Question 2 (b)**

Candidates were asked to outline the costume design for three characters and explain how these choices would communicate their contrasting allegorical meaning to the audience.

Although this was a question about costume design, candidates needed to write their answer with reference to an OPC. The question enabled candidates to be imaginative with their design ideas, and candidates with experience of this production gave good responses. Understanding the allegorical nature of the characters is clearly the key to the production concept, and will influence the costume design in order to communicate the meanings to an audience.

### **Question 2 (c)**

The question required candidates to answer as a director and update a performance of *Everyman* so that it is relevant to a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience.

This was a directorial question which required candidates to outline their OPC for staging, lighting design, costume, sound effects, music, and the actors within the production. This was an all encompassing question and gave the candidates a great deal to focus on within their answer.

Candidates who responded to this question did so with mixed results – there was a lot to cover and some candidates were confused as to which aspect should be addressed first. Separating the OPC into technologies and design and then addressing the director's interpretation for acting the roles within the play would have been the best way to approach this question.

## **Question 3    ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMA**

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

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

No candidates answered this question.

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

Candidates were required to outline their set ideas for the opening scene, and to discuss the potential for creating an appropriate mood and style for the play.

Candidates who responded to this question needed to address the OPC which influences the play as a whole as well as focusing on the specific set design for the opening scene. Candidates who successfully answered this question had a strong design concept and were able to detail the mood that they hoped to create with this concept. The question required candidates to clearly distinguish how their design for the first scene would fit into the whole. Those candidates who had a clear idea of the stage for which they were designing were more effective in their response to this question. A few candidates also had some interesting ideas as to the placing of the audience within their performance space.

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

This question required candidates to direct the characters of Oberon and Titania in one of their scenes of conflict and in their final scene of the play where they are reconciled.

Candidates needed to detail their OPC for the play which would influence the way in which they interpreted the roles of Oberon and Titania. Candidates who answered this question did so with mixed results. Some had good concepts for the interpretation of the characters. These were used to good effect to direct their actors within the performance space to reflect the interaction of the characters in the chosen scenes, and to highlight the conflict between them. The most effective answers addressed the nature of body, voice, movement, and spatial awareness required in the performance and were able to support this in their explanations of the final scene. Candidates who became too plot-bound were unable to effectively respond to the question and became bogged down in the text as opposed to offering a practical interpretation.

### **Question 4 COMEDY OF MANNERS**

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

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

Candidates were required to explain how they would use their vocal and physical skills and the performance space itself to express the changing moods of either Cecily or Gwendolen as they interact in Act Two.

Candidates who answered this question had a good understanding of the text and the relationship that develops in Act Two between Cecily and Gwendolen. Effective referencing of the text was useful to the candidates in their answers, detailing the use of body, voice, movement, and space. An understanding of the performance space and the OPC gave an extra edge to some candidates' answers. An explanation of the interaction with clear acting decisions in response to the other character's lines was essential in this question. Stronger candidates had clear intentions in mind and were able to communicate these intentions within their answers.

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

No candidates answered this question.

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

Candidates were asked to describe how they would direct the role of Lady Bracknell in Act Three in relation to how they would want the audience to respond to the role.

Candidates needed to introduce their response to the question with a clear explanation of their OPC. This is a period costume drama but that does not mean that the performance cannot be set within a more 'modern' or 'political' framework. The relevance of the whole play and how Lady Bracknell's character develops prior to Act Three was worth noting in relation to this answer. Answers needed to be clear about Lady Bracknell's movement around the stage and details about the performance space would also have been useful in response to this question. As a director, detailing dramatic techniques for the actor to use in interpreting this role is also important.

### **Question 5 EPIC THEATRE**

***The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* Bertholt Brecht**

No candidates answered these questions.

## **Question 6 NEW ZEALAND THEATRE: THE MAORI VOICE**

***Purapurawhetū* Briar Grace-Smith**

### **Question 6 (a)**

The question required candidates to describe the actor's interpretation of either Tyler or Ramari in Act Two, Scene Three in order to communicate the shifting nuances of their relationship.

The problems encountered with this question were mainly plot-based answers which did not wholly address the role of the actor within the performance. Some details of plot would have been useful but should not have taken precedence. Those candidates who focused on the actor, specifically on body, voice, movement and space with effective text referencing were the most successful. Candidates who gave design and costume details offered another level to their answers, and those who noted the interaction between the characters were thorough in their response.

### **Question 6 (b)**

The question required candidates to outline the set ideas for representing both the beach where Hohepa spends much of his time and the whare raranga where Tyler works. Candidates also needed to explain how their ideas would create an appropriate mood and atmosphere for the play.

Some candidates responded to this question by including detailed drawings of the set that they intended to use and this was helpful to the Examiner, as was the use of colour.

Candidates who were able to encapsulate both areas within their responses so as to create one workable staging space for the whole play were the most successful. To achieve this, candidates needed to be very clear about their OPC. Some technical knowledge was helpful in response to this question – lighting details, colour to create atmosphere and mood, gobo to create effect, and sound effects all support the design concept. However, some candidates used terms such as “dark lighting” which should be avoided; “dim lighting” or “low density lighting” would have been more appropriate.

### **Question 6 (c)**

Candidates were required to write as a director and discuss how they would communicate the sense of “forgiveness and healing” in *Purapurawhetū*.

Candidates needed to consider the OPC, the stage space, and the performance within the space to enable them to answer with clarity and thoroughness. It was important that they did not get confused by the amount of information that was required by this response. Addressing the design and technology separately would have assisted the candidates' responses to the question.

## **Question 7 NEW ZEALAND THEATRE: LOOKING AT OURSELVES**

***Children of the Poor* Mervyn Thompson (an adaptation of the novel by John A Lee)**

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

Candidates needed to consider the role of the chorus in this question. They were required to choose two contrasting chorus roles and explain, with close reference to the text, how they would communicate these characters to the audience.

In answering this question it was important for candidates to address the role of chorus within the play as well as the detailed specifics of the question. Successful candidates established the strength of the role of the chorus in the performance and gave examples of the ensemble. The clarity of the understanding of the use of multi-role and how this communicates effectively on stage was paramount for this question to be answered effectively. Directorial and actor information was necessary for a fully detailed response – including the OPC and technologies involved in the performance.

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

The question required candidates to consider lighting design to create mood and atmosphere in two contrasting scenes.

In order to answer this question effectively candidates needed some prior knowledge of technologies and lighting design. Candidates needed to detail the OPC and the staging of the play as well as identify specific contrasting scenes from the play. Clearly, the use of technical terminology within this answer was important. Some candidates successfully annotated their answers with detailed and accurately labelled sketches (some also included the use of colour).

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

Candidates were required to outline how they would direct the final scene of *Children of the Poor* from the point where the Judge commits Albany to a Reformatory. They also needed to detail the effects they intended to create for their audience.

Effective responses to this question focused on specific events from the point indicated in the play. Details of the OPC and the design of the play needed to be considered as well as the performance possibilities concentrating on body, voice, movement, and use of space by the actors. Successful answers directed the scene from experience and clearly had practical knowledge of the play which resulted in a well directed and clearly intentioned answer. Some of the directorial ideas were incredibly imaginative and used production technologies with real insight.