



**General Certificate of Education**

**Drama and Theatre Studies 2241**

**Unit 3      Further Prescribed Plays**  
**including Pre-Twentieth Century**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - January series*

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### **Unit 3 – Further Prescribed Plays including Pre-Twentieth Century**

#### ***General Comments***

Examiners reported seeing some outstandingly good scripts this series from well-prepared and imaginative candidates whose scripts revealed both theatrical experience and a clear understanding of what was expected of them in this new paper.

Unfortunately, they also reported seeing some disappointing work.

Although there was a January sitting of DRAM3 this year and an associated Examiner's Report published on the website in March, there were many candidates in June who were clearly disadvantaged by being misinformed about the demands of both Section A and Section B on this paper.

For example, examiners were surprised to find that, in some centres, all the candidates prefaced their answers to questions in Section A with a lengthy preamble relating to the social or theatrical context of the selected play.

This is not a requirement of Section A, nor of Section B.

In both sections, the purposeful use of reference to the style, period or genre of the set text is creditable, where such a reference supports a practical idea, for example, or helps to justify a candidate's theatrical intentions. However, the wholesale reproduction of learnt material, including points of theatre history, background material or biographical information about the playwright attracts no credit at all and wastes candidates' valuable time in the exam room.

Everything that candidates include in their answers should be contributing productively to the construction of an appropriate response to the specific demands of individual questions in Section A, or to the creation of an interpretation of the extract in Section B.

Examiners were also disappointed to find that in some centres, candidates appeared to be approaching Section B in the firm belief that they needed to support their interpretative ideas with reference to wider theatrical experience – a feature of the legacy specification. No such demand exists in the new specification and candidates who offered such references usually distracted themselves from the set task and lost valuable time offering material that attracted no credit.

Sadly many candidates did not do themselves justice as a result of having under-prepared for the precise demands of this new paper.

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## Section A

### General

Candidates clearly enjoyed studying some of these set texts and it was pleasing to note that some of the 'new' texts offered have attracted very large numbers of candidates. *The Servant of Two Masters*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Seagull* were all very popular this year.

Questions in Section A require

- close focus on the precise demands of the question
- a creative overview of the play, conveyed through the candidate's treatment of the focus of the question
- textual support to illustrate the answers
- invention in the interpretation of the role, or section or design demands of the play as relevant to the question asked.

Common errors seen in candidates' answers were

- lack of full understanding of the set text and/or of the character at the centre of the question focus
- an over-reliance on pre-prepared material, generally related to the theatrical style of the play or to its background unrelated to the substance of their answers
- lack of adequate textual support
- use of truncated quotations instead of full lines
- inappropriate suggestions revealing a lack of knowledge and/or theatrical understanding
- unimaginative suggestions especially in relation to the creation of comedy
- no overview revealed
- poor expression and insecure command of specialist terminology.

The majority of candidates offered at least some practical examples to support their ideas, and there were some excellent, highly detailed responses. However, some candidates did not clearly link intended effects to the practical suggestions given. A number of students relied on examples from rehearsal, particularly Stanislavski's exercises, or made detailed reference to practitioners' theories without clearly or appropriately applying them.

Most candidates offered appropriate staging ideas for the plays, with a few exceptions. Some candidates offered suggestions for transposing period, without clear justification. Similarly, some candidates selected theatre spaces without securely understanding their choices. A proscenium arch does not necessarily make a production 'more intimate'.

There were some excellent design ideas, showing a real understanding of design fundamentals and of the demands of the texts. However, these were in a minority and a number of candidates who chose the design option showed only a limited understanding of the designer's role. Answers were often not illustrated with explanatory diagrams, or offered no coherent design concept to support the choices made. Some candidates offered detailed ideas, but did not link their responses to the demands of the play, or to key moments of text.

Many candidates had real trouble with their reference to dates. Centuries were wrongly stated, with many obviously not understanding that 1780 is in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Others, for example with reference to *Lady Windermere's Fan* described it as being set in the 1800s when they meant the 19<sup>th</sup> Century or 1890s.

It would be helpful if word processed answers were sufficiently spaced to enable detailed marking.

### **Question 01: *The Revenger's Tragedy***

This was a popular choice.

The majority of candidates showed a secure understanding of the roles of Supervacuo and Ambitioso and of the style of the performance. Interpretations of the roles were mainly apt, with some useful comic casting.

There were some highly inventive ideas for casting the roles that were clearly linked to the candidates' intentions for their preferred audience responses.

If a comic response was required, candidates made the appearance of the brothers comical. In some cases, the brothers looked much the same as one another and both were bizarre; in other cases they were strikingly and comically contrasting. Tall and short; thin and fat; bald and hirsute. If a macabre effect was selected, some candidates suggested the use of white make-up to create a somewhat ghoulish appearance.

In some good answers, candidates developed their intentions to create a strong contrast between the Duchess' sons and the Duke's own sons. For example one candidate suggested that the Duchess and all her sons – including Junior, have bright red hair. This was used later to create comedy when the 'head in the bag' was revealed, to the horror of the brothers, to have the signature red hair.

Weaker answers offered very lengthy casting ideas which appeared to achieve nothing in particular. These answers tended to include lengthy costume ideas as well, with limited value added in terms of achieving the desired response. Often these ideas were incongruous with the period, or unconvincing in a transposed period setting that was scarcely justified.

Better answers referred to key scenes, for example, where Supervacuo and Ambitioso are plotting the death of Lussorioso, or where they are mistakenly rejoicing over his execution.

Weaker answers revealed factual errors such as not knowing that Ambitioso is the elder of the two brothers, and they selected apparently arbitrary single lines of text (or worse, single phrases from the play) which failed to give any flavour at all of this entertaining duo.

Good answers focussed on the interaction of the characters and their impact on the audience. These answers were rooted in a good understanding of the style and conventions of Jacobean Theatre. Weaker answers spent too long discussing historical context, to the detriment of their answers.

Many candidates failed to identify their preferred response to the brothers, making their answers purposeless.

### **Question 02: *The Revenger's Tragedy***

Failing to identify a preferred response was also a feature of some of the answers seen on Castiza.

Candidates generally depicted her as pure and likeable with nominated audience responses of pity, sympathy and admiration for standing up to the temptation of her (disguised) brother and the harangues of her mother.

Unfortunately there were many examples of candidates simply not understanding the role. Many mistakenly believed her to be working-class, and many more believed her to have finally given in to her mother's persuasion in Act IV, misinterpreting her words as capitulation rather than a further testing of Gratiana.

It was evident that, for many candidates, the language of this play presented a real barrier to understanding.

Good answers were rooted in an understanding of the context of the play and used this understanding well to develop Castiza's role and function. There was some sensitive casting although some weaker answers transposed the text into a contemporary setting and offered limited justification and unlikely costume designs.

Good answers made detailed reference to the text, which was explored in practical detail to good effect.

Only a few candidates commented on the court conventions of the time and the court/country antithesis within the play. Where the information was clearly applied to the question, this was useful.

### ***Tartuffe***

This play attracted many responses but it was one of the plays that some candidates approached with copious pre-prepared material about the playwright and about the furor caused by the controversial nature of the subject matter at its first performance. Examiners, not infrequently, had to wade through anything between a long paragraph and up to 3 complete sides of the answer booklet before discovering whether the candidate had chosen option 03 or 04.

In the majority of cases, the preamble attracted no credit whatsoever as the information was not applied to the focus of the question.

### **Question 03: *Tartuffe***

There were some very funny answers to this question where candidates had noted its focus upon the **interaction** between Orgon and **each** of his children.

Most candidates selected Orgon's interview with Mariane, where he informs her of his decision to marry her off to Tartuffe. They also looked at Damis' revelation to his father about Tartuffe's attempt on the honour of Elmire.

Where candidates gave close attention to both parties in these sections they achieved considerable success.

There was some good development of the relationship between Orgon and his children, although in general the relationship with Damis was better developed, particularly when Damis is disinherited. Realisation of Marianne was often less successful, with some rather superficial answers being given. Neither individual child received as much attention as Orgon, which resulted in an uneven response.

Unfortunately, many candidates read the question carelessly, and their focus was either exclusively on Orgon, or, in the scene with Damis, they concentrated on Orgon's interaction with Tartuffe.

Candidates must be prepared to be flexible in the exam room, and to respond precisely to the new challenges posed by each question.

Examiners were disappointed to see some very lively responses completely misdirected as mentioned above and therefore attracting very few marks.

Some candidates presented an overview but this was not always developed in terms of the family's sufferings as a direct result of Orgon's infatuation with Tartuffe.

#### **Question 04: *Tartuffe***

There was generally a good understanding of this question which was very popular and resulted in some very detailed answers.

The question had a very clearly defined task; to perform Tartuffe in order 'both to amuse and repulse the audience'. Some careless candidates ignored this requirement altogether and offered, possibly pre-prepared, material on how they would play Tartuffe, for example, to create comedy alone or, to reveal his hypocrisy to an audience.

A number focused on repulsion at the expense of comedy and examiners saw some truly repellent (yet unfunny) Tartuffes, who scratched and sniffed and burped and farted their way through the play, picking their noses with great gusto and, in several injudicious answers, even masturbating in full view of the audience. These were unbalanced and largely inappropriate responses to the question set.

In better answers, Tartuffe's appearance, mannerisms, physical qualities, vocal qualities and vocal delivery were used to reveal his hypocrisy and deceit; his rosary beads and greasy hair were details which helped the portrayal.

There was some apt work on Tartuffe's more repulsive qualities, and good candidates offered examples of his simulation of virtue and religious pretensions. There was also some very sound understanding of Tartuffe's duplicitous nature and how this could be demonstrated to the audience through performance. There were some excellent details on asides and direct contact with the audience showing a secure and lively understanding of Tartuffe's comic potential.

Very weak answers showed limited understanding of Moliere's style and intentions.

### ***The Recruiting Officer***

This was a less popular text and one that, like *The Revenger's Tragedy*, proved too challenging linguistically for some candidates who revealed quite a slender grasp of the plot.

#### **Question 05: *The Recruiting Officer***

This was a popular question and a number of good answers were offered. The majority of candidates showed a confident understanding of the role of Captain Plume.

There were some good answers which exploited Plume's relationships in some detail, offering a suitable interpretation of his morality and comic potential. A few candidates were drawn into rather contemporary reflection on his amoral stance, particularly in his dealings with Rose. In general these responses made rather heavy weather of these interpretations, and the mercurial and charming quality of the character was missing.

Unfortunately, several candidates did not demonstrate a secure understanding of the comic style and potential of the piece. A few good answers showed awareness of the use of asides and the characters' relationship with the audience, but weaker answers did not develop this.

Surprisingly, after having studied the play for a year, there were a significant number of answers that revealed uncertainty about how the audience might respond to the role of Plume. Some recognised the difficulty for a modern audience of reconciling his dashing good looks and charisma with his predatory and unscrupulous attitudes towards women, but were at a loss to accommodate these facets of his character into a coherent interpretation.

Better answers dealt with this duality in a very clear way, while others floundered.

The question demanded at least three sections of the play be discussed. Some candidates interpreted this narrowly as three separate lines from the same scene which is clearly not what the question implies. Others simply failed to offer three sections and their answers were weakened by this omission.

Good answers showed an awareness of cultural context which was applied purposefully to the answer.

#### **Question 06: *The Recruiting Officer***

There were some very successful answers to this question, but not many candidates attempted it.

Candidates who chose this question tended to show very good awareness of the particular demands of this play. They made clear what staging form was being used, justified the choice, provided space for the action of the scene, and supported the answer with detailed sketches which clarified the design features. The transition from one scene to another was usually considered with good practical and technical awareness.

Successful candidates showed a good understanding of the demands of the text in terms of entrances and exits, pace and location. Weaker answers did not fully consider the movement of the play, and there were some very unlikely scene changes which would have taken a great deal of time.



Good answers illustrated their ideas with specific references to moments of text. These answers also showed an awareness of design fundamentals in terms of scale, colour and texture and a secure understanding of how transitions could be effected as well as demonstrating a good knowledge of the style and genre of the piece.

Good answers also showed a sound grasp of theatre terminology which was absent in weaker answers.

Much depended on the scenes chosen. Some unwise candidates set themselves more difficult tasks by choosing sequences where locations were not clarified in the text, and others by setting themselves the challenge of creating a river walk when they clearly did not possess the design imagination or knowledge to allow them to achieve smooth transitions

### **Question 07: *The Servant of Two Masters***

This was the less popular option on this text.

Candidates who chose this usually showed that they had thought very carefully about the factors influencing set design, and the demands made on it for this play in particular. Most chose to go with the 18<sup>th</sup> Century period and with the location in Venice, and had researched both to provide themselves and their designs with informed details and appropriate features. Particular scenes such as the serving of the two meals and the lazzi in general were thought about very precisely.

The best answers considered the demands of the whole text, and judiciously selected moments to explore, emphasising changes in mood and atmosphere. Weaker answers offered no, or very limited, detail of the text in action.

Good answers showed a secure understanding of the designer's role and how design could enhance the performance. Most candidates used the stage directions effectively, and offered detail of colour and materials for the set. Good answers offered a secure and detailed overview, taking into account key factors, such as the need for multiple entrances and exits and staging to allow pace.

These answers showed an awareness of the effect of design, and made specific reference to the text and moments of performance, for example, the use of a composite set to allow the service of the "two masters", space for the sword-fight, and the creation of the frantic atmosphere. However, some weaker candidates made very general reference to the text in action but not specific moments or effects.

Weaker answers sometimes offered what looked very interesting as designs but were not focused on the practicality. If much of the stage is to be taken up by the Grand Canal, complete with water, the rest of the space needs to be clearly available for the physicality required in many of the scenes.

Weak answers offered scant description of design fundamentals, such as colour, scale and texture. Good answers were aware of practical factors, including appropriate Health and Safety, and applied their ideas creatively through the text. These answers used specialist terminology with understanding.

### **Question 08: *The Servant of Two Masters***

This was a very popular text, and this by far the most popular question answered. There was a wide variety of responses offered, the majority being quite well constructed and offering an acceptable level of understanding.

The majority of answers offered some acceptable ideas and showed an understanding of the role of Florindo. A few candidates spent too long discussing the influence of Commedia on the character. Candidates were divided as to whether Florindo is one of the *Innamorati* lovers or whether he represented *Il Capitano*, and there was much muddled thinking evident as candidates attempted to push this rather original character into one or other of the commedia stock roles.

Florindo's 'history', having actually killed a man in a violent quarrel suggests that he is neither the braggart Captain nor the sentimental/effete Lover (represented in this play by Silvio) but this did not prevent hordes of candidates from ignoring the features that did not fit the stereotype, and focusing on the aspects of the stock character that they had selected.

Violent, aggressive, determined but 'in love', Florindo was occasionally mis-cast as an effeminate 'wimp', and there were many similar inappropriate ideas that completely subverted the reading of Florindo, for example, in his encounter with Silvio.

Other candidates made him the butt of all the jokes and even had him prat-falling and tumbling about to get cheap laughs.

Some candidates treated Florindo too seriously and went for sympathy, understanding, admiration, empathy, pity as their chosen responses, apparently impervious to the pervasive comic tone of the play and to the effect created by the fact that the audience know all along that Beatrice is alive and well ...and in Venice.

In some centres, perhaps where candidates had seen or been in a production of the play, every single candidate gave exactly the same description of Florindo and suggested exactly the same delivery of words, actions and interactions. He looked the same, he was dressed the same, he spoke in the same way, he did exactly the same things. This made for dreary reading. The 'DIY Suicide kit' was funny the first time, but began to pall by candidate 18 in a centre.

It is to be expected that, at A2, candidates have enough experience and theatrical imagination to offer their own ideas and formulate individual responses to their set texts.

Some very good answers offered a clear overview of Florindo and offered detailed examples from sections throughout the text, revealing different aspects of the character through his relationships with others. Less considered answers drew material from a narrow range and developed only one section in detail, and only touched briefly on the two other scenes required; this was self penalising.

Weaker answers were not always judicious in their selection of illustrative moments, often missing the comic potential of the character or focussing too closely on a contemporary interpretation, for example of his "cruelty" to Truffaldino.

A further problem with some of the answers seen was that candidates selected very brief moments of text, sometimes only one line, which did not allow them to develop their responses in appropriate depth and detail.

Many candidates showed a good level of understanding of the physicality of the *commedia dell arte* style, applying it well and creatively to the performance of Florindo's scenes.

**Question 09: *Lady Windermere's Fan***

This was a very popular text, and there were some good answers.

The majority of candidates showed some understanding of the role of Mrs Erlynne and of her function within the play. Answers generally showed a good understanding of Mrs Erlynne and of the social mores which governed society and the responses to her character. Weaker answers lacked subtlety in the direction of the character, and this resulted in some inappropriate suggestions. Mrs Erlynne should not be described as "an obvious slapper".

Good answers dealt well with Mrs Erlynne's first entrance and with her later interaction with Lady Windermere, showing careful direction and good use of sub-text. Weaker answers tended towards melodrama in the latter scene.

The best answers showed a good awareness of Wilde's style, and used this in discussion of performance to show the development of the character and the effects created for the audience.

Some very sophisticated answers were seen where candidates fully appreciated Mrs Erlynne's capacity to create different effects for the audience at different points in the play. Unfortunately, not all candidates read the question carefully enough, and many failed to notice that they were expected to direct the actors who appear with Mrs Erlynne as well as directing Mrs Erlynne herself. Those candidates wrote exclusively on Mrs Erlynne, some even adopting a performer's perspective.

The understanding of Mrs Erlynne was, on the whole, quite good, and there were many answers which gave detailed and appropriate references to the performance of the part.

Some candidates were rather confused about what the audience know about Mrs Erlynne and her relationship to Lady Windermere at particular moments of the play, with a tendency to ignore Lord Windermere's lines at the end of Act 1 and Mrs Erlynne's own at the end of Act 2.

Others appeared not to understand Mrs Erlynne's motivation in returning to London or her relationship with Lord Windermere. Many mistakenly believed that she was spurred on by motherly love and/or remorse. Several did not understand the nature of her designs on Tuppy.

**Question 10: *Lady Windermere's Fan***

This was an extremely popular question and there was a wide range of responses to it.

The best answers showed a good understanding of the role, and indicated clearly the subtlety and complexity of the character. Good answers showed an understanding of Darlington's opportunism but also of his intelligence and wit.

Weaker responses focussed almost exclusively on his feelings for Lady Windermere, often expressed in romantic terms which run contrary to the text.

Good answers also considered Darlington's interaction with other characters which gave a more secure picture of the role. These answers selected good moments to explore and offered detailed realisation of both action and delivery.

Most answers demonstrated an understanding of the mores of the time, although some candidates were less secure, and many did not fully take into account that a contemporary audience would not perceive the significance of Lord Darlington calling at an unusual time. Many recognised the fact he utters many of the witticisms typical of Oscar Wilde but few suggested how these difficult lines should actually be delivered.

The main problem was more serious, as many candidates took his lines entirely at face value with no attempt to explore the implications of his behaviour and, more especially, no attempt to judge him by the standards of the social mores of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Lord Darlington's declaration of love in Act 2 was rarely viewed as anything other than a heartrending (and sincere) statement of passion, and his behaviour before and afterwards, his opportunism and manipulation of Lady Windermere at a moment of vulnerability were not considered. It was not on the whole that candidates were saying they were choosing to put a 21<sup>st</sup> Century slant on the character and situation, but rather they did not mention what the implications of the original are. Many candidates also had Lord Darlington behaving in far too explicit a manner when declaring his love (and Lady Windermere showing no sense of shock or outrage – or even reaction at all as he stokes and even kisses her). This scene was often wrongly said to be taking place 'on the terrace', therefore in a slightly more private setting than Wilde himself indicates.

In terms of audience response, sympathy was almost universally demanded and only the more astute candidates recognised Lord Darlington as a manipulative, would-be seducer who sees Lady Windermere's 'Puritanism' as a challenge to be overcome. Even Lord Darlington's ruthless issue of the ultimatum to the distressed Lady Windermere, 'now or never', failed to signal to many that these were the words of a cad and not of a man deeply in love. As a consequence many candidates revealed a complete lack of understanding of the moral centre of the play as well as of its immoral centre.

### **Question 11: *The Seagull***

This was a popular text, and this was, by far, the more popular question. Answers on this text suffered, at times, from being treated in too literary a fashion and weaker answers tended to offer largely narrative responses to the question.

Generally the role of Konstantin was well understood, and there was a good range of responses offered. Good candidates drew on Chekhov's tragi-comic style and explored this through the role, allowing the audience to laugh at Konstantin's petulance yet feel the pathos of his despair.

There was some useful and detailed realisation of Konstantin's relationships, with some excellent work on his relationship with Nina and the presentation of *The Seagull*, in particular. There were also some helpful comments on his relationship with Arkadina, although a few candidates developed this in an inappropriately sexual way, showing an insecure understanding of the text.

Some very sensitive answers were seen, offering a secure overview of the role and allowing glimpses of the many facets of this complex character.

Konstantin was discussed with much sensitivity and sympathy in many responses. His relationship with a variety of other characters at different moments in the play was considered in depth, and the changes within his character and circumstances were well tracked and addressed.

Some candidates looked exclusively at his relationship with Nina, and others at his relationship with his mother. Sorin and Masha rarely got a look in.

Stanislavski and his rehearsal methods made an unwelcome and intrusive appearance in the answers of some candidates who allowed themselves to be sidetracked by the practitioner at the expense of offering well focused and precise performance details.

Good answers chose three sections judiciously, allowing for a balanced development of the role and offering some subtle interpretation. Weaker answers tended to comment on very brief sections of the text, without considering an overview of the role in the context of the demands of the whole play. Some answers limited themselves by choosing the three sections from different parts of Act 1, and others created enormous problems by trying to regard each act as a section, providing far too much material and leading to an answer which showed some appropriate understanding but very little detail and depth, becoming bogged down in trying to identify the circumstances and influences on him at each moment.

As with many responses to the paper, the opportunity to address what stage directions tell a director about the character were often missed, and this was most obvious in the final act where candidates' discussion of Konstantin ended with Nina's exit rather than with the destruction of the manuscript.

### **Question 12: *The Seagull***

This was not a very popular question and very few answers were seen.

Good answers showed an awareness of the style of the play and also a good grasp of the differing moods of the Acts. These answers selected moments of text in illustration judiciously, but also gave indication of an overview of the play, commenting on contrasts, performance demands and creating a coherent design interpretation. These answers showed a good understanding of design fundamentals such as scale, colour and texture, and there were some clear and detailed sketches in support.

Weaker answers produced less clearly detailed sketches, and candidates should be advised to consider the view from which they are offering their sketch and to consider its purpose theatrically.

Some excellent answers made reference to potential sources, and there were some delightful details of how Victorian paintings would be used as inspiration for colour and stage lighting.

The question drew answers from extreme ends of the marking bands, with the top end showing clearly detailed technical vocabulary, while the bottom end had difficulties in expressing intentions effectively.

## **Section B**

The purpose of the extract based question in Section B is to assess individual candidates' directorial responses to a section of their chosen text. They do not know, in advance, which section of the play will be set.

The candidates already know what the question will be. The examination therefore assesses candidates' ability to respond imaginatively to this section of text and to offer **their own interpretation** of it.

The bulk of marks is awarded for candidates' invention in relation to the printed extract.

Pre-prepared material that has not been shaped to the specific staging demands, challenges or opportunities as presented by the printed extract does not attract much credit.

Despite the advice issued at Teacher Support meetings in advance of this examination, and despite the clear warnings given in the report for the January series of this paper, hundreds of candidates appeared to believe that they would achieve high marks by offering pre-formulated (often corporately formulated) material relating to general staging ideas for the their set text.

In weaker answers, pre-formulated material concerning set design, casting, costume and technical design significantly outweighed directorial ideas for the printed extract.

Even in scripts where candidates offered direct and sensitive readings of the printed extract, there was a tendency for there to be at least some pre-prepared material that had little or no bearing whatsoever on the interpretation of the given scene or section.

As the question set in Section B is the same for all set texts, it is worth making the following general points about the way in which candidates approached the new style of question. This bullet-pointed section of the report replicates, with only minor variations, the points that were made in the January report but these points remain absolutely a true reflection of candidates' performance in this June series, and it seems entirely appropriate to repeat them here.

Better answers:

- offered an interpretation of the printed extract that revealed their understanding of the extract and of the play from which it was taken
- offered a context for their suggestions related to their 'whole play' knowledge
- considered the audience experience that they were aiming to achieve through their direction
- better answers attempted to communicate meaning to the audience through **each** of the directorial decisions they made
- included clear evidence of **relevant** research embedded in their responses, where appropriate, informing their practical, directorial ideas
- included sketches of adequate size – about a third of a page – which were clearly labelled, and which related to the necessary traffic of the printed extract and its scene(s), and were compatible with the play as a whole.

## Weaker answers:

- in a tiny minority of cases, candidates failed to open their exam booklets to find the set extract but answered instead on the corresponding pages from the texts they had with them in the exam room
- a more significant minority wrote **exclusively** about staging issues: choice of stage configuration, set and costume design, lighting and sound effects, and failed to offer a single idea about how they might direct their cast
- many weaker answers contained several pages of casting and costume suggestions, often betraying a very limited understanding of how casting and costume convey meaning to an audience
- many weaker answers contained potted biographies of the respective playwrights which had no bearing whatsoever on the interpretation of the extract
- many weaker answers described at length their intentions for the audience, for example, 'I would want to increase the tension here', but then failed to explain how to achieve that in practical directorial terms
- many weaker answers explored one or two lines of text in great detail but did not give a sense of understanding either of the rest of the extract or of the play from which it was taken
- many weaker candidates swamped their answers with references to research that was
  - purely biographical
  - purely literary
  - gratuitous and/or clearly irrelevant to their interpretation of the piece
  - not utilised
  - of little relevance to the audience experience of the play
- sketches:
  - many weaker candidates failed to include a useful sketch
  - some provided a sketch crammed into three lines of their answer books with little or no labelling
  - some offered a tiny sketch with so much labelling that it was impossible to see the sketch beneath it
  - some drew empty rectangles with no detail inserted
  - some candidates betrayed a lack of understanding by, for example, nominating a traverse stage setting but drawing a proscenium arch, or nominating theatre-in-the-round but putting a large structure in the centre of it, effectively blocking sight lines for the whole audience at one time or another
- many weaker candidates simply narrated the action of the extracts and offered neither interpretation nor meaning to the reader/audience.

These strengths and weaknesses were seen in relation to each of the texts. The following additional points are worth making in relation to specific texts.

**Question 13: *Blood Wedding***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

Candidates offered a wide range of different responses to this section of *Blood Wedding* set in the entrance to the Bride's home, at night. Many failed to read the stage directions and/or failed to justify a departure from the text, and thus examiners reported seeing examples of many bedroom settings played in the heat of the midday sun.

Examiners saw some good and sensitive readings of the scene, exposing the Bride's increasing misery and reluctance counterpointed beautifully by the Servant's excited anticipation of the

young girl's marriage. The ominous appearance of Leonardo brought the scene to its dramatic climax.

Good answers showed a secure understanding of the style of the piece and its potential in performance. A few weaker candidates were prone to assertion, outlining appropriate moments of text but not developing performance likely to achieve their aims. There was some understanding of the relationship between the two women, although the Servant was often underdeveloped as a character.

There were also weaker answers that did not show a secure understanding of the Bride's social status or of the social mores of the time, including the circumstances of Leonardo's marriage.

A problem already mentioned above was the widespread introduction of regurgitated material pertaining to Lorca's private life, to his influences and/or his sexuality. This material was almost invariably irrelevant to the candidates' interpretation of the play. Where candidates did choose to interpret the play as 'an exploration of Lorca's sexuality' they rarely succeeded in communicating anything of value through their direction, and all such links were asserted rather than demonstrated in concrete staging ideas.

This play attracted some fairly unusual approaches, some of which were justified but the majority of which were not. Many candidates had clearly gone into the examination with the intention of including, for example, physical theatre work in their answers, and they included it irrespective of whether or not it would be appropriate for this intimate and semi-naturalistic scene as envisaged by Lorca.

Some candidates ignored Lorca's poetic symbolism and invented their own abstruse forms of symbolism.

More extreme answers included extraneous hooded figures flamenco-ing around the studio setting throughout the action or hurling paint across a cyclorama; one candidate introduced a stallion into the performance space while another had a raging bull on stage with little consideration given to practicalities or to health and safety issues.

#### **Question 14: *The Good Person of Szechuan***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

The majority of candidates offered some appropriate audience experiences and demonstrated a sound understanding of the role of Shen Teh.

There were some excellent answers seen when Shen Teh's 'interaction' with her imaginary son was sensitively handled, her interaction with Wang thoughtfully directed, and her final exhortation to Mrs Shin pointedly and vividly realised.

Several answers presented the 'son' as a puppet. Where the direction of this was clear, this was often appropriately realised with some awareness of style. A few answers were not very clear about the effect they were intending to achieve, suggesting recollection of a production seen but without defining detail or justification.

Many candidates developed the idea of this being a play by Brecht, and therefore they were intending to present it in his style. Many candidates acknowledged that the play had a political message but they did not identify what the message might be, let alone how it applied to the



extract set. This was a shame as Shen Teh's final speech is one of the most lucid expressions of the play's meaning in the whole text.

General references to lighting/set/costume/acting styles were often claimed to be Brechtian, showing some understanding of **his work** but then the candidates' application of the stated ideas was unconvincing. Mention was made to gestus, for example, but then the acting style described was far more naturalistic. There were sometimes inventive lighting suggestions which were clearly not Brechtian. The problem was *not* that the candidates were choosing to adopt an approach which was not Brechtian but rather that they were claiming to be following his theories.

There was also evidence of a basic lack of knowledge in some answers: some candidates described in detail how Shen Teh gives birth during the extract, for example, others discussed how Wang lost his hand.

There was some good use of mime and puppets suggested for Shen Teh's 'child' but also a tendency to ignore completely the real child that accompanies Wang.

As with so many answers, there was evidence that candidates do not pay sufficient attention to the stage directions and to the significance of non-speaking characters, focusing entirely on the words which are said by each actor and ignoring the total stage picture and the reactions from people who are not speaking.

Many of the answers made insufficient use of the text, not exploring the delivery of Shen Teh's opening speech of twenty plus lines in any detail, and very few candidates considered the style of the singing. Others did not mention Mrs Shin's involvement in the scene at all.

### **Question 15: A View from the Bridge**

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

There were some very good answers to this question which showed a very secure understanding of the text and a well developed knowledge of Miller's style and intentions. Weaker answers spent too much time on Miller's biography or on the historical context. Some candidates offered lengthy discussion of social conditions in Italy at this time which was of restricted use in this section. Others spent too much time explaining the features of Aristotelian tragedy.

Generally more useful was reference to social context and to the importance of family and of good name. This was often usefully applied to the characterisation of both Eddie and Marco.

As with many of the answers in Section B there was generally a clear understanding of the play and its plot, although some candidates persisted in the belief that Catherine is Eddie's daughter. One candidate thought that both men died in the fight.

Some really powerfully directed scenes were in evidence showing a director's complete command of the rhythm and dynamic of the final scene.

In weaker answers casting and costume dominated. Candidates need to ask themselves how much meaning is being conveyed by their ideas as they go into the third or fourth page devoted to hair colour or hemline.

Mention was made by most candidates of the accents which would be required in this scene but this was very rarely linked to the delivery of particular words and phrases in the extract where the accent would be significant and enhance the effect.

What let most answers down was the inability to focus on the detail and mechanics of the set extract. Accounts of the set design were often very precise and complex, suggesting how the interior of the house would be seen, where Alfieri's office is situated, even where the phone was to be situated.

What was often not considered was how the sequence of events was to be acted out within that design; there was little reference to the street area generally, (though there was some very impractical suggestion of cobbles), where Marco would enter from and where he would be standing, how Eddie reaches the street from the apartment section, where the onlookers appear from and where they stand (no reference to how many of them), and where Alfieri is positioned to deliver his final speech.

Many answers did not consider Alfieri's speech at all, giving the impression that the play actually ends at the moment of Eddie's death.

Nevertheless, there were some very good answers seen that considered an appropriate lighting state for these final lines, ensuring that the emotion and the focus was maintained on Eddie but that the observations from Alfieri made the impact and drama even stronger.

Although many candidates discussed Eddie's relationship with Catherine at great length, the precise circumstances at the time of the extract were less accurately covered, and the practical and complex details of the staging of the fight, which provides the main directorial challenge in the extract, were not discussed. There was much reference to the costuming of the play as a whole, but few candidates remembered and addressed the fact of Catherine's wedding and the effect this needs to have on the costuming at this moment; in many answers Beatrice appeared to be attending her daughter's wedding in an apron.

Overall, there were many well crafted answers seen showing secure understanding and some vivid theatricality in the realisation of Eddie's death.

### **Question 16: *The Trial***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

For some reason, this play was the one where examiners reported seeing the most references to extraneous material. Candidates appeared to think that they would be credited for acknowledging a whole host of influences upon Berkoff and practitioners Artaud, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Brecht, Le Coq and even Godber jostled for attention in some of the more overloaded responses.

Many candidates were heavily influenced by Berkoff's own production of *The Trial* and by his use of frames to create different atmospheres and locations. This in itself is not a problem. However, there was an assumption on the part of some candidates that Berkoff's design and direction was intrinsic to the text, and there was limited explanation of candidates' own ideas and choices.

The use of the frames and the rope was often clearly addressed and understood but many candidates offered no justification for adopting these devices in their own production.

There were some good accounts of the use of mask-like make-up and reference to the use of a very limited colour palate for the costumes; the *reasons* for these design ideas were more rarely explored.

The creation of the couch was approached in a variety of ways, some using physical theatre techniques to create it with the bodies of the actors, others using actual chairs although there was often no indication of who brought these on, what the movement style of the actors was expected to be, how the chairs were to be positioned, or generally the practical considerations affecting this moment.

The playing of Miss B and the Inspector were often considered in some detail; much less precise consideration was given to the delivery of Joseph K's lines and especially to the lengthy account of the events of the morning. How these lines should be delivered and what, if anything, is happening on the stage at the time were not considered in enough detail.

Some very good answers chose to examine Berkoff's style in some detail and to work with his theories of the "total actor". In these answers choices were very clearly explained, and the audience experience was considered in great detail. There was good, specific reference to clear moments of text offered in practical detail.

There were some very appropriate costume and make-up choices, although some candidates failed to justify their ideas. Some suggestions were inappropriate, or insufficiently developed for intentions to be adequately clear.

Good answers offered excellent detail of supporting lighting and sound, showing a very good understanding of mood and how technical support creates the confused and troubled atmosphere which begins to build in the latter part of the extract.

Better answers were also aware of the function of K and presented an overview of the character whilst exploring the selected section in some detail. His character was clearly developed.

There was some commentary on multi-role playing and chorus work. Some answers were very clear, others failed to realise their vision of the extract. In particular, the use of physical theatre and the creation of K's room were often obscure.

### **Question 17: *Our Country's Good***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

This was the most popular question on the paper, and therefore examiners saw the complete range of achievement.

Examiners saw some excellent responses that revealed awareness of the place of this scene in Act Two, following on from the second rehearsal and Liz's courage in the face of Ross' bullying and intimidation. The contrast between Liz before and Liz in this scene was appreciated by many able candidates.

Sensitive candidates knew exactly how this scene fits into the sequence of action in the play and were able to link its events to the influence of Ralph's play, the growing sense of community between the convicts, the effect of Farquhar's language, and the over-arching significance of Phillip's desire to rehabilitate rather than punish the convicts.

Others may have known all this but failed to make a single connection between these issues and the printed extract.

This particular play suffered more than most from the use of too generalised an approach. Prepared sketches showed how every other scene might be accommodated on the 'composite' stage setting but few addressed the needs of this scene in any detail.

Many candidates failed to offer adequate context for their answers and moved the three characters about without any indication of who they are, where they are, what they have been through or what is about to happen.

The scene is called "The Science of Hanging" but only the very best answers took account of this or indeed alluded to the title at all. Only the very best considered the word "science" and considered how the 'science' of hanging was impacting upon each of the characters in the scene. The 'science' involved in calculating the necessary 'drop' for the execution of Liz, and the ghastliness of the necessity for cold calculation in relation to a living, breathing person passed many a candidate by. Ketch's need to measure Liz standing and to lift her was ignored, and did not seem to be understood, with many answers referring to how long the rope needed to be *to go round her neck*.

Where candidates did attempt to link the scene to themes from the play (and these answers were not in the majority) candidates tended to choose the ever popular 'redemptive power of theatre' rather than a consideration of 'crime and punishment'. The theatre theme *is* very pertinent here, but few were able to locate Ketch's reference to Melinda as the catalyst to Liz's decision to speak.

Most candidates showed a good understanding of the play as a whole, of the characters involved in the extract and their circumstances. What was unfortunate was the amount of time spent by some candidates addressing other sections of the play at the expense of looking at the one printed on the paper.

There were some ideas for casting, with some informed candidates considering cleanliness and costume. A number of candidates were less secure in describing Harry's costume and rank. A few good answers linked his appearance very clearly to his health and mental state.

Suggestions for setting were mainly apt, with some candidates using this as an opportunity to present an overview of the play and to indicate understanding of Wertebaker's style. However, a significant number of candidates believed the scene takes place on the ship, which is a serious misreading.

The best answers showed a good understanding of the context of the extract, and of the characters' motivation. These answers examined the performance of the changing moods with understanding, showing some of the depth and complexity of the roles, and their function within the text.

There were many suitable ideas for the positioning of the characters on stage (sketches that merely showed three crosses in a rectangle or circle were very common and added little credit) but many answers seemed to suggest that no-one really moved within the extract, with many vague references to use of levels to indicate status. The main omission from many answers was the detail of how Harry hearing Tom Barrett's voice is to be performed. It was not that the suggestions for these vital moments were not appropriate; in many instances no suggestion at all was offered. The final moments of the scene, with Harry's scream and his fall was often totally ignored by many candidates.

As with some other texts in Section B, this might be because candidates had run out of time because they had spent too long on a largely irrelevant disquisition about the penal system in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, about Mrs Thatcher's government in the 1980s or about the spread of small-pox amongst the Aborigine population. The task is to direct the extract.

**Question 18: *The Coram Boy***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

This was a reasonably popular text, usually tackled with good understanding of the circumstances which apply at this point in the play and often with great sensitivity, especially to the playing of Alexander.

There was some knowledge of period setting and how this might influence design.

A sense of period was often clear in the costume suggestions, sometimes detailed, and in the relationship between Sir William and Lady Ashbrook.

The transition between scenes is crucial in this extract, and the use of movement, lighting and stage space was often very skilfully considered in order to create the required fluency.

In weaker answers, design ideas were often rather confused and a number of candidates suggested the use of a revolve which was not well explained in design sketches or in suggestions for theatre form. This was disappointing given the need for smooth transitions and creation of location. Some very confused and hectic sketches were in evidence.

The handling of Scene 22 showed considerable invention in the work of some candidates who deviated from the stage directions in order to achieve the experience of the music and the idea of the colours happening inside Alexander's head.

Unfortunately, many candidates did not show equal care with the stage directions at the end of the extract, perhaps because of pressure of time. The love making sequence, when it was mentioned, was approached in a variety of ways, usually very sensitively, sometimes far too explicitly for the circumstances of the play and for the two characters involved.

The aspect that was glossed over most was the appearance of Meshak and the smashing of the virginals. The breaking of the virginals is a vital directorial challenge, whether the effect is created by complex hidden catches, masked in darkness, conveyed by sound effects, projection of images or any other device; the option which is not available is simply to say that he smashed the instrument.

Some candidates addressed this issue by having screens which slid across the stage to create a variety of acting spaces, and then masked the instrument during which time the original was replaced by a breakable 'dummy'.

As regards the approach to the play and scenes as a whole, many candidates seemed to have settled for the kind of generalised solution which might be used in workshop conditions in a studio theatre, rather than finding a theatrical answer to a theatrical problem suitable for a full scale production.

Few candidates gave any attention to the major issues of the play, and were unable to offer any kind of coherent interpretation of the scenes. Few seemed to understand there is more to the play than simply a children's story. Only in the very best answers did candidates attempt to

make links between the father/son relationships presented in the play or to consider the consummation of the relationship between Alex and Melissa in the context of the Coram foundation.

The majority of the responses seen used the stage directions in the extract effectively, but these were not always developed with the candidate's own ideas or reflections. Often answers declined into pure narrative, or re-telling of the matter in the stage directions.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.