



**General Certificate of Education**

**Drama and Theatre Studies 1241**

**Unit 1B Prescribed Play**

**Report on the Examination**

*2011 examination - January series*

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

#### COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

## Unit 1B – Prescribed Play

### General

Examiners reported seeing responses across the range of texts with the most popular being *Antigone* and *A Dolls House*. Very few responses were seen to *Playhouse Creatures*, maybe due to the consequent restriction of text choice at DRAM2. It was clear from the majority of responses that most candidates had gained a reasonable understanding of their chosen text and were able to, for the most part, address the demands of the question. Good responses revealed a well structured and focussed understanding of the requirements of the specified sections and drew upon background knowledge in an informed and coherent manner that explored the relationship between text and performance.

### Coverage of Extract

- This continues to be of paramount importance - it was clear in the most successful responses that candidates knew the whole text in depth. This was evident from the way in which they approached the specified section, selecting key moments from across it and referring in detail to the text. Candidates need to be aware that the length of the extract varies from play to play and from examination session to session. There is no prescribed length but there is an expectation that if a comparatively short section is set that much of it should be covered, whereas in a longer section, candidates should be selecting the most appropriate moments that will allow them to demonstrate in practical terms the relationship of text to performance in keeping with the specific focus of the question. For example, in the question for *Shadow of a Gunman* that required a focus on comedy, the best candidates selected three or four potentially comic moments and explored these, as a director, in some detail. In a minority of cases, examiners reported incidences of candidates who had written on entirely the wrong section; in these cases it was very difficult to award marks for anything other than a generalised understanding of role.

### Use of Text and Quotation

- Examiners reported that in too many instances, candidates were under-achieving partly because of a lack of detailed reference to the text. It is not sufficient to offer generalised performance or directorial suggestions based on a chunk of text, as it is often very difficult to visualise this. Stronger responses linked precise ideas to very specific moments, developing these across several lines of text which therefore allow for the performances to build up. Both in performance-based and directorial questions it was only the strongest of responses that considered the reactions of characters to one another, but when this was done it was apparent that candidates had really considered the intended impact that the suggestions would have for an audience and the scenes came to life.

### Genre and Context

- It was pleasing to note that far fewer candidates prefaced their answer with generic biographies, backgrounds or historical diatribes about their text. However, there did seem to be more cases of candidates who either completely ignored the need to make reference to genre and/or context, or paid little attention to it, simply stating that, for example, the sentry in *Antigone* would enter from the parados or that the setting for *A Dolls House* would be naturalistic. The best responses made use of contextual knowledge to inform the

practice on stage - thereby allowing the examiner to see how the words come off the page and also demonstrating an understanding of the playwright's intentions.

- As well as demonstrating an overall understanding of the context of the play, it was often very helpful when candidates demonstrated, through their choice of practical decisions, that they understood the context of the particular section that they were being asked to write about. Where candidates did this, it generally helped them to demonstrate a greater awareness of characters' situation, and invariably this made performance or staging decisions take on greater significance.

### Transpositions

- Few candidates effectively transposed texts into other eras or styles. One of the main problems of this is the need to justify such transpositions not just at the start of the response, but also when considering the delivery of specific moments. All too often, a candidate who has suggested, for example, a symbolic approach to Krogstad in *A Dolls House* ended up either offering performance details which were neither symbolic nor purely naturalistic, resulting in disjointed ideas. There were however some reasonably convincing interpretations in *Antigone* of Creon and the Sentry as military leader and subordinate.

### Types of Questions

- Candidates should be reminded of the need to be able to respond to whatever the precise focus of the question is. Where a question invited candidates to offer an audience response, for example, the best answers nominated no more than one or two such responses that were entirely appropriate to the demands of the role, and stuck to performance ideas that would elicit such a response. Where the focus of the delivery is specified as in *Shadow of a Gunman*, candidates need to be aware of the possibilities, and focus their answer on these. In questions that asked candidates to consider the staging of a section, only the best responses considered this in its broadest sense, taking into consideration the full range of staging opportunities available to them as a director - the majority of candidates viewed this type of question in a more narrow way, focussing almost exclusively on the delivery of the dialogue without identifying other methods by which the director could aim to have an impact on the audience.
- Some candidates still choose to answer 'how would you **perform**....' questions from a directorial standpoint; this rarely allows for complete success as many responses become less focused on the role and stray into discussing other characters on stage.

Finally it should be reiterated that the road to success in this paper lies through precise, purposeful and practical detail.

**Question 01: Antigone**

This was the most popular text on the paper and examiners reported seeing a range of responses to this question. Most candidates identified some kind of effect for the section, generally related to a desired audience response to each of the characters. Whilst it is feasible that the Sentry's prevarication at the start of the section might be considered humorous, some candidates took this to such extremes, with what could only be described as slapstick farce, that any sense of his low status in the presence of Creon was lost. Most candidates were aware of the changing nature of the characters within the section although many of them failed to select moments from across the whole section with many answers spending far too long detailing the Sentry's entrance and then cutting almost to his exit. Whilst examiners recognise that this was a comparatively long section, there is an expectation that, in order to meet the requirement of both AO2 and AO3 at a high level, candidates will consider a range of ideas. Few candidates recognised the full scope of the question, focusing almost exclusively on the delivery of the dialogue without considering the wider staging opportunities that were afforded to them in creating their preferred effects. Some candidates considered the placing of the Chorus within the scene, some failed to acknowledge their presence at all. Most candidates did consider some sense of the relative positioning of the two main characters, occasionally offering suggestions for set design to provide some opportunities for Creon to reveal his status. Only the best responses really demonstrated the changes in tension throughout the section, making suggestions as to how these might be accomplished. Most candidates made some reference to genre, and it was pleasing to note that far fewer candidates prefaced their answer with lengthy discussions of Greek Theatre. Examiners did report however that there were several instances of candidates misunderstanding or misusing specialist terminology relating to Greek Theatre (and one or two who still believe a toga to be Greek!)

**Question 02: Antigone**

This proved a popular question that was generally tackled in a straightforward and appropriate manner. Virtually all candidates identified a sympathetic audience response to Antigone's plight, with better answers charting the changes in her attitude from initial self-pity at the start of the section to defiant strength at the end. The best responses exemplified this with precise reference to moments in the text and offered clear justifications for the performance ideas, some of which were subtly linked to other moments from the text helping to reveal some very good awareness of Antigone's role and function. Where candidates made reference to the context of the section, this often helped to justify their ideas. Weaker responses failed to consider Antigone's relationship with the Chorus in this section and, depending on the version of the text being used, didn't consider in sufficient detail her attitude towards Creon at whatever point he appeared. Some candidates appeared to misunderstand the text, with some rather confused explanations of the significance of her comparison with Niobe - although most showed some awareness of her explanations regarding her family. On the whole, physical performance skills were better exemplified than vocal, with many candidates offering rather generalised descriptions of her being 'loud' or 'quiet'. Some candidates, having identified a large arena style performance space, went on to say that, at particular moments, Antigone would have a tear in her eye: it is debatable that an audience in these large venues would recognise this as a sign of her distress. It would help candidates for them to be reminded of the practicality of some performance suggestions and relating them to the space being suggested.

---

**Question 03: *The Taming of the Shrew***

This was a comparatively popular question which again revealed several quite good responses. Most candidates understood the need to offer an interpretation of Lucentio's role, frequently opting to present him as the 'romantic'. Better responses also considered his relationship with Tranio and linked this to the chosen portrayal. Although this was a comparatively long section, there are very clear moments that candidates could look at which potentially affect the decisions the performer must make in interpreting Lucentio. Unfortunately many candidates didn't get far beyond his first sighting of Bianca and his attitude towards her. Better answers succinctly considered his initial appearance, his enthusiasm, his attitude towards Tranio and his explanation of the plan. Few candidates made any reference to Biondello's entrance. Although a performance question, it was very important that candidates had given some thought to the staging of the scene - much relies on the 'hidden' asides, and many candidates didn't consider how Lucentio (and Tranio) would be concealed from Bianca, several not even recognising the need for concealment, and having Lucentio actually falling at Bianca's feet. The scope for comic business was frequently not considered and only the best responses recognised the potential for this, both in interaction with Tranio, but also in terms of overall comic intentions behind the portrayal of the character.

**Question 04: *The Taming of the Shrew***

Examiners reported seeing very few responses to this question with few of them being particularly well executed. Many candidates failed to recognise the status differences between Grumio and the other servants (in one case playing them all as slaves), and in several instances candidates lost the focus of the question almost entirely, choosing to write about the relationship between Kate and Petruchio. In a minority of good responses, candidates did offer some clear effects and then gave directorial details that focussed on the delivery of particular moments, whilst acknowledging the potential for (black) comedy within the section.

**Question 05: *A Doll's House***

This was the most popular question on the paper and revealed a very wide range of responses. It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates had made an attempt to define Krogstad's attitude towards Nora. In the best answers this revealed a quite subtle understanding of the potential complexity of his character and motives revealed through a range of performance ideas that demonstrated exactly how Krogstad might change from condescension to threatening or pleading. Some candidates chose to opt for one attitude throughout the section, and as long as the moments selected for discussion supported this, this was an entirely acceptable approach. Many candidates paid some attention to Krogstad's physical appearance and where this was linked to the desired attitude it was often quite useful. Some candidates, however, spent an inordinate amount of time casting and costuming Krogstad at the start of their answer, often running into more than one page on this and then didn't allow themselves sufficient time to discuss the precise focus of the question. Some weaker responses, whilst demonstrating some clear knowledge and understanding of Krogstad's role, failed to relate this information to his attitude to Nora. In several cases, candidates lost focus on the requirement to perform the role and instead directed the actor – whilst this didn't necessarily hamper the candidate's ability to answer the question, there were many cases when the answer started to focus more on Nora than on Krogstad. Another common problem with responses to this question included candidates who barely moved beyond discussing Krogstad's entrance. Good answers showed that candidates had a clear understanding of Ibsen's style and offered performance details that were entirely in keeping with this. Some candidates became over-reliant on elements of symbolism, particularly in Nora's use of the stove – resulting in some performances that started to resemble a game of

chase. The best responses though created a real sense of character through subtle use of spatial relationships, physical contact and use of space, with due care and attention paid to Krogstad's vocal delivery of specific lines, resulting in a character that really came to life.

### **Question 06: *A Doll's House***

There were very few responses to this question and those that there were ranged in effectiveness. Most candidates offered some details about the set designs, and there were some useful sketches (although many candidates still try to cram this into a tiny amount of space or fail to offer clear labels to make their intended meaning clear). Costume ideas were less well handled, with candidates making many generalisations about style. Whilst the better responses clearly linked their ideas to the mood and atmosphere, weaker ones almost ignored this element of the question. Most candidates opted for a largely naturalistic setting with some symbolic elements; however, there were some who hadn't considered the practicalities of their design ideas, often due to a lack of real understanding of design fundamentals – some candidates' letterboxes (although not significant in Act Two) appeared to be large enough for Nora to make her exit through them as opposed to using the door! With regard to costume, there was little sense of a designer at work – candidates who are going to attempt these types of question need to have some knowledge of fabric, style and fit in order to be able to convincingly portray their ideas. Some candidates failed to offer enough space within their design in which Nora could dance, and/or placed her in a costume that would certainly not allow her enough freedom of movement to practice her tarantella.

### **Question 07: *The Shadow of a Gunman***

This was a very popular question and, generally, answers to it revealed some knowledge and understanding of Tommy's role and function. Most candidates recognised him as a hero-worshipper and a patriot, and were also aware of his potentially comic function in the play. Examiners were pleased to report that there were fewer instances of candidates merely copying out O'Casey's stage directions and character notes although, conversely, in attempting to provide an interpretation, some candidates had moved so far from his original intentions as to make him almost unrecognisable: 'I would make Tommy appear as a failed business-man and would dress him in a worn suit...'. As is too often the case, less successful candidates spent far too long on the entrance of the character and, although providing some useful details of his movement and attitude towards Donal and Minnie, failed to give a clear interpretation of the character owing to what became a restricted number of moments. There were also some examples of candidates who had misinterpreted O'Casey's information and seemed to believe that Tommy was so drunk as to be able to barely stand. Few candidates made much reference to his role in the letter reading, although there were some apt details offered for his rendition of the song. The best responses selected precise moments from across the whole section and considered in some detail how a unified range of ideas relating to voice, movement and relationships with others on stage all helped to clarify the candidates' intended interpretation of the role.

### **Question 08: *The Shadow of a Gunman***

This was also a popular question with many candidates revealing quite good understanding of Grigson's character, particularly his drunkenness which the majority of candidates focussed on – sometimes at the expense of considering any of the other significant elements of his character. Most candidates paid some attention to casting Grigson, with the best ones doing more than simply restating O'Casey's directions. However, several candidates appeared to be unsure of his age; several suggesting that he is 55 but looking younger. Only the best

responses made clear links between the casting of the character and ways in which the decisions made might help to achieve the focus of the question and create comedy. There were many quite inventive ideas for the start of the section with some detailed suggestions for off-stage business and his initial stumbling entrance. Once again though, candidates need to be reminded of the need to ensure that all practical ideas are specifically linked to moments from the text in order to prevent them from being generalised. There were some very appropriate details offered for his attitude to his wife, although weaker responses failed to take sufficient notice of the need to create comedy and presented ideas which were far too brutal to be considered funny. Whilst there was some recognition of the comic potential towards the end of the section, his abrupt sobering up and subsequent exit were not covered in as much detail, and indeed by the time many candidates got to this part of the text, they had stopped considering how a director might actually achieve comedy through the use of a range of vocal and physical techniques and in particular, timing.

### **Question 09: *Oh What a Lovely War***

Examiners reported seeing some very creative and inventive responses to this question with candidates considering in detail how French might be portrayed. This included everything from his physical appearance and a developed sense of his vocal qualities to how he might perform in an appropriate style. The best responses saw candidates considering the wider elements of the section such as staging the car imaginatively and exploiting the situation for comic effect. Weaker responses however failed to focus ideas sufficiently on his attitude to the other characters, whilst some answers got lost in their own inventions, often with the result that there was insufficient precise reference to the text. There was also some confusion in places with one candidate believing that Sir John French was French. Most responses would have benefited from a more precise knowledge of who these people were and what the situation was, choosing to cover their lack of knowledge with imposed invention. In some cases candidates appeared to have little understanding of the significance of the section and, where this was the case, found it almost impossible to offer appropriate details about French's attitudes.

### **Question 10: *Oh What a Lovely War***

There were some very good answers to this question which focused very clearly on the horrors of war. The back projection and the newspanel were used well to juxtapose the events on stage with the reality and there was some detailed and effective direction of the nurse in this scene to convey the emotion of the situation. Some very creative ideas were used to ensure that the different groups within the scene were both seen and heard, although the way the two sets of words for the hymns could be differentiated was not so well achieved. Some answers tried to create the horror with bandages and wounds on the soldiers without offering sufficient detail about the delivery of the text; others had some dropping dead during the scene. The best responses recognised the need to consider a range of staging suggestions with these candidates clearly explaining their chosen staging form and providing set design details to accommodate the rapidly changing traffic of the extract. Where sketches were included this really helped to get a sense of the positioning of the various groups of characters. Weaker responses failed to get to grips with the text, either covering very little of it or providing generalised ideas only, whilst some candidates did not consider 'horrors of war' at all and made the section into pure farce.



### **Question 11: Playhouse Creatures**

Examiners reported seeing very few responses to this question; however, those that there were revealed some knowledge and understanding of the design requirements of the opening of the play. All candidates were aware of the different locations and of their associated moods. There were some imaginative lighting ideas which would help move from one location to another e.g. small pools of light and low lying smoke were used to create the location for the prologue with the pool growing to accommodate Nell's entrance, and then opening up completely to reveal the setting for Scene Two. A few candidates lacked knowledge of the state of London streets in the 17<sup>th</sup> century suggesting what appeared to be a pleasant courtyard with fountains! Although most candidates had ideas for what the set and lighting should be like for each scene, the transition into the theatre for Scene Three was not particularly well handled, and only the best responses made use of such elements as gauzes and revolves to achieve their ideas.

### **Question 12: Playhouse Creatures**

Although not a particularly popular text, there were some very good answers to this question demonstrating a clear understanding of Doll, her role within the play and within the playhouse. There were some very good details about her handling of the props and some sensitive consideration of her relationship with Mrs Betterton and how she responds to her in the opening section. One of the frequent weaknesses however was that there was insufficient consideration of her involvement with the 'abortion' section where, because she says so little, she was given very little direction relating to positioning and her overall contribution to that moment. Candidates should be reminded that it is not only the lines that a character says which matter, nor simply the moments when they are speaking which require direction. Weaker responses failed to cover the whole section whilst some candidates seemed to perceive Doll as little more than an aggressive old crone, with little sense of her humanity and affection for Mrs Betterton.

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

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