



General Certificate of Education

Drama and Theatre Studies 2241

Unit 3 Further Prescribed Plays
including Pre-Twentieth Century

Report on the Examination

2011 examination - January series

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Unit 3 – Further Prescribed Plays including Pre-Twentieth Century

General Comments

There were some very good papers seen during this series, with many candidates demonstrating a good understanding of the texts that they had studied, coupled with secure understanding of the precise demands of the different sections of the question paper.

Both sections of the paper require candidates to reveal a creative overview of their chosen plays; additionally, Section B requires an explicit interpretation of the extract set.

Neither Section requires candidates to offer gratuitous information about the playwrights of their set texts. Superfluous reference to theatre practitioners and/or productions seen during the course is not accorded any credit. Similarly, the inclusion of lengthy historical background material that is not made precise use of, in the course of the answer, is to be discouraged.

In Section A, weaker answers did not demonstrate an overview of the chosen text, and there were a significant number of answers which approached the questions from a literary and/or historical stand point, ignoring the practical demands of the questions.

Most candidates selected appropriate sections of text to illustrate their answers, but some relied on very short sections of text, which might be as little as one line or a brief moment of action, which limited the development of the practical suggestions and offered quite restricted evidence of understanding.

In Section B, a small number of candidates strayed into parts of the text that were found outside the confines of the printed extract, particularly in *Our Country's Good*, thereby losing time to focus appropriately on the required section of text. Once again, some candidates had not read the question carefully and a disappointing number ignored the printed extract altogether and focused on the pages from their texts that matched the given page numbers from the question paper.

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, and it was impossible to guess what effects were being attempted. Some failed to offer any kind of interpretation at all.

A new trend this series appeared in the number of candidates referring to ideas that they had picked up from workshops which were not developed, or made relevant to their own intentions. In some of these answers the candidates appeared to make the assumption that the examiner would understand their references, however oblique. In particular, students tended to use style specific terminology, such as "hymn hands" without clearly explaining what was meant, or the intended effect.

Most candidates offered appropriate staging ideas for the plays, with a few exceptions. Where students choose to set an historical text from Section A in a contemporary setting, some justification should be given.

As in previous series, candidates frequently began their answers by identifying their preferred theatre space or configuration. However, this was often not appropriately justified; nor were the specific properties of the nominated 'stages' always fully understood, or adhered to in later ideas. Traverse stages, in particular, had a habit of morphing into a proscenium arch halfway through a candidate's answer.

There were some excellent answers seen to design questions, showing a real understanding of the relevant design fundamentals as well as the period of the play 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.

This year few very weak answers were seen, and the standard of writing and punctuation was generally acceptable, although there was an increased number of answers in which handwriting was very poor, making reading difficult. There was also evidence of insecurity with terminology in a disappointingly large number of responses. This insecurity was highlighted in candidates' sketches which often lacked clarity and helpful labelling, suggesting a lack of forward planning and practice.

It may be stating the obvious, but it is vital that candidates know their A2 texts inside out. It was evident from many scripts that a significant number of candidates may know the basic story that their chosen text tells but they have but a slender grasp of the dramatist's aims beyond the telling of that story. It was obvious, too, from the perusal of their scripts, that many have a restricted understanding both of their chosen playwright's dramatic method and of the rudiments of a practical approach to realising text on stage.

Section A – Pre-Twentieth Century Plays

Question 01: *The Revenger's Tragedy*

The most common failing noted in the less successful answers was the absence of a clearly identified preferred response to Vindice, without which all performance ideas were rendered purposeless.

Where candidates did identify their preferred response, examiners saw a range of ideas; some candidates viewed the character as wholly sympathetic which was often not well justified given his decline into gratuitous violence and sadism.

Others depicted Vindice as a jibbering madman from his first entrance which was also an unhelpful approach to a play which depends upon the audience's sympathetic relationship with the character at least in the early stages of his journey from the deeply wronged, avenging scourge of a corrupt court to a depraved and bloodthirsty killer.

Better candidates chose their sections wisely in order to reveal more of an overview of the character, and they considered Vindice's interactions with his family as well as with Lussorioso and/or the Duke.

Weaker answers sometimes covered two 'sections' from different parts of the same scene, thus depriving themselves of the opportunity to show the changing attitudes of the character and thus the potential for different responses from the audience. Others chose Vindice's initial monologue and final speech before his execution offering a snapshot approach with no sense at all of what he did in the rest of the play.

Weaker candidates made little or no reference to the play's period or genre. There were also some unjustified and some unsuitable transpositions seen.

As always, the best answers focused on specific sections which were used to illustrate moments of performance calculated exactly to achieve clearly stated and appropriate responses from the audience.

Too many candidates answered the question from the perspective of a director rather than a performer and some candidates revealed insecurity in their knowledge of the play's intricate plot.

Question 02: *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Although not selected by many candidates, this question produced some imaginative designs for the play with the potential to communicate the contrast between the two conflicting value systems seen in the play, embodied in the design brief for 'court' and 'country' scenes.

There were some inventive suggestions for presenting the corruption of the Duke's court which better candidates treated with some invention and vision. Better answers also created imaginative domestic settings for the scenes between Vindice and his mother and sister.

In less successful answers, the contrasts between the two worlds of the play were often barely realised, or suggestions were overly simplistic. Several answers relied upon changes of lighting and sound (not a nominated design element), while ignoring either set design – the main focus of the question- or costume design, which could have been a very effective visual indication of contrast.

Some answers showed a lack of understanding of the designer's role and gave answers couched in very general terms without use of specialist terminology. There was an overall lack of precision and detail in these answers which was very disappointing.

Those candidates who chose to transpose the settings to another period or to introduce anachronistic costumes or accessories into an otherwise mainly Jacobean setting did better when they remembered to justify their suggestions.

Question 03: *Tartuffe*

As in the previous series, many candidates who had studied *Tartuffe* devoted too much time and space to peripheral matters rather than tackling the role of Elmire directly. Thus, examiners reported seeing lengthy introductions about the nature of Moliere's comic style, its origins in *Commedia dell'arte* and the difficulties that Moliere encountered in the face of objections to his play from religious zealots. This material detracted from, rather than enhancing, their answers.

The majority of candidates showed a secure understanding of the role, and interpretations of the role were mainly apt. However, there were some unlikely interpretations of Elmire and her relationship with Tartuffe which were not justified. It is unlikely, for example, that Elmire flirts with Tartuffe when we first see them together.

Some candidates did not realise Elmire's 'maternal' qualities (although some evidently believed her to be the natural mother of Mariane and Damis) or her fundamental good sense; qualities which are so important in establishing her interaction with the other characters. There was some evidence of misreading, particularly with reference to her relationship with Mme Pernelle and her costuming. For example, it is unlikely that Elmire would wear "a scarlet dress slit to the thigh" or disport herself with the physical abandon envisaged by rather too many candidates.

A few candidates covered a full range of indicators and gave an informed overview of the role; they used the text well to support their interpretation and to justify their nominated audience response. However, a great many candidates focussed on very brief moments from the text, and did not develop the role fully or appropriately. Some failed to nominate a preferred response.

Better answers generally developed her relationships with Tartuffe, Orgon and Mariane in some detail and offered clear performance ideas.

Question 04: *Tartuffe*

This was a popular question and it attracted some very well informed responses as well as some very weak ones.

There were some impressive answers to the question which showed a very good understanding of comedy and were very clear in their use of comic timing, business and Moliere's text. However, weaker answers tended to assert comic intention, which was then only mildly realised in the performance ideas given.

The majority of candidates used the sections with Elmire and Tartuffe, with varying success, and many candidates also used sections with Orgon. Good answers offered very detailed references to the text to illustrate moments of timing. The best answers considered the

responses of other characters on stage during the section, and showed coherent direction with very clear intentions.

Weaker answers showed limited understanding of Moliere's style and intentions. These answers tended to focus on Tartuffe, his appearance and unappealing qualities, but often considered the character in isolation, therefore not meeting the "interaction" of the question. Some answers focussed solely on interaction with Elmire, not addressing the "different characters" aspect of the question. Good answers selected examples with care in order to meet these precise demands.

Examiners reported seeing a significant number of answers that appeared to be answering the Summer 2010 question on *Tartuffe* which referred to his ability to 'amuse and repulse' the audience.

Candidates should be encouraged to expect questions to have their own specific demands which need to be fully met to ensure success.

Question 05: The Recruiting Officer

This was the more popular and successful question on this text. Many candidates were able to identify suitable audience responses to Silvia, and to recognise her qualities in their performance ideas. Others stated their aims for the audience but relied on assertion rather than actual performance detail to achieve them.

The best answers showed a good understanding of the role of Silvia and the demands of playing a "breeches" role. These answers offered some detail of Silvia's performance, both as herself and in the role of Jack Wilful. Good answers also explored the character interacting with a number of others with some particularly successful work on her interaction with Plume.

Less successful answers gave lengthy accounts of the historical context and analysis of the type of role Silvia represents.

Good answers paid attention to the use of costume and props, and integrated their understanding of the historical context with apt and detailed direction. These answers paid greater attention to the realisation of a comedy, with appropriate use of timing, comic business and delivery.

Good answers also gave sufficient focus to audience and to their intended responses. These answers showed an awareness of pace and of the light humour of the text.

Many candidates chose the initial section with her cousin Melinda and her first appearance as Jack Wilful, not touching upon her relationship with Plume, and most did convey a sense of the comedic potential within the role although Silvia's exchanges with Rose were rarely handled well, if handled at all.

A number of candidates invented business for Silvia that was either inappropriate to her character or to the period. The exchange with Melinda, for example, is not conducted while the girls are served tea by Lucy, nor is it historically correct to have Silvia consume sandwiches in a greedy and noisy fashion before storming out of her cousin's home.

Question 06: *The Recruiting Officer*

There were quite a few answers to this question and examiners reported seeing some very comical renderings of Kite's recruiting tactics, albeit far fewer answers that dealt with both Plume and Kite in action.

Some limited responses were also seen. Several candidates were drawn into lengthy discussions of historical context. Unfortunately these answers often appeared to substitute 'history' for 'invention'.

Some answers offered pejorative readings of Kite and Plume, revealing a misunderstanding of the contemporary mores or, simply, revealing a lack of thorough knowledge of the text.

Good answers showed a command of comic direction, including pace, timing and comic business, and applied these features well in their realisation of their chosen sections of text. In these answers, costume and props were appropriate and used well in performance terms.

Focus was directed equally towards the recruiters and the recruited, and much comedy was extracted from the gullibility of the 'young men of Shrewsbury'. Some weaker answers failed to consider the direction of the crucially important, hapless fellows who fall victim to the recruiters' ruses.

Many candidates concentrated their attention on the opening scene and the scene in which Kite (occasionally in concert with Plume) recruits Pearmain and Appletree in Act Two Scene Three. There were some weaker candidates who simply appeared to begin at the beginning of the play, directing every line of interaction between Kite and the 'mob' in Scene One until they had run out of time. This resulted in a restricted overview of the recruiters.

Better candidates gave appropriate attention to the sections where there is most comic potential and there were some inventive strategies for realising Kite 'the conjuror' and Plume's role in the scene. Others omitted this scene entirely and thereby missed opportunities for comedy.

Some careless candidates opted for contemporary costumes (without full justification) but these were often over-pantomimic or inappropriate. Kite would not appear in Y fronts, for example.

Good answers selected their moments of text judiciously and paid attention to the comic realisation of their chosen scenes through detailed practical examples, including some off-text but highly appropriate suggestions for comic business.

Question 07: *The Servant of Two Masters*

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

The best answers showed a good understanding of the question, and applied physical theatre techniques and/or comic *lazzi* and/or slapstick with purpose.

There was some particularly good work on the realisation of Truffaldino in a variety of scenes and on the fight scene between Beatrice and Silvio. The best answers integrated their understanding of the appropriate comic devices into the direction of their selected scenes, and offered painstakingly precise direction. Only fully detailed ideas succeed in creating comedy for a reader and there were many superb realisations of the 'chewed bread to stick the letter' section of the play which contained moment by moment, fully visualised comic action which made the examiners (the potential audience) laugh!

Less successful answers attempted and occasionally succeeded in creating comedy from direction of the delivery of the dialogue or from costume ideas. Unfortunately, while potentially comical, these ideas were not the result of physical theatre techniques and/or comic *lazzi* and/or slapstick and could not be credited as such.

Less successful answers also often offered practical suggestions for physical comedy that was not always made integral to the whole play. For example, several answers suggested the use of trampolines but did not adequately explain why the waiters were serving food from a trampoline, nor why Pantalone was using one to reach Clarice's room. This lack of clarity limited the effectiveness of such answers.

Some very good answers fully integrated ideas from the *Commedia dell'arte*, and used this cultural context to provide visual humour and add pace and depth to the sections selected.

One recurrent mistake reported by examiners, again, this January, was candidates' apparent inability to distinguish between what might be purposeful reference to the *Commedia* tradition and what was simply irrelevant (because not applied) background material that served only to distract the candidate from the focus of the question.

Question 08: *The Servant of Two Masters*

This was also a popular question and, in general, was successfully answered.

There was a good understanding of Silvio and his *Commedia* roots were generally explored briefly and purposefully. Casting was often offered (though not required) and was mainly apt, and there was some good use of detail in how Silvio could exploit his appearance, particularly his hair, to show his vanity and self-absorbed qualities.

There was some judicious selection of sections of text, with the majority of answers showing Silvio's progress through the text from his original betrothal, through his despair, to his reconciliation with Clarice.

There was some lively direction, with the fight between Silvio and Beatrice being particularly successful, with suggestions covering choice of swords (rubber or tiny) and Silvio's cowardly response to fighting "Federigo". Good suggestions showed a secure understanding of the style of the piece, and comic moments were well developed.

A few answers were less successful; in the main because quite repetitive scenes were selected. For example, three scenes in which Silvio weeps, gazes at Clarice and sighs could be an apt interpretation of the text but offers a rather limited overview of the role.

Many candidates interpreted the creation of a sympathetic character to mean that Silvio had to be completely sympathised with, at the expense of being sympathetic within the comic style of the play. This was in error and led to many realisation ideas that were not wholly apt. Some answers realised a Silvio that was 'pathetic' or throwing tantrums 'like a toddler', creating a character that was not sympathetic at all.

Question 09: Lady Windermere's Fan

This was an extremely popular play and the option on 'the cynical presentation of society' received the majority of answers.

A wide range of responses was offered, from the highly successful and sparkingly witty realisation of Wilde's presentation of society to the woefully unsuccessful, literary and/or narrative description of totally unsuitable sections of the play.

Too many candidates who studied this play appeared not to understand it. They did not understand the basic story of the play, who loves whom and who does not; they did not understand the characters of the play, those whom Wilde is satirising and those whom he is not; they did not understand the themes of the play, and they did not understand Wilde's intentions. Unfortunately, a number of them did not understand the demands of the question.

While confident candidates selected appropriate sections of the play with apparent ease, offering detailed and often very funny directions for extracting every ounce of potential comedy out of the pithy aphorisms of Lord Darlington, the hypocritical snipings of the Duchess of Berwick and the misogynistic banter of Cecil Graham, Dumbly and Tuppy, bewildered candidates blithely offered blow by blow descriptions of moments that were completely unsuited to the question's demands.

Thus, examiners reported seeing candidates directing Lord and Lady Windermere's initial argument over the bank book or Lady Windermere's exchanges with Mrs Erylne in Act Four with never a whiff of 'cynicism' and often without any idea at all about how a director goes about 'highlighting' anything for the audience.

Another difficulty with some of the answers seen was that candidates selected very brief moments of text, sometimes focusing on one or two lines, with which to illustrate their answers, which did not allow them to develop their responses in appropriate depth and detail.

There were, however some very good answers which addressed, head-on, the directorial tools that could be used to 'highlight' the 'cynical presentation'. Good answers showed a secure understanding of Wilde's wit and the lightness of touch needed in performance.

The better candidates were able to identify the aspects of society that were being satirised by Wilde, including its hypocrisy, its views on marriage and the double standards that exist regarding relationships between the sexes. Others focused on society as a hotbed of gossip and the celebration of the trivial. Many good answers revealed an understanding of Wilde's purpose in juxtaposing the Windermeres against the 'backdrop' of a more cynical society.

These answers chose appropriate sections and realised them with clear detail.

The question was specific in its demand for a discussion of the direction of the cast, which made it all the more difficult to understand why so many candidates spent up to half their answers designing settings for the ballroom, or for Lord Darlington's rooms or describing the exact colour and style of the Duchess of Berwick's hat and parasol, often with no explicit attempt to make these relevant to the focus of the question.

Question 10: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

This was the less popular option although it elicited significant numbers of responses, covering a wide range of achievement.

Good answers began by referring to the style and period of the play, and the best answers revealed evidence of purposeful research into the costume of the period. In particular, well-prepared candidates knew the difference between day-wear and evening wear, and they were able to use costume design related vocabulary in their discussion of the style, cut and fit of their chosen designs. They wrote knowledgeably and accurately about bodices, skirts, cuffs, hemlines, neck-lines, waist-lines, sleeves, ornamentation, trimmings, braiding, fringing, pleats, ruching, padding, buttons, stitching.

These candidates knew about different fabrics and their relative properties for hanging, swirling and swishing. Better answers always contained details on accessories, gloves, headgear, footwear, bags, jewels and fans.

Weaker answers, in stark contrast, contained tentative suggestions for the colour of the ladies' respective frocks, often opting for the most simplistic of colour coding-pastel shades or white for Lady Windermere and red or black for the 'dangerous' Mrs Erlynne.

The demands of the question went beyond the mere provision of costume designs; candidates were expected to discuss how their ideas would help to reveal the different characters of Mrs Erlynne and Lady Windermere and here, too, answers were sharply divided into the better and the weaker.

Better answers revealed a secure understanding of Wilde's characters and of the precise social milieu of the ladies for whom they were designing; their designs were both inventive and intelligent and based on textual evidence about the two women.

Weaker responses contained evident misunderstanding, especially of Mrs Erlynne. Some suggested she would turn up at the party that was to confirm her re-entry into society in shabby clothing that had been patched; others thought she would attire herself in a black and red 'number' that would have been more suitable for an American 'whorehouse'. The fact that Mrs Erlynne is attempting to be accepted in society and that she has received vast sums of money from Lord Windermere to maintain a grand lifestyle, would suggest that she would wear a costume appropriate to the occasion, and not draw attention to "her vulgarity"; albeit her strong personality might be reflected in colour and design. Candidates who made these mistakes were clearly unfamiliar with the text that, on more than one occasion, refers explicitly to Mrs Erlynne's dress sense.

There was evidence, too, of misunderstanding of social conventions such as when hats and/or gloves would be worn, and this led to some inappropriate answers. For example, although Mrs Erlynne is the more flamboyant of the two characters, she would not wear her ball dress in the morning. There was similar misreading of Lady Windermere. The fact that she is "a puritan" does not indicate that she "is innocent and always dressed in pure white". Several candidates wrongly suggested that in Act 4, Lady Windermere would receive visitors dressed in her nightie and dressing gown.

Good answers always provided sketches to support their ideas.

Weaker candidates often failed to supply a single sketch and, not infrequently, they ignored the demand of the question to relate their designs to at least two specific scenes where the

characters appear together. Thus some offered designs for Lady Windermere in Act One, where Mrs Erlynne does not appear.

A considerable number of candidates 'economised' by selecting Act Two and then Act Three, where the two women are wearing the same costumes as they did for the ball, with the addition, for Act Three, of a cape, cloak or shawl, as fancy dictated. This was not a sensible approach to a question that clearly required four designs, and candidates who adopted this strategy robbed themselves of the opportunity to show off their knowledge of the events of the play and the way in which the characters had responded to them.

Question 11: *The Seagull*

This was a fairly popular question which was often successful. The interpretation of Trigorin dictated the audience response, and this was generally well handled, with the majority of candidates interpreting the role as weak and selfish, albeit talented. Better candidates acknowledged that the audience response would vary as the play progresses.

There was some nicely detailed work on Trigorin's relationships with Nina and Arkadina and particularly his duplicity in his dealings with the two women. Practical suggestions were often detailed and there was generally very good use of text, showing an understanding of the play and of Chekhov's style.

Good answers offered appropriate ideas for casting (although this was not a requirement) and vocal quality bearing in mind that Trigorin has to be, at least superficially, an attractive character.

Weaker answers spent too much time discussing Chekhov, his writing and his relationship with Stanislavski. A few answers offered unlikely suggestions for the realisation of the role, largely ignoring Trigorin's success as a writer and ascribing some melodramatic characteristics to his performance which would have been more appropriately ascribed to Konstantin.

Some candidates offered interpretations of the role that appear to go against Chekhov's intentions. For example, they suggested that Trigorin's inability to recollect the seagull in Act Four was a 'cover' for his remorse over Nina. Better candidates who made this assertion acknowledged that the idea was unconventional. Other candidates characterised Trigorin as something of a 'dirty old man' often described as a 'leech' or as acting 'pervy'; these suggestions were rarely justified.

Most answers selected appropriate moments of text and gave a clear overview of the role and how they intended their audience response to develop.

Question 12: *The Seagull*

This was also a popular question. The best answers gave a clear overview of the changing relationship between Nina and Konstantin and selected sections of text appropriately to show its development.

Casting was generally suitable and sometimes purposeful rather than perfunctory and, in the best answers, characterisation was well supported with these candidates offering close and frequent support from the text. Weaker answers devoted far too much space and time to detailing the characters' costumes which had little bearing on the relationship between Nina and Konstantin and was therefore not credit-worthy.

There was some particularly useful work on the couple's first meeting, indicating, through the direction of subtle facial expression and gesture to support clearly defined delivery of lines, their different intentions for the relationship.

Similarly, the collapse of Konstantin's hopes towards the end of the play when Nina returns to him for a final goodbye was often discussed sensitively and in good detail.

Candidates who confined themselves to the sections in Act One and Four, however, often failed to realise a genuine overview of the relationship which is delicately balanced in Act One but somehow fractured by Act Two. The 'snap-shot' approach to the beginning and ending of the play omitted much.

Many candidates omitted Nina's line in Act One where she says: 'My heart's full of you', presumably because it did not fit with their interpretation that the relationship is entirely one-sided. But this in itself betrayed a lack of understanding of Chekhov's subtle presentation of the young love between the pair.

Other candidates spent too long on Konstantin's exchanges with Sorin before Nina arrives, a section that is strictly outside the scope of the terms of this question.

Some candidates were less secure in the realisation of the section where Konstantin presents the seagull to a bewildered Nina. It was surprising that so few candidates made reference to this section; some approached it dismissively as an example of Konstantin's foolishness. A few better answers gave detailed and thoughtful descriptions of Nina's responses at this moment, and how this fateful symbol of destruction is revisited in Nina's exchanges with Konstantin at the end of the play.

The majority of candidates showed a good understanding of Chekhov's style and revealed this through detailed and subtle direction. A few answers, as with the previous question, spent too long on Chekhov's biography and his work with Stanislavski, losing valuable time for examples of direction.

Section B: The Twentieth Century and Contemporary Drama

General

As the question set in Section B is the same for all set texts, it is worth reiterating the following general points, most of which have been made in previous reports, about the way in which candidates approached the extract-based question.

Better answers:

- offered a **personal interpretation** of the printed extract that revealed their understanding of the extract, of its context within the wider play and of the play as a whole
- attempted, through their directorial ideas, to communicate meaning to the audience
- supported ideas by using quotation from the extract
- considered the audience experience that they were aiming to achieve and offered suggestions that were likely to achieve these
- provided sketches that were of adequate size – about a third of a page – that were clearly labelled, and which related to the necessary traffic of the printed extract and were compatible with the play as a whole
- included evidence of **relevant** research discernible in the appropriateness of their practical suggestions

Weaker answers:

- failed to locate the correct extract in their examination booklets but answered instead on the corresponding pages from the texts they had with them in the examination room
- failed to confine their interpretation to the material in the printed extract, and wasted precious time directing moments before or after the material in the printed extract
- wrote **exclusively** about production elements – 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
- spent almost all of their answers writing casting and costume suggestions for every single character on stage, often betraying a restricted understanding of how casting and costume convey meaning to an audience
- referred irrelevantly to the biographies of the respective playwrights which had no bearing whatsoever on the interpretation of the extract
- wrote at length about their intentions for the audience without offering the concrete suggestions for achieving these intentions
- wrote about 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
- failed to quote from the text in front of them
- ignored the context of the extract and made suggestions that ran counter to events that have just taken place in the section before the printed extract
- Many weaker answers were swamped with references to research that was:
 - purely biographical
 - purely literary
 - gratuitous and/or clearly irrelevant to their interpretation of the piece
- contained a narrative account of the action contained in the extract and offered neither interpretation nor meaning to the reader/audience
- Sketches
 - many weaker answers did not contain a useful sketch
 - some sketches were crammed into three lines of the answer books with little or no labelling

- some sketches contained so much labelling that it was impossible to see the sketch beneath it
- 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 depended upon back projection for their ideas

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.

This surreal scene offered a great opportunity to well-prepared candidates who had understood Lorca's intentions.

Unfortunately, too many candidates saw it as an opportunity to make outlandish suggestions which are not supported by the text. Candidates should be encouraged to justify their ideas in relation to the text and not in relation to a playwright's biography.

Good answers showed a clear awareness of the importance of the scene and its impact within the context of the whole play.

There were some useful and imaginative set designs, clearly linked to creating a valid interpretation of the section for an audience. However, some sketches were not very clearly realised and were difficult to follow. Some consisted of theatrical impossibilities.

Some candidates had chosen to incorporate ideas from Salvador Dali's work. Where these were appropriately linked this often added a richness to the design ideas, but, too often, the link was a spurious reference to Dali's relationship with Lorca which added nothing to an interpretation of this scene from *Blood Wedding*.

Many candidates failed to explain the symbolic value of the characters of the Moon, the Beggar Woman and the Woodcutters, and there were many unjustified suggestions for casting these characters as children or as dwarves or as lighting effects/voice overs; some chose to cast the Beggar Woman as a man. This is a scene where it is useful for candidates to describe the appearances of the symbolic characters to enable the reader to envisage the unfolding of the scene.

There were some interesting ideas for stylised movements, including the use of flamenco and the toreador's bull-fighting movements. Where these were explained in relation to the intended interpretation they were valid. Often they were not. There was much pre-prepared material in evidence that was not shaped to the demands of the extract and much superfluous description of the costumes of the 'musicians' who were, for some reason, visible throughout.

Unjustified ideas often lacked focus and revealed a lack of understanding, for example directing a chorus as "Moon" or using a team of acrobats to create a moon shape.

Many candidates showed a good understanding of the play and of the roles in this extract. These were well realised in the main, particularly in the presentation of the Beggar Woman and Moon. Better answers directed the words of the text in specific detail rather than dealing in generalities.

Many candidates failed to reach the end of the short extract, omitting the Bridegroom's exchange with the Beggar Woman, the Woodcutters' speeches and the arrival of the Bride and Leonardo. These answers failed to give a full flavour of the extract in action.

Many failed to offer any kind of coherent interpretation of the extract which Lorca clearly delineates as a 'hunt'.

Good answers put the piece in context and revealed a secure understanding of Lorca's purpose. Such candidates showed a secure understanding of the style of the piece and its potential in performance. A few weaker candidates were prone to assertion, not developing performance ideas likely to achieve their aims.

Question 14: *The Good Person of Szechwan*

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

As in previous series, many candidates wrote at great length about Brechtian theory, about their embracing of *Verfremdung* and the merits of gestic acting.

This occasionally helped better candidates to interpret the extract and to clarify the political thrust of the play as a whole, but often prevented them from understanding one of the most important aspects of this extract - Shui Ta's function in ensuring Shen Teh's survival - the impossibility of goodness surviving in a capitalist society.

Many candidates failed to understand the purpose of the quotation from the poem 'The Big Rug' which is central to the extract. In fact, few bothered to mention the delivery of it at all. Others thought the Carpenter was badly done by.

Some candidates appeared to think that Brecht did not want his audience to recognise Shui Ta as Shen Teh while others had the character engaged in much gratuitous nodding and winking to an audience that was to be entirely complicit both in the disguise and in the perceived 'cheating' of the Carpenter.

There was far too much theory here, far too much 'borrowing' wholesale from the exemplar essay on *Good Person* that is part of the Teacher Resource Bank and far too much pre-prepared material that was not shaped to the demands of the extract.

Better answers were original and refreshing in concentrating on directing the action and dialogue of the extract unhampered by Brechtian 'devices', but always mindful of the political message of the play and of the need to ram it home.

Question 15: *A View from the Bridge*

The majority of answers started with a detailed sketch of the stage plan and some reference to Miller's style. Often the answers showed a good understanding, although some candidates were confused as to the blend of classical elements with naturalism and representation. Weaker answers brought this confusion into their commentary on set and their direction. Some muddled candidates even confused Alfieri's choric role as 'Brechtian.'

Some answers spent too long on design ideas, to the detriment of their ideas for directing the text. Some candidates failed to include Alfieri's office on their sketch.

There was also some confusion with reference to the style of both men's and women's costumes in the 1950s, with some inappropriate suggestions both in terms of style and in the realisation of the characters.

Candidates need to ask themselves how far their casting and design ideas are helping them to create a coherent interpretation of the extract which, with this play, will always rest in the delivery of the dialogue and of Alfieri's direct address.

In general, there was a good understanding of the roles of Catherine and Beatrice, although not all candidates managed to realise the highly charged emotional content of this section. Several candidates misread the role of Beatrice, ignoring her self-control and dignity, and suggesting that she was deliberately hurting Catherine for no reason. This misreading was surprisingly common.

It was also common to see candidates setting the exchange between Beatrice and Catherine in a kitchen or even in a bedroom setting. Many had the women sharing chores such as folding washing or washing/drying up after a meal. These answers failed to recognise the context of the scene, the fact that Catherine has just returned from the cinema and that it is late in the evening.

The scene with Alfieri and Eddie was generally handled well, although weaker candidates had mistimed their answers and were only able to make a few observations about this section.

Examiners saw some exceptionally sensitive answers on this text. However, there were very many candidates who failed to recognise that at the heart of the extract is Catherine's dawning realisation about Eddie's feelings for her which is reinforced for the audience through Eddie's own poorly articulated accusation about Rodolpho.

Question 16: *The Trial*

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

Most candidates showed a good understanding of Berkoff's style, and developed appropriate ideas for the appearance and movement of the chorus. Good answers brought out the voyeuristic aspects of the chorus and the increasingly claustrophobic atmosphere created in this extract.

Some candidates struggled to reconcile Kafka's original novel and its roots in existentialist thought with Berkoff's highly physical adaptation, although most recognised at least the nightmare quality that is a feature of both.

Weaker answers spent far too much time theorising and/or tracing the influence of a myriad of practitioners on Steven Berkoff. One candidate offered details, for example, of Berkoff's meeting with Artaud.

The stage directions in this play are frequent and helpful, and many candidates contented themselves with repeating them with no significant additions or explanations. Many candidates used Berkoff's directions for the cast as furniture; in better answers, the chorus members' movements, postures, positions and generated sounds were clearly described and often vividly realised.

In only a few weaker answers did the chorus become threatening too early in the extract, giving little opportunity for building atmosphere and tension.

Several good answers offered clear casting for K, showing a secure awareness of his role in the play and making useful reference to context. There were detailed directorial suggestions, creating K's weakness and lack of comprehension.

Guards 1 and 2 were well drawn for the most part, with a variety of suggestions for casting, most well focused on the dark comedy of the roles. There was useful attention to the delivery of lines and to vocal quality.

Not all candidates made detailed reference to technical support, but there were some pertinent suggestions for lighting.

Many weaker answers failed to reach the end of the extract, and some candidates failed to offer an interpretation of any kind.

Question 17: Our Country's Good

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

This was a very popular question and generally a successful one on an extremely popular text.

In weaker answers there was a tendency not to explore the Aborigine's performance but to make brief reference to his function; many candidates failed to include any reference to Scene Four.

Weaker answers also offered discussion of Brechtian theory at the expense of exploring the play. Candidates need to remember that although Wertenbaker has a political purpose in writing this play, there are significant differences in her style, not least her engagement of sympathy for some characters.

Others discussed the political and historical context of the genesis of the play with insufficient application to the question.

Of all the questions in this section, this was the one where candidates sometimes failed to focus on the specified extract. There were several answers which discussed Ross's treatment of Dabby and his attempt to humiliate Mary or they focussed on Sideway's and Liz's launching into Farquhar's text. These diversions attracted no credit and limited the potential for achieving marks in this section.

The majority of set sketches were appropriate and had some references to Australia and the harsh conditions which the convicts experienced. Some candidates had not taken sightlines into sufficient consideration.

In this section, it is vital that the design reflects the demands of the extract, albeit in context of the whole text. Several candidates spent a long time describing the setting for the ship, for example, which relates to the very brief opening scene.

Many candidates failed to reach the end of the extract having spent the majority of their answers in casting and costume ideas that actually added very little to their interpretation of the section. Many candidates appeared not to understand the difference between interpretation and intention, and their answers suffered accordingly.

However, examiners reported seeing many very good answers which dealt sensitively and imaginatively with the delivery of text and the creation of rounded characters.

There was some very good direction of Ross, and his confrontational relationship with Ralph was usually very clearly explored.

Campbell was habitually depicted as a drunkard with no other evidence offered for such a reading than his idiosyncratic speech pattern which denotes his general lack of articulation in a play that has much to say about the power of both language and silence.

Some candidates wrote about no more than three individual lines of text, often starting with Ross' first expostulation of 'Modesty!' Such an approach will never constitute an acceptable interpretation of an 80 line extract.

In some answers, the overview of the text was less secure and therefore Ralph's emerging respect for the convicts and their developing sense of self-worth was over emphasised in direction.

Issues of rank and hierarchy are foregrounded in this extract, and many candidates attempted to interpret this through costume and other staging ideas with varying degree of accuracy and success. As in the last series, some candidates interpreted the hierarchy to which the officers and convicts belonged in concrete staging terms, by splitting the stage into zones or levels and placing different groups of characters accordingly. This is potentially very limiting and can be an ineffective directorial strategy, especially in scenes where both 'types' of character interact.

Question 18: *Coram Boy*

Strengths and weaknesses as above.

A few sound responses were seen on this text, showing a good knowledge of the text and of Edmundson's style.

The majority of candidates showed a good sense of the context of the action and identified the importance of the discovery of the dead babies in their answers.

In terms of design, a large percentage of the answers seen set the extract on a revolve. Some of these were successful, but a number were not and the answers suggested a lack of theatrical understanding as to how a revolve functions and how backdrops are used in this situation.

There were also some dubious claims made about the effectiveness of simple settings and the perceived 'complexity' of a thrust stage arrangement.

Use of costume was generally well considered and was more successful than set design, showing an apt awareness of period setting, and establishing characters and their position in society very neatly.

There was some thoughtful and detailed direction of characters, particularly of Mrs Lynch, Mrs Milcote and Meshak. In one very good answer, the realisation of Mrs Milcote in Scene 32 was detailed and moving, showing good use of the shawl as a prop and a good sense of timing to create emotion. The use of music in this scene was also well detailed in the majority of answers, and well linked to an overview of the play. Sound and lighting were generally considered carefully and with some success.

Weaker answers simply narrated the action of the scenes with little or no embellishment. There was no attempt made to explain the significance of the scenes in the play as a whole or to point up thematic elements such as those relating to parenthood, exploitation and/or love.

Many candidates focused on the technical demands of the section, such as achieving the transitions and providing recognizable locations. These answers adopted a somewhat mechanical approach at the expense of exploring the delivery of the text and its meaning which is as always the most important aspect of interpreting text-based drama for an audience.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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