



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2012**

**Drama and Theatre Studies**

**DRAM1A**

**(Specification 2240)**

**Unit 1A: Live Theatre Production**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **DRAM1A – Live Theatre Production Seen**

### ***General comments***

As in previous sessions, examiners reported seeing the full range of responses to questions in this paper with many candidates being extremely enthusiastic about the work they had seen. In the best cases this enthusiasm was translated into directly meeting the focus of the question with some excellent analyses of the three key areas that make up each question, i.e. addressing the specific demands, making reference to particular moments and assessing success or effectiveness. Where candidates failed to consider these key demands they were less successful and their responses became very generalised, offering either little more than an overview of the production or, in some cases, attempting to write about every aspect of the production without meeting the focus. Candidates need to pay specific attention to the precise demands of the question and not attempt to mould it to fit the question that either they had been hoping would appear or to one that they had previously practised. It is unlikely that pre-prepared material will fit the specific demands of the question.

### Choice of production

- candidates should be encouraged to consider why their choice of production is particularly appropriate for the specific question. Better responses made this explicit within their answers, often being most effective within the introduction. In some cases it would appear that candidates either had a limited pool of productions to draw from or were clearly so captivated by a particular one that they were determined to write about it regardless of its suitability
- many candidates wrote about productions that had been seen over a year previously, presumably as they were re-sitting the paper, often in these cases their notes were rather thin and consequently their ability to recall the precise details of the productions was not particularly well developed.

### Overview of production style and use of notes and sketches

- examiners reported that most candidates included some kind of overview of the production's context and style but they should be reminded that this should be comparatively brief and not at the expense of including reference to a range of moments from it
- candidates should be reminded not to assume prior knowledge on the part of the examiner, particularly for less well known productions where some brief details about the place of the chosen moments within the narrative can really help the examiner to visualise what the candidate is discussing in relation to performance or design elements
- examiners reported seeing a wide range of notes but candidates should be reminded that these are there to assist them in making reference to precise moments from the production. In several instances it would appear that the notes were considerably more detailed than the essays themselves. Candidates must also be reminded that these notes should not be in the form of continuous prose nor must they contain any downloaded or printed material (**including** production photographs)
- many candidates failed to include sketches for the two design questions and they should be made aware that not only are these expected, but that the inclusion of them can often help to convey information in a way that assists the examiner to understand the relationship established between the designer and the audience.

## Assessment and Evaluation

- examiners reported some improvement over previous examination sessions in this aspect, with many candidates moving beyond basic assertion and at the very least attempting to support their assessment of success with more developed ideas.

### **Question 01**

Examiners reported seeing some very precise and effective answers on the set and lighting in a wide variety of productions; and although some candidates failed to consider set and lighting working together, most addressed both aspects and the mood/atmosphere was often very well and precisely considered. Many candidates did provide detailed sketches of the set, with the best ones indicating the positioning and angling of lanterns in conjunction with this. In some answers, having done the sketches, candidates could have made more direct reference to them. The positioning of the sketch at the beginning of the response (or an indication of where to find the sketch further through the booklet) would often have been useful. The best responses demonstrated an impressive level of technical vocabulary that was accurately applied and this helped to make the discussion of particular moments very clear and precise. Other answers were distorted by the reverse situation; confusion over up stage and down; reference to scenes happening 'back stage'; or statements about the staging form which were then clearly contradicted by the sketches. In less effective responses, the focus on explaining how the mood or atmosphere was created was not always achieved, with some candidates ignoring the effectiveness of the two elements together completely. Responses on *The Wild Bride* were particularly effective but in several cases candidates selected productions where, although the lighting was integral in creating mood or atmosphere, there was little to say about the set design and this was often preceded by a statement explaining that because of the variety of locations required by the production, the designer had chosen a minimal set. These rarely produced entirely satisfactory responses. Many candidates chose to write about *Warhorse* – but often selected moments from the production where there was very little to say about the set design.

### **Question 02**

This was the least popular of the four choices but many candidates who answered it did so because they had specific and detailed knowledge, and were well prepared to address the requirements. The range of plays chosen was wide, with some candidates concentrating on the specific details of the costume of just two characters, giving very precise references and indicating a well-chosen moment. There was much, quite subtle, interpretation of character and its relevance. If no other moment in the play was directly related to costume, some candidates concentrated on the impact the initial entrance in a costume had for the audience. Some chose more extreme designs including pantomimes and musicals (from ugly sisters to chorus lines) and conveyed very clearly what the design achieved for the characters. Modern dress and often period costume were equally well tackled. With weaker responses there was often the sense that the candidate had chosen this question because they had a fairly clear mental picture of one particular design, but the relevant references were not developed and the definition of what was suggested about the character was either limited or not attempted. Relatively few took the advantage of offering sketches and even fewer managed to provide drawings which were precise enough to add to the reader's ability to visualise the effectiveness. Some answers contained very sweeping assertions, especially in relation to the effect of certain colours in design, for example, white revealing innocence (even when the costume was a doctor's coat) or black demonstrating evil, (in a period costume for an elegant gentleman). As with responses to all design questions, it is imperative that candidates are equipped with the necessary appropriate terminology and that

this is something that should be tackled in the follow-up work done after seeing a production. Candidates who described the Devil's costume in *The Wild Bride*, as 'baby-grows' are not really demonstrating sufficient precise knowledge to enable the examiner to gain a complete understanding of the production style. *Wild Bride*, *Wicked* and the RSC's recent version of *The Merchant of Venice* were among the productions which provided material for good answers.

### **Question 03**

In many respects, this was the question which suffered most from candidates failing to read the paper carefully. The requirement to discuss the use of set and space by the actors was often almost completely ignored. Some candidates simply described the set, not even offering a sketch, and giving no reference to the space; other candidates described the performers' movement around the space without any consideration as to how this was 'imaginative'. Better responses recognised what was being asked, often producing very astute and interesting answers with some very clear, effective assessment of the way the stage space could indicate the confidence or otherwise of a character on it. Similarly, there was some very precise reference to the way the auditorium was used in some productions and the theatrical effectiveness of such scenes. Where candidates chose to write about more non-naturalistic productions, the use of the space by the performers was often analysed in such a way that it became clear how the audience were carried along by the illusion created, and provided some very clear and thoughtful details. Plays such as *The Woman in Black*, *Swallows and Amazons* and Frantic Assembly's *Lovesong* produced some very good responses here. What was perhaps most disappointing about some candidates' responses here was the failure to consider in any real detail the performers' use of physical skills, resulting in very generalised answers that did little more than provide an overview of the production. Conversely, some candidates wrote in some detail about very specific moments but with no sense of either the context of the moments or the design of the space, thereby making it very difficult for the examiner to see how the examples given related to the demands of the question.

### **Question 04**

This was by far the most popular question on the paper and as such produced a very full range of responses. Candidates tackled the question from a range of standpoints, with some focusing exclusively on one performer's ability to create comedy or sympathy whilst others chose to write about one performer and comedy and another with sympathy; some very effective answers considered both comedy and sympathy at different times during the production; all of which, although equally acceptable, sometimes proved challenging for less able candidates who would have been better to focus exclusively on either comedy or sympathy. Generally speaking, the evocation of a sympathetic response was better achieved than a comic one. There were some excellent and very detailed answers on *Journey's End* that demonstrated a real understanding of not only the context of the moments being considered, but also a very good sense of exactly what it was that the performers were doing, vocally and physically, to create this response. The best candidates offered precise vocal details, considering the performers' use of pitch, pace, volume and emphasis with appropriate terminology to analyse these elements. Sometimes physicality was less well expressed, with some candidates failing to recognise the meaning of certain terms: 'gait' often being confused for 'walk'. Those candidates that identified a comic response were often very clear about describing a comic moment, but only the strongest candidates were able to give a clear explanation of exactly what precise skills the performers were using in order to create the comedy. Many simply described the action of the specified moment, relying on assertion such as 'this made the audience fall about with laughter'

without explaining how this was achieved. The current National Theatre production of *One Man, Two Guvvners* – although offering much potential – was rarely handled well. Some candidates, who perhaps had little choice of productions to write about, fell into the trap of trying to identify moments that clearly were not either particularly comic or designed to elicit sympathy, and which therefore afforded them little scope for detailed assessment of success.

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

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