



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

Drama and Theatre Studies

DRAM2

(Specification 2240)

Unit 2: Presentation of an Extract from a Play

Report on the Examination

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DRAM2: Presentation of an Extract from a Play

General

This is a well-established examination and, for those teachers who have been teaching the specification since 2008, its requirements are now very familiar.

Nevertheless, the specification is continually attracting new schools/colleges as well as being taught by teachers new to AQA, so it is recommended that all teachers who do not feel 100% au fait with the precise requirements of each component of the practical unit refer closely to the specification document. Additionally, they should endeavour to attend the annual standardisation meetings that take place in the autumn term.

Each school/college is also allocated a Coursework Adviser who is available to provide advice about the practical units. Contact details of Coursework Advisers are available from the Drama department.

The Drama department also has a bank of information for new and existing teachers of the specification on the AQA web-site where teachers may access examples of Supporting Notes.

Students may find it useful to have copies of the AQA Drama and Theatre Studies textbook which is published by Nelson Thornes, where there are 'student-friendly' explanations of the requirements of the specification.

Where teachers were completely secure about the demands of the DRAM2 Unit, moderators reported seeing much very successful work where students achieved their potential.

There were unfortunately a number of instances where students had not been guided appropriately and this had an adverse effect upon their achievement.

Examples of inappropriate advice included:

- The selection of insubstantial or unsuitable texts for performance
- The selection of prohibited texts (any set text from the AS DRAM1 and A2 DRAM3 lists & any text from the same period or genre as that selected for DRAM1)
- The selection of an inappropriate practitioner as an influence, for example:
 - not influential – no significant body of theoretical material to inform the work
 - not a practitioner as designated in the specification
 - not **wholly** relevant to the selected text or relevant for the **whole** text
 - 'pick and mix' approach to the ideas of a practitioner which made a travesty of the practitioner's theatrical purpose – often indicated by apparently haphazard completion of blue DTVS form
- Over-long or brief, under-developed pieces
- Extracts/texts cut to ribbons or stitched together as an abridgement
- Inappropriate choice of production elements, given the choice of practitioner, for example, 'hot pants' and low cut leotards for a Grotowski-inspired piece.

Having established a mutually convenient date with the moderator, it is imperative that teachers complete all the necessary forms sent to them in good time.

The return of DTSV forms at least one month before the examination is a requirement, but if the examination is to be taken immediately after a half term or Easter holiday, for example, it is important to allow time for the moderator to check the paperwork and the extract(s) and to get back to the school in good time to avert potential problems, so in these instances, extra

time is needed.

If teachers have any doubt whatsoever about their students' choices, the Coursework Advisor should be contacted before groups embark on their work. Many teachers did this and were therefore able to advise their students appropriately.

It is worth reminding students that the work prepared by each group should be entirely their own. In some schools/colleges moderators witnessed all the groups wearing more or less identical costumes, regardless of the choice of play or practitioner.

In other cases schools' groups offer the same play every year, which, although not prohibited, often resulted in an almost identical 'interpretation' and a feeling of *déjà vu* for the moderator. This is not good practice.

It should also be noted that if schools/colleges have more than one group doing the same or different extracts from the same play they must ensure that there is no collusion between the groups but that each makes their own artistic decisions. They should not share costumes or props or a set.

Teachers should also warn students from replicating AS performances seen on YouTube. One moderator was astonished to see a performance of *4.48 Psychosis* that was identical to one that a group had done a couple of years ago in her own school. The group had even referenced this in their Supporting Notes.

There is a real danger in this. Groups should be creating their own work and not copying the work of others. Indeed they sign a declaration sheet to confirm that the work is their own and this sort of 'copy-cat' approach could lead to suggestions of malpractice, which in turn may lead to disqualification.

It is also strictly prohibited in the specification for a group to perform something created as a school production or that they have already performed at GCSE.

Administration

Moderators have reported that the organisation of the actual moderation was generally good overall.

Many schools/colleges had provided a reserved parking space, a quiet, well-ventilated room in which the moderator could peruse the Supporting Notes in complete privacy and additionally offered refreshments, depending on the time and length of the examination. This was very much appreciated by moderators who had either travelled a great distance or had gone straight from their own school to moderate at another, without a break. Given that some moderations can take four hours or more, these courtesies were often a sign of thoughtful consideration.

Teacher Assessment

The purpose of moderation is to cascade the national standard to teachers who are assessing their students up and down the country. It is expected that teachers will have attended standardisation meetings in the recent past where they are experienced teachers of the specification. It is a requirement for new teachers to attend a standardisation meeting before attempting to assess their students' work.

Where there are no more than two groups in the school/college, moderators will be present for the award of all marks and will guide teachers appropriately. The moderator's mark is the final mark.

Where there are more than two groups in a school/college, the moderator will leave the teacher to complete the assessment of the further groups provided that he/she is satisfied that the teacher has assimilated the standard. The teacher will then mark the remaining groups – which should fall between the highest and lowest groups seen by the moderator- in line with the standard that has been established by the moderator.

Not all teachers appeared to appreciate that the moderation discussion is not a negotiation about marks; it is a discussion whereby the teacher's marking is adjusted, if necessary, to be in line with the national standard. Moderators must hear teacher's justifications for the marks that they consider appropriate for each student in order to feel confident that the teacher understands the criteria for awarding marks; however, the moderator's marks are the marks recorded on the Candidate Record Forms and the marks that are awarded to the students.

Supporting Notes

Most teachers were able to apply the marking criteria accurately to the Supporting Notes. Where adjustments had to be made it was usually because students failed to understand the specific requirements of each section.

Preparation and Development

These marks are not subject to moderation but teachers do have to justify the marks awarded, especially where there appears to be a discrepancy between the preparation marks and evidence available to moderators, i.e. the Supporting Notes and the presentation. Moderators noted that, in some schools, despite there being obvious differences between the quality of individual student's achievements as actors, director or designers, all the preparation marks were the same.

Teachers are advised to read the criteria for each section and award marks accordingly using the band descriptors; there are no marks available for generalised 'hard work' and it can be a sign of limited discrimination where teachers cannot distinguish between their students using the published criteria.

Presentation

Most teachers were able to apply the banding criteria appropriately, viewing the work their students had presented with an objective eye.

Supporting Notes

The vast majority of Supporting Notes were submitted in sections, each of an appropriate length. Students who used their allowance of 700 words almost always offered better developed notes than those who wrote 550 words. However, moderators lamented the fact that some students were writing sections that exceeded 700 words by some way. Students should be reminded that if their work is over-long it can be judged not to be 'concise', 'precise' or 'purposeful' which are all Band 1 descriptors in Sections 1-3 respectively. Over-length penalises itself.

Another feature that has begun to appear in some students' notes is the use of Appendices, where students attempt to by-pass the word limit by introducing supplementary material relating to each section, through a section-by-section dedicated Appendix.

Please note that such appendices will be ignored by the moderator as they fall outside the specification requirement. Appendices attract **no credit** whatsoever and students should be discouraged from including them.

The best work demonstrated complete awareness of the requirements for each section.

Section One

In Section 1, good notes demonstrated a very good knowledge and understanding not only of the practitioner's theatrical purpose but also the methods, techniques and ideas that they employed to achieve that purpose.

In good notes, students used the practitioner's own terminology (e.g. 'gest' or 'affective athleticism') but they then further defined and explained what each term meant with precision and related their methodology to their chosen text.

The justification of the choice of text/extract is the key to this section and the most important reason for selecting a play/extract is where students see it as the perfect vehicle for demonstrating their understanding of Brecht/Frantic Assembly/Artaud et al. Too many students and their teachers appear to think that a 'best fit' approach is acceptable. It is not.

There were also instances of students selecting playwrights (with no directorial background) as 'practitioners'. This was self-limiting as students were unable to refer to the 'practitioner's' methodology in their approach to the text.

Where students selected Pinter, Ayckbourn, Godber or Berkoff as their practitioner they needed to be careful to ensure that their application of the methodology was that of the practitioner/director rather than that of the playwright and the literary features of the chosen play.

In the best notes, students justified their choice of play/extract strictly in terms in how it could be used to employ the selected techniques of the practitioner- thus demonstrating their knowledge. This is necessary even where students are performing a Berkoff play and applying Berkoff's methods as a practitioner, or a Brecht play with Brecht as a practitioner. It is not satisfying the demands of the Section to offer as sole justification for choice of play – 'Brecht wrote it, so it's appropriate'.

Section Two

In Section 2, in good notes, students expressed their dramatic intentions; in most cases these were linked closely to the intentions of the playwright. They described much more than a general intended response such as 'we want the audience to feel shocked', but explained concisely what they wanted the audience to think or feel towards a particular character, moment or scene. Good work then went on to explain exactly how the group were interpreting the text; referring to casting, staging, costuming and acting of the roles. Alongside this they linked their artistic decisions closely to the ideas of the practitioner and how these ideas were influencing the interpretation of the extract(s). Having read this section, the moderator should have a very clear idea of what they are about to see on stage and the student should have demonstrated that they have understood the play itself as well

as the techniques of the practitioner in practice.

Section Three

Students have a lot to do in Section 3 and the best notes focused on the assessment of the potential effectiveness of the piece and on the development of their own skills (in relation to the application of the work of their chosen practitioner) as they discussed the rehearsal process. Health and safety issues received appropriate relevant attention.

Better notes appeared to be the result of students having asked themselves the question, 'would my chosen practitioner recognise this extract as something of their own?' If acting was the chosen skill, good notes reflected upon both vocal and physical skills with purposeful exemplification of how they acted their part in line with the practitioner's influence and their stated intentions. A particular line was delivered and what they were doing whilst saying it.

Features of weaker work are listed below and future students are advised to take note.

Section 1

- choosing the text first then describing the search for a practitioner.
- discussion of plays that had been rejected
- justification of choice of play in terms of group size
- writing about more than one practitioner
- writing about literary features of the text rather than practical techniques to be applied
- reduction of the practitioner's methods to one or two techniques only
- knowledge of the practitioner based solely on one production seen
- biography of the practitioner
- plot of the chosen text.

Section 2

- generalised intentions
- describing rehearsals rather than how the group were interpreting the play
- describing the plot of the play
- character studies of individual roles.

Section 3

- describing the rehearsal schedule or process with no reference to the chosen practitioner's rehearsal methods
- no mention of the role(s) being played
- requirements for design skills not met in full
- over-long health and safety details at the expense of assessment of the piece, rehearsals and skill.

Presentation

Moderators reported seeing a good number of high level presentations, revealing evidence of sound understanding, tight organisation and excellent technical accomplishment.

These pieces were confidently performed and eminently watchable and adhered both to the authors' intentions and to the practitioners that had been applied.

Many of these were ensemble productions that were influenced by a clutch of theatre companies offering accessible and exciting theatre. Thus, Knee High, Frantic Assembly, DV8, Shared Experience, Complicite and Berkoff made their mark on the students' work.

Other practitioners selected included Stanislavski, Max Stafford Clark, Brecht, Peter Hall, Peter Brook and Dario Fo. Most moderators reported seeing a balance between physically-inspired work and dialogue-led practice.

The most successful pieces showed a well-understood integration of meaning and means. They were cerebrally understood at a high level and communicated by well-gauged and highly effective performance skills. When using an ensemble approach there was a discipline and precision that was absorbing to see. Often multi-roling was a feature of this work and showed a mastery of character-demonstration and seamless transitions.

Less successful students showed a more fragmented understanding of either play, practitioner or, in some cases, both. Physically-led work lacked precision and invention; sometimes the physical elements seemed artificial and not the product of an organic growth. Productions focusing on creation of character showed a limited level of emotional involvement and some attempting the challenges of stylisation lacked both verbal and gestural finesse.

Some productions showed a fruitful collaboration between actors and designer/s and at the highest level were extremely skilful at integrating and balancing the range of elements in the production.

Good students working without the benefit of designers went to some lengths to create an appropriate physical environment with light and sound support that enabled many of the requirements of the play to be realised.

There were some productions that insisted on a bare, black box and attributed this extreme minimalism to a specific practitioner but this threw more responsibility on the actors, not all of whom rose to the occasion.

By far the most frequently presented play was *4.48 Psychosis*. The popularity of this play does not necessarily equate with success, however.

Often students chose Artaud as their selected practitioner, although groups which had chosen the techniques and ideas of Frantic Assembly and Katie Mitchell often did better in terms of demonstrating their understanding of the text itself. Too often those groups who had used Artaud had ignored both the poetic nature of the text and the fact that it does have distinctive 'voices', as well as the features of a text that relies for its dramatic effectiveness, in the main, on the power of its words.

This was also the text most often performed in an 'all black' 'uniform' which revealed a lack of understanding of Artaud's ideas about ancient ritualistic costumes and his aversion to a uniform appearance.

Where students revealed a sensitivity to the real possibilities of this play there were some very effective interpretations, especially when students had used a restrained quieter performance style for the 'psychiatrist' and 'doctor' voices, which often lead to a more chilling, cathartic effect for the audience when contrasted with the obvious agonies of the 'patient'.

Apart from this modern 'favourite', plays by Brecht, Berkoff, and Godber were also regularly seen. However there were also some very exciting new plays presented, notably, *Mogadishu*, *Love Steals Us from Loneliness*, *Punk Rock*, and *The Knowledge* all of which have characters of a similar age to the students. Where the performers had been able to meet the challenging content head on and adopt the necessary casting and accents, these proved to be engaged and engaging performances.

Less popular plays from the classical cannon were often highly successful as they offered students the opportunity to work in a distinctive period style. Moderators reported seeing highly effective presentations of extracts from *The Tempest*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* as well as Sheridan's *School for Scandal* and Wilde's *Salome*. Here students were able to demonstrate their understanding of period through performance style as well as through appropriate choice of costume and gave moderators' eyes some much needed relief from the ubiquitous 'theatre' blacks. Chosen practitioners for these classics included Peter Brook, Katie Mitchell, Peter Hall and Max Stafford Clark.

At the other end of the spectrum, some groups opted for texts that were not really worthy of AS Level study and had been taken from anthologies of plays supposedly suitable for teenagers. Others performed stage versions of well-known fairy tales neither of which really stretched them theatrically.

The best groups demonstrated a very good understanding of their extract through everything they put on stage. Carefully selected costumes conveyed instantly their understanding of period, climate, character and social context as did the choice of props. Where props were part of the action, the students had clearly rehearsed with them a great deal, so that drinks were actually drunk, tea was poured filling the cup (and looked like tea!) and food was actually eaten thus demonstrating not only considerable acting skill but a clear understanding of style.

For example, one group performing *Top Girls* had literally included the kitchen sink on stage with a boiling kettle and properly made tea which the actor performed with excellent timing. The same group had built a suitable 'den' for Angie with exactly the sort of junk that would be found in a back yard. In making these choices, groups are able to score highly in terms of their creativity.

Sometimes, students are concerned because the school's/college's stage or studio space is small but moderators reported groups using small spaces very effectively by performing in the round or in traverse rather than end on. This led to a very effective degree of intimacy in small cast extracts. One such example was a group which presented a traditional interpretation of *Macbeth* in a tiny space, but through the effective (and restrained) use of smoke with red and blue lighting played onto a scaffolding 'tree' and a terrifying sound scape including eerie music, fully created a dangerous corner of a battlefield.

Perhaps the single factor that was common in all of the most successful pieces was that the group had not imposed an anachronistic interpretation on to their play but allowed the text to speak through them.

Weaker work was often the result of misunderstanding of either the chosen play or the ability to employ the methodology of the practitioner to the chosen text appropriately. For example, significant numbers of students appeared to believe that Brecht employed cross sex casting,

divided single major roles between several cast members and had a 'minimalist approach' to set and costumes.

Some students even referred, erroneously, to 'Brechtian Blacks' in their Supporting Notes. This kind of muddle suggests that the students' grasp of Brecht's methodology is extremely slight as even a very brief perusal of photographs of Brecht's own productions reveals these ideas to be inaccurate.

Similarly, some groups applying Artaud think it's all about screaming, heavy breathing and wearing the same costume (again usually black leggings and T-shirts) regardless of the play. These groups are advised to look at photographs of Artaud's production of *The Cenci*.

Other weaknesses reported by moderators included the poor use of space or failing to take control of it, with desks and chairs visibly stored upstage yet clearly visible to the audience. Some groups had some props but not others - for no apparent reason- others offered no hint as to the period of the play on stage at all.

In the very weakest presentations, the pace was relentlessly slow or was unchanging all the way through as were the levels of pitch and projection. In fact poor vocal work was a fairly common feature this year with poor articulation especially in evidence. There were also some offerings that were clearly under-rehearsed and not ready for exposure to an audience.

In some schools/colleges there also appears to be very much a 'house style' with all groups looking the same, working with the same space utilised in the same way, occasionally also performing the same play. It's important for students to express themselves creatively and an expectation of this examination that all artistic decisions are the responsibility of each group alone.

Skills

Directing

At its best, the inclusion of a directing student had a really positive influence on the group as a whole. Having a perceptive student who sits outside the action and advises about blocking, characterisation and intentions for the total effect was a real advantage for some of the groups seen. It also helped to keep the focus of the piece and the group on the style of the practitioner.

In other cases the inexperience of the director was very apparent. Although students will have gained considerable experience of acting during the course, in some cases the student's first attempt at direction was the moderation piece, and they were gaining experience at the expense of the potential achievement of other students.

Assured and effective directors seen provided purposeful working/prompt books to accompany their Supporting Notes and these revealed consideration for the requirements of both the creative and the practical aspects of the skill. The moves, sound, LX, set were all clearly explained and justified and the final performance reflected all these equally precisely.

Good directors possessed both the maturity and intelligence required when handling actors of their own age and approaching complex texts. Amongst the most successful students were those who had used practitioners such as Katie Mitchell, Max Stafford Clark or Brecht, all of whom have a wide range of specific rehearsal techniques and a clearly documented directorial approach to their work.

Acting

The demonstration of Acting covered a very wide range of ability matching criteria for each of the five bands.

The range of challenges was wide, from intense realism to heightened stylisation; from earthy comedy to complex physicalisation; from virtuoso demands to integrated ensemble work.

Within the Physical Theatre productions there was a distinction between those students using simple physical devices to tell a story or explore a state of mind and those who were using physicality of the body at a level of risk. In the former category there was an aptitude with physical skills that provided for the demands of the chosen play at a basic level and a violence of movement and delivery often pervaded these productions. In those working at risk there was evidence, in some of the students, of a long association with using the body as a performance tool with dexterity and precision. This allowed complex choreography to be designed and performed with great skill.

Similarly, within those students who selected a more realistic approach, there was an emotional depth to their work that persuaded the audience that the characters were behaving realistically. There was also a fluency in their work that came from an ownership of the characters and this, coupled with an excellent control of vocal and physical skills produced some startling pieces of realistic drama.

Some of these students seemed mature on stage beyond their years. One such student playing Mitch in *A Streetcar Named Desire* played his role with complete understanding of the emotional journey the character makes in the play. Not only was the accent highly appropriate and well sustained but he was able to communicate the sub-text through subtle changes in his tone and pitch without losing the accent. Physically not at all bulky, he used the small stage space sensitively to make us believe him when he said the line about how much he weighed.

Less capable students, either presenting realistic, non-naturalistic or physical theatre work, ranged from those who were restricted in creativity and with underdeveloped technical accomplishment to those showing good technical accomplishment with a degree of creativity.

Some of the weaker students were not helped by choosing challenging texts requiring high levels of understanding for effective interpretation. One presentation of *Waiting for Godot*, for example, failed to explore beyond surface of the text.

Weaker students also sometimes revealed a lack of precision and detail in their work which led to unconvincing characterisation in naturalistic work and lack of effectiveness in more physical work.

Good students always look and sound assured on stage, the result of much creative exploration and rehearsal. Articulation is such that every word can be understood regardless of accent or volume. There is vocal colour and good breath control. In comedies, students have shown the confidence to wait until laughter has died down before continuing. In more physical presentations every move is slick and precise, timing is flawless. The best students are also generous on stage; never 'hogging the limelight' but making their own performance serve the play and the interest of the group.

Weaker students offered more generalised work; emotion was generalised, lines were played with repetitive cadences, articulation was poor and projection was ineffective. Sometimes regional accents have been wilfully ignored. If students are unable to achieve the right

accent for the play they are much better off choosing a text where specific accents are not required.

In the very weakest work students have been unable to learn their lines properly and look distinctly uncomfortable on stage, rushing through their lines as if wanting to get the whole ordeal over as soon as possible. These students would benefit from considering other skill options.

Set design

Very few students have opted for this skill this year but some of those that have chosen it have been most ambitious. Students who elected to create a stage setting for *The Rise and fall of little Voice*, or *Noises Off* certainly gave themselves enormous challenges.

It is worth reminding all design students that they do not have to use the same practitioner as the actors in their group but that, if they do nominate a different designer/practitioner, that the work is consonant with that of the actors' practitioner. At AS Level one student, for example, explored the work of Malcolm Rippeth, Kneehigh's own designer, in a piece where Kneehigh's approach was influencing the work of the actors.

Good Supporting Notes were approached from the perspective of being the designer. There were also some very good set models seen, which, although not a requirement, (provided the student has scale drawings of the set in their notes) did give moderators a clear sense that this was a genuine designer at work with a practical ability to realise their ideas.

Good sets worked for the actors on stage as well as communicating the location or period of the text. Some sets however used a form of symbolism which appeared to make sense only to the students themselves and not to the audience.

Costume

This skill was also a minority option this year. Students who provided costumes for period plays tended to do better as the text had offered more opportunities for the designer to show off their skills of construction. Students needed to make their costume from scratch and the best students had even made their own patterns.

Many showed an attention to costs and had recycled fabrics to create desired effects, such as heavy curtains found at a charity shop to create the appearance of brocade. Others used breaking down techniques to create effects of sweat on the costumes or had bleached them and used shoe polish to create the effects of wear and tear.

The weakest merely adapted something that had been found in the costume cupboard contrary to the requirements outlined in the specification.

Masks

Mask design is the province of the enthusiast and there were not enough examples of mask design seen to draw any general conclusions.

Technical Elements

These were more popular than other design skills and were usually the preserve of real enthusiasts. Those who had focused on just lighting or sound usually fared better as they could focus more on one specific skill.

Whether lighting or sound designers, good students employed well timed cues, a variety of intensity and levels and rates of fade/cross fade. Lighting students who had an artistic approach coupled with technical 'know-how' used a variety of angles including back lighting, up lighting, side lighting and moving light effects. Obviously a school/college has to have a range of lanterns that such a student can employ so schools/colleges with limited lighting equipment would be better off advising against this skill or hiring in specific equipment so that the able students can fully demonstrate their skill.

The advance in computer programs and music technology in schools/colleges has enabled some stunning sound effects and soundscapes to be created with many students using layering effects to create a suitable background for their presentations. Some composed highly appropriate incidental music for their plays or used directional sound effectively. Some also used radio mikes and passed the actors' live voices through reverb or echo effects to create additional suitable atmosphere.

One such student, designing sound for *Five Kinds of Silence* had used an echo effect to distort the first Billy monologue which when mixed with music by Nine Inch Nails provided a very menacing effect. The subsequent gunshot rang out repeatedly adding to the sense of the gun reverberating throughout the whole play.

Weaker students had poorly focused lights, or large areas of the stage which were not lit at all resulting in the performers disappearing into the gloom. Weak Sound students appear to have done nothing more than play tunes at full blast using their iPod and a couple of inadequate hissing speakers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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