

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE Drama and Theatre Studies
(6DR01)

Unit 1: Exploration of Drama and Theatre

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6DR01 Exploration of Drama and Theatre

Introduction

Students are required to explore two dramatic texts from a practical perspective; these should be whole, formally published and substantial plays written for the theatre. Practical exploration is the backbone of the unit and the results of this exploration provide students with the knowledge and understanding necessary for them to write a set of Exploration Notes. There is a word limit of 3,000. Students are asked to explore the plays through a series of elements:

- Language
- Non-verbal-communication
- Vocal awareness
- Characterisation
- The social, cultural, historical and political context
- The visual, aural and spatial elements of production
- The response to a practitioner- for one or both of the texts
- Interpretation

Practical exploration of the texts is the most heavily weighted assessment area for Unit 1. This assessment is carried out by the teacher through a series of structured workshops and requires the application of the assessment criteria against the candidate's response to the practical exercises. This is not about performance; rather the marks should reflect the application and creativity shown in the workshops.

Exploration Notes must be illustrated with examples of how specific practical explorations allowed students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the texts. These examples should be embedded within the notes so it is clear how students arrived at the understanding they have gained over the course of the unit. The notes may refer to the exploration elements separately, for each play, they may be written as continuous prose or include sketches, diagrams and designs. It is not necessary to compare the two texts in any way, although students may do so if they wish. Assessment of these notes is carried out holistically, across both texts and notes must be balanced so that each text receives, as far as possible, equal attention.

Centres are asked to send a recording of an active practical drama session where students can be seen exploring one of the chosen texts. This should not be a performance, or preparation for a performance, rather it is an exemplification of the type of practical drama exploration that is carried out in the centre. Centres assess the relative success of their students in this workshop, providing marks and justification for the highest, middle and lowest attaining students in that session.

The final aspect of the unit is the candidate's response to a live production. Students produce a written evaluation of a live theatre production, of no more than 1,000 words, in which they address the elements of both performance and production, analysing and evaluating what they saw. This

is an opportunity for students to put what they have learned during the unit into effect, by calling on knowledge and understanding of plays, the ideas of practitioners, dramatic devices and structures, appropriate vocabulary and critical awareness developed through evaluating their own and others' practical drama.

Centres are asked to supply a Record of Work that details how each of the texts was explored.

Marks for this unit are awarded as follows:

Exploration Notes 20
Practical Exploration 25
Evaluation of Live Theatre 15

There is essential guidance for centres in the Administrative Support Guide. This document includes the requisite forms and instructions for Unit 1. It is required for all units and includes information about procedures for Unit 2; it is updated annually with forms and deadlines that apply to the administration of all units in both AS and A2. Centres should download it from the website as soon as it is available in November.

The web address is: <https://www.edexcel.com/gcedrama>

There now follows some specific observations from the moderation team, based on centre responses to this specification in the 2013 series.

The Unit Elements

Centres are free to choose their texts and most are appropriate to the age of the students. In reality, the range of texts chosen appears to be limited, the most popular still being *Metamorphosis*, *Our Country's Good*, *Miss Julie*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *A Doll's House*, *Antigone*, *Blood Wedding*, *The Crucible*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*. There were some choices made that broke this mould, such as *Saved*, *Translations*, *Freedom of the City* and *The Laramie Project*.

Moderators reported again that centres have chosen plays that better suit the needs of their students and that where teacher examiners have achieved this effectively, students clearly have a better chance of success. Where centres choose texts that stimulate the interest of their students, they are inspired and show enthusiasm and excitement in their responses. Poor choices in terms of level of challenge and subject matter lead to weak responses. Students struggled to write in depth, and many could not move beyond what the play's stage directions told them about how scenes or characters might be interpreted.

The use of support structures for the Exploration Notes, such as scaffolding questions that students set about answering, have led, according to many moderators, to strong responses, in the main. The straightforward use of a question that poses, 'what have you learned from your practical exploration

of the text that you didn't understand when you read it?', worked effectively for some centres.

There is a unit recommendation that there should be at least 10 years between the two texts and the majority of centres chose texts from distinct time periods of theatrical development. Where this was not the case, students were short changed since the social, cultural, historical and political contexts of such texts proved too similar. Even where plays appear to be very different, if they have been written too close together, there can be hidden similarities that weaken the breadth of the whole AS year. Where centres choose texts that demand similar practitioner ideas students were also hampered; it is key to provide a variety of approaches to meet the needs and tastes of any group of students and this creates a strong foundation for those going on to the A2 year.

The Practical Exploration of Texts

This element of the work is assessed by teachers in centres. Many centres are getting this absolutely right with a wide range of practical activities in workshops. This means students have been afforded opportunities to access the full range of marks available for the unit.

The most successful students had again clearly been given the advantage of explorations that engendered confidence and encouraged risk taking. The weakest elements, as reflected in the written work, were again language and the social, cultural historical and political contexts of the texts. These two elements still seem to challenge centres' ability to find ways students can explore them practically and then go on to reflect on their findings in their exploration notes. Few students find techniques and exercises to support discovery of how language works in performance, or how the context of a play can inform its interpretation. Those that do, show how the style of the language, for example, its structure and tone, impact explicitly on the meaning of the text as a whole and on characterisation.

Interpretation also still proves to be difficult for some and moderators report that it is not uncommon for students to write lists of notes about how a version of the play might be staged. Where students fail to explain how any of their ideas could be brought to fruition through strong links with their own practical explorations, notes do not attract high marks.

Moderators have found that where practical exploration was strongly structured and led, with the written elements in mind, it remains clear that students are best able to reflect on their learning and growing understanding of the plays in their writing.

Exploration Notes

Students' notes fall generally into distinct categories. Most students still write separately about each element of exploration across both texts. Some write about each element, combining thoughts about both texts, either closely linked or in separate paragraphs. The strongest responses continue to come from students who choose the route of continuous prose, rather

than note forms. Although there is sometimes a danger that students forget to include sections in their writing that encompass all of the exploration elements, most ensure this does not happen by including headings to cover each section. Where students do not, moderators report that some do not always make it clear where work has covered all of the elements. However, where students have ensured all elements have been covered, some of the best responses again came from students whose work read like essays. The key to the success of notes written in this style is that work is truly the final aspect of a long and continuous process of developing and honing ideas and understanding.

Some students included extracts of texts, but of those that did, most still do not grasp that annotations must take the key role, if this approach is to be successful. Occasionally, students included very extensive text extracts, by the side of which they wrote ideas for interpretation or characterisation, or what they would be doing when they said the lines. Sometimes this resulted in students failing to make the crucial link between the text and the annotation. These examples tended to be less successful because students did not draw any substantial conclusions and notes were too linked with the narrative line of the play. It is essential that Exploration Notes awarded marks in the higher bands make a very close connection to the student's practical exploration. They must be analytical and evaluative of the work undertaken. Where students' work is too descriptive of what they did in the workshop, higher mark bands are not reached.

Fewer students again this year developed large-scale designs and drawings, attached to their notes; this is a pleasing trend. Designs can be helpful where students have used them in exploration activities, but designs for their own sake are not successful. Centres have generally accepted that the Exploration Notes are the final point of a process of honing ideas and understanding, and are not a working notebook.

The range of theatre practitioners, whose ideas informed explorations, was relatively small. Most students used the theories of Stanislavski and Brecht, with Artaud, Berkoff, *Frantic* and *Kneehigh* also being popular choices. Centres had clearly chosen texts and combinations of texts with practitioners in mind and, while there is no requirement for both texts to be explored in the light of the work of a practitioner, many centres did. This often allowed some interesting comparisons to take place, such as where students made their own choice of practitioner whose ideas were employed. For example, some students chose to focus on Berkoff's own ideas for the interpretation of *Metamorphosis*, but also compared how Artaud's thoughts helped them bring out the key political messages of the text. Others showed how their naturalistic approaches to *The Crucible* helped them to understand the emotional landscape of the characters, rather than the background politics of the play.

Overall, students' notes fulfilled the needs of the unit and many produced work that was highly informative, giving a real sense of what they had genuinely come to understand about their texts, through fully applied practical drama exploration. This attracted higher marks. Weaker responses were overly descriptive of practical activities, did not relate to practical

activities, or were the result of theoretical research. This meant that work fell into the lower assessment bands, because there were insufficient clear links to the results of the students' own practical work.

Where centres lacked appreciation of the requirements of the Exploration Notes this sometimes led to them being far too long. However, the majority of responses kept more closely to the word limit again this year. Centres are reminded that work that exceeds the word limit in the final version of the notes should not receive any marks and it is the responsibility of the teacher-examiner to reflect this, if appropriate, in the marks awarded and indicate it to the moderator. Students need to be fully aware of the word limit for this and other units within the specification. There are no exceptions to this.

Language

This element is used to demonstrate how the language of a play might be practically explored in workshop activities. However, moderators still report that students write about the nature and style of the language of the playwright, with limited reference made to how they had come to this understanding through practical activity. The most successful examples of this element still show how a candidate had explored a section or comparative sections of the play using several approaches, coming to conclusions that were clearly rooted in their practical exploration. Too often, students simply report their findings from research and so work cannot reach higher mark bands.

Non-verbal Communication

Students that are more successful wrote effectively about their practical work on how actors and directors give a text meaning through non-verbal means. The best write about a range of strategies used in practical exploration, reflecting their understanding of how a text may be brought to life. Some show how exploration of the use of the body and the stage space has shown them something surprising, that they had not picked up from reading the text. Other students tended to limit the success of their work by writing about how they might physically express themselves whilst delivering lines. Unless ideas have come about through a clearly practical route then high mark bands are not reached.

Vocal Awareness

Students often write successfully about vocal explorations of characters but many still do not. There is a tendency to limit notes to showing how lines will be said in a future performance, or to describe how they were said in the workshop and what the candidate believes that showed about a character. This is not vocal exploration. Vocal awareness must be about exploring vocal possibilities within a role. For example, some students exploring Nora, from *A Doll's House*, showed how her changing vocal tone could illustrate her developing awareness and journey through the narrative. With clear examples from the workshop, this style of writing can prove worthy of higher mark bands.

Characterisation

Moderators have said that students generally showed their understanding of characters through some well-illustrated examples of exploration. Some, though, simply make assertions about a character based on reading the text and deciding that lines sounded like the character was, say, happy or annoyed. It is still common for students to fail to show how a range of exploratory strategies helped them find the truth of a character. Where students do not demonstrate how they had formed their opinions about characters, but still write at length about them, their notes lack substance. Successful work tends to deliver a clear picture of how a candidate's understanding came about through trial and error, working with others and by watching their peers. To gain high marks work is then personalised and expressed in the first person.

The Social, Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

Students rarely pursue ways to relate this element to their practical explorations. The majority still simply report their researches with little or no reference to anything they did as a result of this knowledge. There was a very limited range of examples where students gave a clear indication of how they had used their understanding of what they knew about the play's context to help them understand how it might be explored or interpreted. For example students do not appreciate that what you know about a play, the time in which it was conceived, might inform the style of acting or design of the stage space. Often where they do appreciate the links, they do not then use them in the workshop, so cannot furnish their writing with real examples.

The Visual, Aural, Spatial Elements of a Production

A minority of students made good use of sketches and designs for this section. Many failed to annotate their work sufficiently so few marks are gained. Centres are reminded that sketches and designs themselves are worth few marks; it is what is said about the sketch, diagram or photograph that earns the candidate marks. A few sets of notes included extensive photographs depicting practical work but their content was not embellished with notes that showed what the exercises meant to the candidate. This does not merit marks in higher bands.

Students have increasingly incorporated how photos capture specific moments in practical exploration to aid understanding, so work is more successful.

Interpretation

The most successful responses to this element are generally those that show how understanding developed in the studio through experimentation, what worked, and what did not. Weaker responses incorporate lengthy wish lists for whole productions, many of which have little to do with the student's experience in the exploration of how theatre is made from text. More successful responses often concern the adaptation of the methods of

recognised theatre practitioners, such as *Frantic*, *DV8* or *Berkoff*. Centres have not yet fully embraced the way this element can be applied to short scenes and sections of the text, rather the whole play, making exploration much more the focus of the exercise.

The Response to a Practitioner

Students are asked to write about practitioner ideas they have made use of when exploring at least one of their texts. A minority still limit their responses to the ideas themselves, without referring to how they had put them to good use. Centres have not fully taken on the fact that the ideas themselves are not necessarily interesting, but the ways they can be put to good use are. Many students have tackled this section through a separate workshop, unrelated to text exploration at all. This is of little merit. Where centres have looked at a practitioner for each text, students are able to develop understanding and retain practical ideas for future use in Units 3 and 4. Whilst this is not a requirement, it is interesting when students are able to make some valid comparisons between methodologies.

The Evaluation of Live Theatre

Live productions viewed are naturally specifically related to those shown by the professional theatre throughout the year. Popular pieces evaluated this year were, *Hedda Gabler*, *The 39 Steps*, *War Horse*, *The Woman in Black*, and several productions by *Frantic*. The vast majority of students wrote about performances of plays, rather than any other form of production. Theatrical productions chosen do not have to be plays; in fact it is acceptable for students to experience any live performance, such as a musical or circus performance. Some students did write about musicals, such as *Blood Brothers*. Moderators reported that students sometimes struggled, however, to write in depth about how the characterisation was developed by actors and this limited their success. Where students wrote analytically and evaluatively about productions though, encompassing both performance and production aspects, marks were awarded in higher bands. The most successful responses of necessity include an effective mix of analysis and evaluation and frequently provide a lively and engaging critical view of what was seen. Weaker responses fall back on extensive descriptions or overly subjective and unjustified evaluation. Higher band students are comfortable using the vocabulary and experience of drama they have mastered during work for the unit, to illustrate their writing. There has clearly been teacher input at the outset in developing ways of recording evaluation and analysis, over time, and this contained area of experience is often the strongest element of the unit.

Some centres encourage students to write about a production of one of the texts studied within the unit. Where this is the case, there is little evidence that this element of assessment is any more or less successful than where productions were of plays not studied. The theatre experience, however, may have had more of a positive impact on the Exploration Notes.

Records of Work

Most centres comply with the requirement to send a single record of work for both texts. These help moderators considerably in determining the level and style of work delivered to students. It is not necessary for centres to send highly detailed accounts of what went on over the course of the unit; these should be general accounts of the workshops delivered on both texts. The most helpful records of work were those that were closely aligned to the assessment objectives and that indicated which session was the one filmed for sampling.

Annotations

Centres are not asked to annotate coursework but it is immensely helpful to moderators where teacher-examiners clearly show how students' work attracted the marks that it did. Where teacher-examiners note how students' writing fulfils the needs of the elements of exploration, moderators report that they can more easily agree the marks awarded, than if they have to search for evidence. This is particularly important when work is submitted in continuous prose. Either the candidate or the teacher-examiner must clearly indicate where the elements are being covered in the writing – all elements must be covered and there must be a balance across all elements across both texts.

Sample Practical Session

The practical activities carried out for the Sample Session generally range from the highly imaginative and directly applied to the exploration of the text in question, to extensive discussion. Preliminary conversations and warm-ups need not be filmed.

Sessions are still sometimes over-directed by teachers or do not clearly show students working together on a text. Many moderators again reported that students were very difficult to make out or identify. The most effective sessions are still those where students are clearly identified at the start, their names frequently used throughout and the camera focuses on areas where practical work is going on apace.

Centres are still requested to experiment with how well they can capture practical sessions in their studio space, before recording their final version, to ensure lighting and sound elements are sufficient to the task. Centres with larger groups are asked to consider splitting the group to enable the moderator to see a recorded session with, for example, 9 of the 18 students in the group taking part in the workshop so identification becomes much easier.

There is no requirement for all of the students in the centre to be seen in this recorded session so centres might consider how to construct the session with the moderator in mind. It is a sample session so it is good to see a range of students with the top, middle and bottom evident within that range, but a studio with 18 to 20 seventeen year olds in it may not provide the most conducive environment for moderation. There is no necessity to

make separate recordings for the small minority of students who are re-sitting the unit. These students are considered along with the whole of the cohort taking the examination. Centres are advised to download the Administrative Support Guide for this subject each year so that all of the rules and demands pertaining to this, and all other aspects of entry for the unit, are fully understood.

Teachers' Assessments, Comments, and Annotations

Centres' marking of the Evaluations of Live Theatre is still felt by moderators to have been more accurate than for the Exploration Notes. This has been noted for every year of the examination by the moderation team. There appears to be a rather more realistic view taken of work for the Evaluation.

The assessment of the Exploration Notes remains problematic in some centres, with moderators applying the standard of this unit and adjusting students' marks accordingly.

On occasion, centre rank orders have had to be modified since centres had incorrectly rewarded work that had obviously taken effort, but was not always related to the criteria. Teachers' comments and annotations did not always reflect the marks awarded. Teacher annotations are vital to the process of moderation and, where usefully applied, can help show the thinking and assessment processes.

Over long work should be weeded out at the first draft stage. If this is not effectively done, then the teacher-examiner must ask the candidate where the 3,000 words begin and end so they may mark against the assessment criteria. If it is not completely clear to the moderator what work has been entered by the student, and what the teacher-examiner has actually marked, moderators are instructed to review the first 3,000 words and to ignore anything that follows. This may result in a change of marks if all of the elements are subsequently not covered.

Moderators have again reported examples of good practice where teacher-examiners had drawn a line across the page of work that reached the word limit to indicate to the moderator where the centre has stopped marking. Many centres helpfully annotated their students' coursework so that moderators were able to follow their thinking. The moderator's task is considerably eased when annotations show how the assessment criteria have been applied. In some centres, there was evidence of genuine department standardisation and cross moderation of work, something that is essential for the security of marks awarded to students in centres where there is more than one teacher-examiner.

Practical Exploration

Marks given for the Sample Session were still too high. Clearly there may be an imbalance in the marks awarded for each of the areas of assessment but it is expected that students' practical marks should bear some correlation to that given for the written elements. Where centres over

award for the practical exploration and the written components appear to be weak in comparison moderators report difficulties in carrying out their tasks.

Administration

Most centres ensured their work arrived on time and in good order and a few ensured it came in early to moderators. This aided the process considerably. However, there were some very common mistakes made by a large minority. Centres did not always include all of the asterisked students from their OPTEMS sheets. It was not uncommon for centres to omit their highest and lowest attaining students or documents had not been correctly signed; information in the Administrative Support Guide indicates what must be sent to the moderator and the examination board deadline for this. Where centres requested special consideration for students, or felt there were circumstances in play that meant the work of students was not as strong as it should be, they were directed to Edexcel directly via the following address: uk.special.requirements@pearson.com. It is not the business of the moderation team and centres should not be approaching their moderator with any information regarding the work of their students. A formal request for special consideration is always advisable, and these should be made through the examinations' officer, not through the moderator.

Several centres had not ensured their Sample Session recordings were visible, could be heard, or had been copied on to regular, standard size discs, playable on any domestic player. Others did not package up materials safely and DVDs were damaged in transit. It cannot be overstressed that where centres use large numbers of plastic envelopes for work and papers, or cardboard folders, they do so unnecessarily and waste time for their moderator. Centres are again reminded that work should be presented on ordinary paper, not card, stapled together for each candidate and DVDs packed in protective envelopes. Centres are also reminded to ensure that students' names are on all of the pages of the Exploration Notes in case they become separated. Centres are also reminded once again that work over the word limit must not be assessed.

High scoring work was felt to show some of these features:

Students had been well taught and given the opportunity to practically explore two substantial plays that had been well chosen

Students' practical explorations were embedded in their writing about the plays, across all of the elements

Students had clearly been given the advantage of practice that engendered confidence and risk taking

Students' written Exploration Notes were the end product of a process of summarising and honing ideas gleaned from practical exploration. They were not their logbooks

Exploration Notes were balanced across both texts

Students referred to their own work, not just that of their group. They made use of "I" rather than "we"

Exploration notes were concise and made full use of the available number of words but did not exceed them

Diagrams and sketches were fully annotated

Key lessons were delivered that allowed the students to focus on each of the elements

Students found ways of discovering how language works in performance or how the various contexts of a play can inform its interpretation

The Sample Session was well focused and showed a range of practical workshop activities with the emphasis on the students working on the text, rather than the teacher

The Evaluation Of Live Theatre made clear distinctions between the play and the production and provided evidence of considered objective analysis of the production

Responses showed a good mix of analysis and evaluation and frequently provided a lively and engaging critical view of what they had seen

Teacher comments were detailed and specific, allowing the moderator to see examples of how and why marks had been awarded

Middle scoring work was felt to show some of these features:

Texts did not fully meet the needs of the students

Practical activities were not sufficiently explorative

Exploration Notes were imbalanced across the two texts

Writing for some of the elements of exploration was not sufficiently rooted in practical work

Evaluations of Live Theatre were descriptive, rather than evaluative and analytical

Teacher comments were brief and did not help the moderator see why marks had been awarded

Low scoring work was felt to show some of these features:

Texts were poorly chosen, were not clearly understood by students, or were too simplistic

Practical activities were teacher dominated

Exploration Notes exceeded the word limit and failed to meet the criteria in terms of being concise and rooted in practical exploration

Students carried out elaborate comparisons between texts that were sometimes inappropriate, fruitless or too difficult

Practical insights were not used to inform the Exploration Notes

Students included extracts of texts, but did not grasp that annotations must take an important role. There were extensive text extracts, by the side of which they wrote ideas for interpretation or characterisation, or what they would be doing when they said the lines, failing to make the link between the two sides or any substantial conclusions

Elements of the notes were reproduced from other sources and were not related to candidate work, or were missing

Students wrote long wish lists of how their own version of a play might be interpreted or staged, without showing how any of it would work through practical examples

The plays' contexts were approached too theoretically, without practical exploration

Evaluations of Live Theatre were too descriptive and lacked analysis and evaluation, or were missing

Centres were poorly organised, had lost coursework, had not carried out centre standardisation or did not have sufficient specialist drama staff to deliver the unit

In general, however, the majority of centres still proved they have a firm understanding of the purpose of this unit and this was evident in all of the material presented for moderation. In most centres, teachers were clearly well prepared and focused on the demands of the unit and had effectively served their students.

Based on their performance in this paper, students should:

- Ensure they read and practically explore two contrasting plays written by different writers and at different times- ten years apart at least

- Include plenty of examples from their practical explorations to illustrate how they developed their understanding
- Ensure they write about how all of the exploration elements helped build understanding of both texts
- Only include text extracts if they are fully annotated to show how practical exploration led to knowledge and understanding
- Make sure language and social, cultural, political and historical contexts are explored practically for both plays
- Evaluate and analyse the live production seen and use examples from both the performance and production aspects of it
- Count the words in both parts of the written coursework- do not exceed the limits

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