

**UNIT 6: Drama Passage Questions:** tackling the passage questions; commenting on narrative features, preparing material for an essay.

**Recommended Prior Knowledge:** A reasonable standard of written English and familiarity with reading drama gained at O Level or IGCSE.

**Context:** This Unit is designed to help students acquire the skills to answer the passage questions on Paper 4. It can be undertaken at any time during the course.

**Outline:** This Unit addresses the understanding and appreciation of drama, its characteristic features and techniques.

Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching/Learning Activities	Resources
<p>1. <u>What To Look For in an Extract</u></p> <p>Students need to develop an awareness and appreciation of the detail of dramatic writing. In a range of short extracts, students become accustomed to looking for and discussing dramatic features and how they contribute to the reader's and audience's experience of the text.</p>	<p>The focus here is not on extensive wider reading, but on looking at a range of styles of writing to enable students to put their set text into a literary context. Students and the teacher choose a range of short passages from different periods and types of drama. By initially taking these extracts out of their context, students are encouraged to think about the features of the dialogue and character interaction rather than the development of plot. As they read and discuss the extracts, students should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the setting important? Is it clearly established in the extract?</li> <li>• How are the characters defined by their speech? Look at vocabulary and sentence construction.</li> <li>• Is the dialogue naturalistic?</li> <li>• Are the characters listening to each other?</li> <li>• Do you think the characters mean everything they say?</li> <li>• What do the stage directions indicate about the characters' positions on stage?</li> <li>• Do the stage directions indicate any particular sound or lighting effects? What do these contribute to the extract?</li> </ul>	<p>A range of short drama extracts. Examples could include those used for Unit 1 as well as alternatives such as extracts from <i>Everyman</i> (Anon.), any Shakespeare play, <i>The Country Wife</i> (Wycherley), <i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i> (Shaw), <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (Wilde), <i>Death of a Salesman</i> (Miller), <i>The Caretaker</i> (Pinter).</p>

## 2. Dynamics of Dialogue

Students develop an awareness and appreciation of the nature of dialogue and characters' language in drama.

Students and the teacher choose extracts for focus on the dialogue and characters' speech. With drama texts, it is a good idea to try out some of the alternative practically by acting out sections of the play in the classroom. Through practical work and discussion, students should consider:

- In what ways has the playwright discriminated between each character's speech? Do they use different types of vocabulary or sentence construction?
- What does the playwright's choice of vocabulary and construction indicate about each character?
- Which characters dominate the scene through their speech?
- How is the dialogue constructed? Is it in a sequence of long speeches, or do the characters exchange a number of short, quick speeches?
- Are any characters largely silent? An absence of speech can be as powerful as speech itself.
- Are there any stage direction indicators of the way in which speeches are delivered?
- If not, what are appropriate alternatives, and how might they alter interpretation of character and scene?

Extracts taken from the Drama texts studied for the Paper.

### 3. Dramatic Action

Students develop an awareness and appreciation of dramatic action, including stage directions. This focuses students on the play as a text for dramatic presentation, rather than purely as a text for readers.

Students and the teacher choose extracts for focus stage directions and dramatic action. Through practical work and discussion, students should consider:

- What do stage directions indicate about setting, character position and movement?
- Which characters dominate the scene through their actions or position? How do they do this?
- In considering the points above, consider also how the position and movement is linked with dialogue.
- Are any specific sound effects or lighting changes indicated in the extract? How do these contribute to the tone of the scene, and how do characters respond to them?
- How might an audience respond to extract, considering both the auditory and visual elements?

Extracts taken from the Drama texts studied for the Paper.

Exemplar for Unit 4.pdf shows what students might be able to comment on in a passage from *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams.

#### 4. Context

Students develop an awareness of the significance of the context of passages from the drama text.

Students consider the extracts previously discussed in terms of their context within the play as a whole.

Through discussion, students should consider:

- Where in the play does this extract take place? Is it near the beginning or end, or central to the play's development?
- What has happened in the play prior to this passage? Has previous action prepared for it?
- What happens in the play following this passage? Does it prepare for or prefigure later events?
- How does the episode develop the reader's and audience's understanding of the characters?
- How does the passage develop the reader's and audience's understanding of the main concerns of the play?
- Can students make any specific links between this episode and other scenes in the play?

Extracts taken from the Drama texts studied for the Paper.

### 5. Writing Exam-Style Essays

This prepares students for the type of question they will face for the selected extract essay in the examination (the *b* question).

The selected extract questions (always the *b* option) always ask for a close and detailed commentary on the set passage. Questions frequently ask candidates to 'comment closely' on the extract or discuss a particular aspect of it. The teacher should discuss the implications of these types of questions with the students. Candidates who write about the text with an appreciation of the dramatic genre will do well.

The pointers above give students a working method to approach the extracts for this question, enabling them to focus on the writing rather than the plot of the extract. They should, though, always remember that they must comment on the effects of any dramatic technique they notice and how it contributes to the meaning of the passage. They will not gain marks for spotting the techniques alone.

They are now prepared to attempt their first examination style essay question.

Past papers (available from CIE).