

UNIT 7: Drama Essay Questions: tackling the essay questions; choosing appropriate references, commenting on dramatic features, structuring 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 open essay 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>Getting Accustomed to the Texts</u></p> <p>Students need to develop a working knowledge of their drama set texts. This will introduce them to the text and to the skills of analysing and interpreting them.</p>	<p>The most enjoyable way for students to encounter the texts is to part-read them in the classroom, if time permits. This gives some sense of the dramatic nature of the texts through the element of performance and encourages interpretation of character through the delivery of lines.</p> <p>As the students read, it is useful for them to compile a logbook which breaks down the plays into Acts and Scenes, with the setting, characters and main action of each noted. This will enable quick references to be made at a later stage of the course.</p>	<p>Drama texts selected for study.</p>
<p>2. <u>The Structure of the Plays</u></p> <p>Once students have a working knowledge of their texts, they need to develop an understanding of their structure. This will increase their appreciation of the texts and prepare them for the questions they will face in the examination.</p>	<p>Students can use their logbooks prepared in (1) to chart the development of the plays. They should note and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the structure follow the pattern: Exposition, Crisis, Development, Climax (<i>Macbeth</i>, for example, could be said to follow this pattern)? • Is the structure linear, with each event occurring sequentially? • Does the structure make shifts between, for example, different times, locations or groups of characters? • What are the effects of the structure on the development of ideas in the text? 	<p>Drama texts selected for study.</p>

3. The Context of the Writing

Though not an essential feature of examination answers, a knowledge of the context of play's writing can be helpful in increasing appreciation, particularly if that text is from a culture or period different from the reader's. This section looks at research and the application of knowledge gained through research.

As with prose, the internet is an invaluable resource, its world-wide nature giving world-wide views of dramatic texts. There is also an enormous number of cultural, geographical and historical sites which can give useful background material to texts. Reviews of theatrical productions are also very valuable, indicating different dramatic interpretations of the plays.

As suggested in Unit 5, it is helpful for the teacher to do some of the initial research, and direct students toward particular sites which they know to be of use and ask them to select specific information.

It is very important for students to remember that they should use the contextual knowledge gained to assist their interpretation and appreciation of the text, as they will not gain marks for contextual knowledge on its own.

There are some excellent Shakespeare internet sites. <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu> is a comprehensive site that covers the plays, criticism and the Elizabethan context. It also has links to other useful sites, so is an excellent starting point.

For the performance conditions of Shakespeare's theatre, the guide to the research done for the creation of the new Globe theatre is invaluable, at www.rdg.ac.uk/globe

Though limited in the range of authors and texts, www.learn.co.uk/default.asp?WC1=Home is useful for those areas which are covered. Tennessee Williams is featured.

<p>4. <u>References and Quotations</u></p> <p>In a closed book exam, students have to be very familiar with their texts in order to be able to support the points they make in their essays with appropriate references and quotations.</p>	<p>The teacher should reinforce what the students know from O level/IGCSE about references and quotations. References are precise citations of episodes or events within the text, quotations are direct citations of words used in the text. References work best when accompanied by quotation, and quotation is essential for any point made about language.</p> <p>The chart of the plays' development completed in (2) will serve as a key for important references in the text. Students should be encouraged to keep a record of key quotations in their logbook. The best quotations are short — they are more easily remembered and more easily incorporated into discussion.</p> <p>The teacher can make up a worksheet containing key points about the text, and ask students to provide a reference and quotation which would support the points. By comparing suggestions, students can evaluate their ideas.</p>	<p>Drama texts selected for study.</p>
<p>5. <u>Preparing to Write Essays</u></p> <p>On a foundation of knowledge and experience of the text, students can build towards writing essays on the poetry.</p>	<p>As an initial writing exercise before tackling examination-type questions, students should choose two or three poems which they can group or link and write a piece about what they find to compare or contrast in them. They should be encouraged to consider how the dramatist's chosen language, imagery and form creates a particular impact in each poem. The resulting pieces of writing should be shared among the group in order to exchange ideas between students.</p>	<p>Drama texts selected for study.</p>

6. Writing Exam-Style Essays

This prepares students for the type of question they will face for the open essay in the examination (the *a* question).

The open questions (always the *a* option) frequently use words such as 'Discuss', 'Compare', 'Examine' or 'Comment', which instruct the candidate what to do in the essay. An alternative form is to present a view of the text and ask the candidate 'How far do you agree?' In this case, candidates should reach a conclusion in their essay. Other questions may ask candidates specific questions about the effects of dramatic techniques. The teacher should discuss the implications of these types of questions with the students.

From earlier discussions, students should be aware of what dramatic features should comment on. They should be prepared to consider the text as drama, taking full account of stage action and stage effects as well as dialogue.

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

Past papers (available from CIE).