



General Certificate of Education

Drama and Theatre Studies 1241

**Unit 2 Presentation of an Extract from a
Play**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Unit 2 – Presentation of an Extract from a Play

General

In the second year of this examination it is pleasing to report that the vast majority of teachers were completely *au fait* with the administrative and procedural requirements of the AS practical examination.

Many teachers had attended one of the regional standardisation meetings which take place in the autumn term, many had consulted their centre dedicated Coursework Adviser and many had familiarised themselves fully with the requirements of the examination through making a detailed study of the specification.

New teachers are reminded that further guidance is available on the AQA website in the Teacher Resource Bank and that information about the practical examination is provided in 'student- friendly' format in the AQA approved textbook, published by Nelson Thornes.

There were infrequent occasions where teachers were not sufficiently familiar with the demands of this practical unit to be able to guide their candidates appropriately.

DRAM2 is not simply a test of candidates' acting ability or ability to execute an effective stage design or direct an effective piece of theatre. The unit assesses candidates'

- knowledge and understanding of an influential practitioner
- interpretation of a play representing a different period and genre from the play selected for Unit 1
- application of performance and/or production skills.

Where teachers appreciated the learning objectives underpinning DRAM2 they were able to guide their candidates to make an appropriate selection of a practitioner and a suitable play that enabled candidates to demonstrate their understanding of that practitioner through their interpretation of their chosen extract(s).

As was reported last year, moderators saw some instances where inappropriate plays were chosen that contravened the rubric either by being a set play from the AS or A2 prescribed texts list or by being of the same genre or same period as the play that the candidates were studying for their DRAM1 written paper.

Some candidates made the mistake of attempting to apply the work of two or more practitioners to their selected play, also contravening the specification requirement for a single practitioner or company to be applied.

Administration

In the majority of instances

- centre teachers were very quick to reply to the initial telephone contact from the moderator and were able to select their first choice date for the examination to take place.
- form DTS (yellow) was returned promptly to the moderator

- completed DTS forms and copies of scripts were sent at least a month in advance for the moderator to check
- teachers sent the moderator directions to the school, including a map showing the exact location of the venue to be used for the exam
- teachers had also thoughtfully reserved a parking space for the moderator which enabled a prompt start to the moderation session
- a private room has been designated for the moderator's use for the perusal of Supporting Notes and for the moderation discussion to take place
- a sensible running order for the moderation had been devised, and suitable breaks for refreshment had been programmed into the session for the moderator and the teacher/assessor
- all Supporting Notes, including those to be sampled, were available for the moderator at the beginning of the moderation session
- preparation and Supporting Notes sections of the candidate record sheets had been completed in advance of the moderator's arrival
- mark sheets were sent to the moderator promptly after the examination had finished.

However, in some instances, teachers did not comply with the guidelines set out in the specification for the administration of the coursework and/or moderation procedures.

It may be worth repeating here some of the pointers offered in last year's report intended to be helpful reminders about some of the procedures associated with the moderation:

- AQA runs standardisation meetings in the autumn term where teachers are able to see video material of both AS and A2 candidate work and examples of Supporting Notes; teachers have the opportunity to ask any questions about the practical component. To attend one of these meetings, contact the subject manager at the beginning of the autumn term.
- teachers are recommended to check their school or college calendar before arranging a firm date as this cannot be changed after December 31st.
- after December 31st, changes of date are **not** permitted for reasons of candidate absence or staff absence (whatever the cause of staff absence). In the case of candidate absence, advice should be sought from AQA on arrangements to accommodate the absence and on special consideration.
- it is essential that centres send forms DTSV4 (with copies of the scripts to be used for DRAM2) at least a month in advance. This is so the moderator can check for any contraventions of the rubric such as the prohibited choice of a set text, the choice of a text linked to an inappropriate practitioner or the injudicious cutting of texts at AS.
- if teachers are unsure about the viability of candidates' decisions they should contact their Coursework Adviser well before the rehearsal process gets fully under way.

- while moderators are willing to moderate during the evening, it is recommended that the moderation schedule is drawn up to ensure that no group is beginning to perform after 9pm and, therefore, that starting times for the first group in the sample should be no later than 7pm.
- it is important that where Centres choose to hold an out-of-hours examination, the moderator is provided with clear details about how to access the drama department and also given a mobile number to contact in case of difficulty.

Application of the marking criteria

Moderators have reported that the vast majority of teachers were able to retain their objectivity in assessing their candidates.

Most teachers were accurate in the application of the marking criteria for each of the assessment objectives being tested in DRAM2. However, there were some instances where teachers had not fully understood the precise nature of AO3. This mark out of 10 is not related to the application/understanding of the practitioner but to candidates' understanding of the text from which their chosen extract is taken.

Candidates whose interpretation of the chosen text ran counter to the dramatist's intentions therefore penalised themselves in relation to AO3.

A very small number of teachers appeared not to understand the role of the moderator which is to match each candidate's achievement against the published criteria in a completely objective way. Moderation involves the adjustment of the teacher's original marking (including the rank ordering of candidates) to a national standard that is being applied nationwide. It should not be viewed as a 'negotiation' between the teacher and the moderator over individual marks.

Completion of Form DTSV3

There was a vast improvement this year in the completion of these forms with almost all teachers briefly summarising, in each box, the specific key features of a practitioner's work that were being employed by their candidates. Many teachers have followed the advice given in standardisation meetings and completed these forms in consultation with their candidates, so that all knew precisely the features to be explored and used in rehearsals and the performance. This practice also seems to help candidates in writing their Supporting Notes, and, in particular, Section 1.

Supporting Notes

As one would expect, there was a much better understanding of the requirements for each section of the notes, this year, and most candidates tailored their material to match them.

Good candidates addressed all the criteria in a concise and precise manner revealing a real commitment to the work of their chosen practitioner. It was also clear that a great deal of contextual research had underpinned their work on their chosen play, with a very clear understanding of the play's intentions linked strongly to their own.

However, despite warnings last year that over-lengthy sections do not attract the highest marks, moderators have seen far more examples of work with sections of over 700 words this year.

Candidates must be discouraged from this practice as, not only are they not rewarded for their extra words, but they actually penalise themselves by not fitting the Band 1 criteria of 'concise', 'precise' and 'purposeful'.

Once again, teachers who had attended standardisation meetings were in a better position to advise their candidates than those who had not. Many had also given their candidates exemplar Notes from those meetings. As a result, candidates mostly used the headings from the specification criteria for each section, which helped to focus the work. Candidates are once again, however, encouraged to ensure that each section is balanced to cover all the requirements. The most common faults found by moderators can be summarised as follows:

Section 1

- not enough explanation/exploration of the theatrical purpose of the practitioner
- restricted knowledge or understanding of the key features of the work of the practitioner, for example, Stanislavski's ideas being reduced to 'emotion memory' and 'magic if' only
- biographies of the practitioner or explanations of how a company of practitioners came to work together offered instead of identification/analysis of the key features of their work
- choice of play justified in terms of who was in the group and how much they loved the play rather than in terms of its suitability as a vehicle to explore and employ the ideas and techniques of their chosen practitioner
- lists of plays/practitioners considered yet rejected
- missing bibliographies/webliographies.

Section 2

- while intentions were often clear there was little discussion about **how** candidates were interpreting the play in order to achieve those intentions
- little, if any, reference to the techniques of their practitioner that the candidates used in their interpretation
- no reference to the play at all but generalised descriptions of rehearsals
- misunderstanding of the word 'interpretation'.

Section 3

- too much general material on how the group got on and when they rehearsed
- inadequate focus on the rehearsal methods of the chosen practitioner
- no mention of the character being played (in those offering acting)
- no reference to the potential success of the piece as distinct from the chosen skill
- no reference to the development of the chosen skill, in relation to the chosen practitioner's ideas
- missing specification requirements from those offering directing (for example, prompt copy) or design and technical skills (for example, cue sheets, photographic records, costings)
- over-lengthy health and safety sections at the expense of addressing the other requirements for this section.

Exceptionally, there were examples of Supporting Notes that were not divided into three sections, as stipulated in the specification, or, if they were divided, the material appeared to be distributed between the sections in an arbitrary manner, with no attempt to match content to the section requirements.

Group Performances

There was some very exciting work seen this year that created both dramatic impact and appreciation of the skills demonstrated. These presentations created the impression of a high level of candidates' control over their material and over their application of the ideas and methods of their chosen practitioner. The salient features in evidence in these pieces were economy and discipline.

Moderators witnessed a wide variety of plays in just about every style and genre even if not from every period; the overwhelming majority of plays selected were from the late 20th/early 21st century. The work of Sarah Kane continues to be popular with candidates, with *4.48 Psychosis* still the most performed play, although, it is worth noting, not the most successfully performed play.

Other much performed pieces included *Abigail's Party*, *Be My Baby*, *Find Me*, *Memory of Water* and *Fear and Misery of the 3rd Reich*. Berkoff's plays are also popular, and moderators reported how frequently candidates choosing to apply Berkoff's production methods to his own plays seemed to be some of the most successful in relation to producing an authentic theatrical experience for an audience, as well as meeting the requirements of the specification head on.

Some of the plays chosen, however, did not seem to challenge the candidates sufficiently at this level, and some very simplistic 'teenage' themed plays were witnessed. Some groups selected TiE pieces such as *Too Much Punch for Judy* or *Hard to Swallow* by Mark Wheeler and struggled to apply the ideas of a mainstream practitioner to these texts.

Others resurrected the play they had performed for their GCSE exam with predictable outcomes. John Godber's plays were also popular, but candidates often underestimated the level of precision required in bringing his work to life in an effective manner. There were many very poorly executed attempts at *Teechers* seen, as well as the seemingly ubiquitous *Shakers Re-stirred*. Moderators also commented on the fact that where candidates selected a play by Godber and nominated Godber as their practitioner, they rarely succeeded in identifying aspects of Godber's work as a practitioner as opposed to as a playwright. This was a problem that also arose with other nominated practitioners who were/are also playwrights, such as Pinter and Ayckbourn. It is imperative that candidates focus on these practitioners' ideas as directors, when they come to the application of the practitioner to the chosen play.

Moderators saw work influenced by the ideas, style and methods of Artaud, Stanislavski, Brecht, Meyerhold, Katie Mitchell and Max Stafford-Clark; by Volcano, Punchdrunk, Joint Stock, Complicite, Frantic Assembly, Shared Experience, Forkbeard Fantasy; by Peter Brook, Grotowski, Hulltruck, DV8 and Trestle, amongst others.

The most frequently chosen practitioners were Stanislavski and Brecht. Where these practitioners had been studied in appropriate depth and applied to suitable plays, candidates often distinguished themselves. All too frequently, however, it was evident in both candidates' Supporting Notes and in their presentations that they actually had but a slender grasp of the theories they were purporting to be applying. In each case, weaker groups of candidates nominated a ridiculously narrow range of the selected practitioner's theory or practice, such as only focusing on Spass in relation to Brecht or only mentioning 'magic if' in relation to Stanislavski. On these occasions the work failed to convince the moderator of its Stanislavskian or Brechtian credentials.

As mentioned last year, many candidates performing in what they may genuinely have believed to be the style of Brecht (on the basis of the flimsiest of exploration into his style) had negligible real appreciation of his methods and practice. Many adopted a generalised approach to his

theories on gestic acting and on Spass, in particular, and there were instances where Brecht's political purpose was completely undermined by inappropriate slapstick approaches. Touring companies such as Splendid Productions have, unfortunately, in their quest to make theatre vivid and accessible, seemed at some centres to have distorted **some** candidates' perceptions of what a Brechtian production looks like. Candidates would be well advised to undertake proper research into Brechtian theatre and to look at photographs of some of his productions in action before embarking on a presentation full of comical wigs and stick-on moustaches, puppet hand-puppets, inappropriate songs and meaningless jigs.

This year, moderators reported a surge in the popularity of Artaud as an influential practitioner selected. Where Artaud's proposals for the theatre were fully understood and replicated in performance, moderators reported seeing some exciting work. However, the vast majority of work that purported to be influenced by Artaud offered but a dim reflection of an authentic Artaudian treatment of the selected text.

This is one of the most difficult practitioners to apply to a text with any degree of success, especially since he advocated the abolition of text itself. Moderators reported being screamed at, or mauled, or covered in confetti (or worse), all in the name of an Artaudian experience that never materialised.

This is a style of theatre that should be avoided by all but the most dedicated of candidates. Peter Brook wrote wisely when he said in his chapter on Holy Theatre in *The Empty Space* that "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed: betrayed because it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited". Moderators have reported seeing Artaud 'betrayed' repeatedly this series by candidates without the knowledge or the highly disciplined skills required to pay appropriate homage to this complex practitioner.

The best groups demonstrated a complete integration between their chosen play and their practitioner, thus fulfilling the requirements of the examination and enabling them to achieve the highest marks.

The most successful groups chose an extract which they could perform without any recourse to editing of the text or doubling up (unless this was written in to the text). Where groups had chosen to perform 15 to 40 minutes from the opening or closing of their play, or to perform judiciously selected extracts from the whole play, they were more able to demonstrate understanding of their text and show the development of characters, style or theme. There were still a few cases of groups which attempted to stage an abridgement of their chosen play, thus disregarding the requirements in the specification.

Groups that chose the correct amount of material for their group size, also fared better than those smaller groups who chose to present a two or three 'handers' lasting the full forty minutes.

On the other hand, it is worth reporting that there were instances this year of groups working in pairs, whose presentations were far too short. These candidates, who had worked on pieces that lasted no more than ten minutes and sometimes little more than five minutes, inevitably penalised themselves. It is not possible for candidates who present brief, under-developed pieces to attract marks in the highest band, however polished their work might be, as this would effectively penalise the candidates who have laboured hard and long to master, rehearse and refine the appropriate amount of material.

The best presentations revealed an excellent understanding of the text, and candidates were able to demonstrate their understanding of the social and historical context of their play through judicious use of props and costumes. One performance of *Abigail's Party* demonstrated a fine attention to period detail in their use of a garish 1970s style wallpaper which they had stuck to

their flats and props exactly as specified in the text. In another performance, of Catherine Hayes' *Skirmishes*, the group revealed subtle understanding that the dying mother would inevitably be in the marital double bed, complete with pink candlewick bedspread.

In non naturalistic presentations candidates were also able to demonstrate not only excellent understanding of the text but also an imaginative employment of the devices of their practitioner. Hence a performance of *Tristan and Iseult* used songs, visual gags and magic tricks to 'get the audience going' in the manner of Kneehigh, to create a riotously amusing opening to their performance.

Obviously, for such understanding to be evident, such groups had selected key elements of staging from their practitioner appropriately; demonstrating a holistic approach rather than a piecemeal one. So while none of the group mentioned above who presented *Abigail's Party*, were offering set or costume design, they had realised that, if they were to create an authentically realistic presentation of this play, they needed to surround themselves with all the necessary accoutrements, as referred to in the text, in order to live their roles. They had also noted this in their Supporting Notes.

The best groups used all theatre elements in a completely integrated way to produce an authentic theatrical experience for the audience and moderator alike.

Weaker pieces tended to be those where the candidates had tackled a piece which was intellectually or physically beyond their corporate abilities. There were examples seen of groups who simply did not appear to understand the words they were speaking, and these groups invariably missed the subtleties of the text. Such groups missed the potential for comedy, for example, or the slight social differences between the characters or the sub-text of the play. In these cases the AO3 mark was affected however 'secure' a performance of the extract they delivered.

Weaker groups demonstrated their lack of understanding of their play through poor costume and props choices, idiosyncratic casting and/or editing which ran counter to the playwright's intentions, as well as the normal practice of their selected practitioner. Occasionally props were inappropriately mimed, and in one extreme example the five Mark note was missing from a performance of *Fear and Misery of the 3rd Reich* despite being mentioned in the text, thus revealing a lack of understanding of Brecht's purpose and practice at a stroke, as well as the significance of poverty in that play.

In some presentations groups were large and not all the performers were able to realise their characters because the required style of acting did not suit them or were beyond their capabilities. These candidates might have done better to work in smaller groups in a piece that gave them more opportunity to show what they could do.

In the weakest offerings there were further examples of backstage indiscipline with repetitive and clumsy transitions, noisy (and slow) costume changes complete with clanging hangers and the sounds of actors clearly bumping into the set.

Directing

Candidates who offered this skill this year seem to have fallen into two camps: those who have an intelligent grasp of the play and the nominated practitioner, coupled with the skills and maturity required to handle a cast of contemporaries, and those who seem to have gravitated towards the skill because they lack the necessary skills to be assessed as an actor or designer.

Those in the former category had more success if they were using the techniques of a practitioner who has very specific ideas about the role of the director. Hence, those who used Max Stafford Clark or Brecht fared better than those who had attempted to use, for example, Godber or Artaud. In the work of better candidates it was evident that artistic decisions were closely linked to the intentions of the playwright. Here, detailed prompt copies revealed a disciplined and imaginative approach to the theatrical elements other than acting.

Where candidates had the necessary skills to lead a group, it was obvious that the whole group had benefitted from the ideas and objectivity of someone able to step away from the piece and offer purposeful advice about positioning, grouping and use of the space and of props. Very often accomplished directors created effective stage pictures; a number had chosen to incorporate projected images and sequences, and these were often very effective. It was also clear where directors had employed the strategies of the chosen practitioner to shape the work on stage.

There were less satisfactory examples where the directing candidate did not apparently have an overall directorial concept, and there was little in the final piece to suggest that there had been a single unifying force driving the work.

Candidates who were influenced by the techniques and methods of Stanislavski or Max Stafford Clark provided useful evidence of the application of their ideas in detailed prompt copies that had been enclosed with the Supporting Notes. Artistic decisions taken were in line with the writer's intentions as well as the practitioner's, and good work was also evident in the highly detailed performances given. Some directors had also made props, set and costume their responsibility resulting in an obvious overall design concept realised on stage.

Weaker directors revealed little sense of any controlling hand in the work. Positioning lacked invention and at times led to actors being masked or standing laterally across the width of the stage. Movement lacked motivation, and there was very little sense of the tempo of the respective scenes. There was often an over-riding even pace applied to the performances, and in some cases it was difficult to detect what directorial contributions had been made.

It is fair to say that candidates who offer this skill need to have a high level of maturity and intelligent understanding of the text as well as knowledge about rehearsal techniques. In some offerings it was difficult to assess precisely what the directing candidate had been responsible for and in some unfortunate cases a whole group will have lost marks for understanding because of the director's autocratic interpretation. In one case a group mounted a play by Brecht all wearing leggings and t-shirts which goes against any ideas that Brecht had about the visual aspects of his productions.

Acting

This was by far the most popular skill offered by candidates, and there were some outstanding performances witnessed by moderators.

In the best naturalistic performances, the thought processes behind the lines were evident, resulting in the revelation of a detailed emotional journey that was shared with the audience. Good candidates always display a sensitivity to the rhythm of the language, whatever the play, but particularly in Shakespearean pieces. The same careful note of the poetry of the text was often also seen in renditions of Berkoffian characters. These candidates revealed a complete understanding of the verse form in such performances, so that, although heightened, the characterisations were thoroughly based in truth, rather than being mere exhibitions of verse delivery. Pauses and silences were relished but never empty.

Good performers did not mistake effort for energy but controlled their use of pitch and tone effectively. Accents, where adopted, were sustained without losing the feeling and sense inherent in the lines. Props were handled adeptly, and their apparently effortless use was clearly the result of many weeks of rehearsal. In the best work the adopted style of the practitioner was appropriately realised, with many candidates ready to take risks with their work.

Some of the best work was of an ensemble nature and this demanded a high level of focus, dexterity and discipline.

On some occasions, it was hard to believe that the performer was only 16 or 17 years old. One such example was a candidate who convincingly played Helen in Berkoff's *Decadence* with just the right degree of sluttishness and eroticism revealing an ability to get under the skin of a woman far beyond her years and experience. She at once seduced and repelled the audience. Other candidates managed to plumb the depths of emotion in a presentation of *Peepshow* using Frantic Assembly's methods so much so that it hardly seemed as if they were acting at all but actually living the role, such was the level of physical intimacy exhibited without any inhibition on stage. Others, working in masks, were able to fully physicalise their role in considerable detail.

However, at the other end of the spectrum there were some performances where the moderator wondered if it might have been better if the candidate had selected a different skill or play. These were generalised performances with often ponderous delivery, repeated cadences and a lack of attention given to age or accent. Weak work contained performers who made no reactions to others on stage and failed to find the thought changes or emotional journey in the character.

Often it was evident from the performances, that, however much theoretical knowledge candidates had of the ideas of their chosen practitioner, the work had barely been affected at all by those ideas.

Less effective acting was often at odds with the intentions and/or methods of the nominated practitioner, so that candidates who had, for example, chosen Frantic Assembly were unequal to the physical disciplines involved, or those having chosen Brecht could not always cope with the Brechtian need for demonstration rather than a naturalistic identification with the character.

Others did not have the appropriate accent and, at the lower end of the ability spectrum, in some cases, had not even mastered their lines sufficiently. This often led to hesitancy and nervousness on behalf of the rest of their group as they worried about whether their fellow group member would get through the performance or not. It is worth reminding candidates that they do not have to choose acting as their skill and that, if they do opt for performing, the ability to learn lines is a very basic requirement.

Set Design

The popularity of this skill continues to grow and there were many credit-worthy designs seen this year. The very best incorporated the ideas of their chosen practitioner fully and helped to contextualise the selected text. Some were very ambitious in terms of ideas and imaginative in how they used a wide variety of materials. One candidate who designed the set for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had used a variety of draped lace, muslin and satin which reflected the lights beautifully in hues of green, turquoise and blue to create an ethereal quality.

At the other end of the scale of achievement candidates had failed to take into account the design ideas of their selected practitioner, and it is worth reminding candidates that design and technical candidates do not have to use the same practitioner as the actors in their group. In

the weakest pieces the skills exhibited were restricted to the painting of already constructed boxes or flats or the re-arrangement of 'stock' pieces from the college store room. Many sets in this category consisted of a couple of school chairs with a throw draped over them or a saggy old sofa that had evidently been used in many previous shows, perhaps suitable for a production of *Road*, but certainly not appropriate for the style or period of *Private Lives*, as it was supposed to be.

Other candidates had not considered the action of the play sufficiently, causing some exits and entrances to be cramped, slowing down the action and making difficulties for the actors.

Costume Design

This is another skill that has grown in popularity this year. The best candidates created a total top to toe look for all of their actors, with considerable attention to detail.

One example was for a presentation of *The Cherry Orchard*. This was not only historically accurate but also reflected a coherent design concept. All the costumes were constructed in shades of cream and beige, and these colours were lit beautifully throughout the piece.

Good candidates were very inventive in how they used materials, often relying on recycling old fabrics rather than using new (and more expensive) ones. So one candidate produced a 1920s dress out of an old duvet cover, and by clever accessorizing and the use of sequined braiding made the costume seem authentic. Attention was also given to the use of shiny stockings to replicate silk ones and cami-knickers to create the full period look.

Another highly effective set of costumes were produced for Campton's *Cagebirds*, again using largely recycled materials. The one produced for Guzzler was especially fun with a skirt of padded 'feathers', padded puffed sleeves and a huge apron out of which stuck a variety of cooking utensils. What made the costume so successful was that it enabled the actor to move freely and also gave her items to use in the performance.

Another example of excellent design skills was for a queen's costume in a political satire by Edward Bond. The hooped skirt seemed to sway with a life of its own to reveal clashing pantaloons.

To achieve success in this skill, it is imperative that costumes actually fit the actors who have to wear them. They should also contribute to the creation of character or to the creation of the mood, style or period of the play.

In many cases, moderators reported that having a costume candidate was a definite advantage to the group in terms of enhancing the final look of the piece.

In weaker pieces the costumes often did not fit properly, bra straps were seen when they should not have been, skirts had not been hemmed or they were simply the wrong period for the play. Some very weak candidates appeared to have given very little thought to the demands of the piece they were designing for.

One of the least successful approaches is where candidates merely assemble costumes out of stock or out of candidates' own clothes. For example, one candidate 'designed' for a presentation of *4:48 psychosis*, but actually only produced shop bought t-shirts and trousers in white cotton. There was no skill shown in the construction of the garments as they had not been made by the candidate. The candidate's only 'design contribution had been the application of baffling symbols in marker pen on the back and front of each of the shirts. It was

evident from reading the supporting notes that the symbols meant something to the candidate, but they communicated nothing to the audience.

Mask Design

Although this was not a popular choice, moderators reported seeing some mask designers this year.

There were a number of groups who had chosen Trestle as their influential practitioner and there were some very effective masks seen that were based on Trestle's hallmark style.

In the aforementioned *Cagebirds*, for example, the candidate had clearly worked extremely closely with the costume candidate so that the mask fitted into the hairline seamlessly and complemented the costume in terms of style and colour. Fully three dimensional, the masks allowed the actors freedom of movement because the eye holes were big enough to see through and the actors could be heard through them. Clearly influenced by Trestle, they were art works in their own right.

Weaker candidates constructed masks that were not entirely fit for purpose, and moderators were disappointed to report that some groups would have achieved better marks if the masks had been ready for the actors to rehearse in at least two weeks before the examination date or, in the worst instances, if the candidates had performed without masks at all.

Technical Elements

There were many outstanding demonstrations of lighting and sound design skills this year which took into account fully the demands of the chosen play and the techniques of the selected practitioner. Good candidates were excellent technicians as well as artistic designers.

The very best lighting designs were often quite subtle with, first and foremost, careful colour mixing and lighting of the actors. These design candidates exhibited a variety in rates of fade and cross fade, used different angles including backlighting, up-lighting and side lighting in their designs. The execution of the cues was pinpoint perfect, nothing late and nothing early. Some candidates used special effects such as smoke and UV lighting to enhance the performance of their play.

The best candidates were extremely creative with colour and special effects. In one performance of *The Fall of the House of Usher* the technical candidate had employed a smoke machine to create smoke which was then backlit in blue to create the spooky, foggy atmosphere that marks the arrival of the Friend in the play. Using a UV lantern he was also able to create ghostliness, which, coupled with the use of up-lighting, created spectral shadows on the cyclorama. Both effects revealed an understanding of both the play and the practitioner (Berkoff). Another candidate fully embraced the techniques of Meyerhold, having all his equipment fully visible to the audience as well as the use of up lighting and side lighting using colours from opposite ends of the spectrum to distort the appearance of the actors on stage. Lighting changes were executed subtly with a variety of rates of change and the studious avoidance of gimmicky lighting effects such as strobes in the best designs.

Weaker offerings were also evident, however, with the most common mistake being that the actors were not lit so the audience could see them properly. This was especially evident in poor lighting of stage-left and right resulting in unplanned darkness. Sometimes the audience were

lit more than the actors, and in the weakest offerings the lights seemed to go on and off for no apparent reason.

Many candidates who offered lighting also offered sound but only those with excellent time management and full control of their equipment were able to use both successfully. Some candidates composed music especially for the examination, and others used a wide variety of music technology to mix and overlay special effects to create evocative soundscapes. Others used a mix of live and recorded sound including directional sound effects such as the sound of an aeroplane flying overhead.

With both of these skills it is essential that candidates have sufficient technical equipment in order that their creative response to a text is not limited. If a centre's equipment is restricted then so is the potential for a technical candidate.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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