



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Drama and Theatre Studies**

**DRAM3**

**(Specification 2240)**

**Unit 3: Further Prescribed Plays including  
Pre-Twentieth Century**

***Report on the Examination***

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### **Unit 3 – Further Prescribed Plays including Pre-Twentieth Century**

#### ***General comments***

There were many very good papers seen during this June series, with many candidates demonstrating a secure understanding of the texts that they had studied, coupled with a determination to use their knowledge and understanding to meet the precise demands of the different sections of the question paper.

Both sections of the paper require candidates to reveal a creative overview of their chosen plays; additionally, Section B requires an explicit interpretation of the extract set.

Neither Section requires candidates to offer biographical information about the playwrights of their set texts. There is no credit given for reference to theatre practitioners or to live productions seen during the course unless these references are made entirely relevant to the developing response to the set question. Lengthy historical background material that is not utilised purposefully is also to be discouraged.

In Section A, weaker answers did not demonstrate an over-view of the chosen text, and there were a significant number of answers which approached the questions from a literary and/or historical stand point, ignoring the practical demands of the questions.

Most candidates selected appropriate sections of text to illustrate their answers, but some relied on very short sections of text which limited the development of the practical suggestions and offered quite restricted evidence of understanding.

Many candidates selected inappropriate sections from the play or they selected sections which afforded them limited opportunities to answer the precise focus of the question in any detail. Many candidates drew all their examples from the first scenes or Act.

In Section B, a small number of candidates strayed into parts of the text that were found outside the confines of the printed extract, particularly in *Our Country's Good* and in *Coram Boy* thereby losing time to focus appropriately on the required section of text.

Surprisingly, for the fourth series of the examination, some candidates were not prepared for the Section B question adequately which was revealed in the fact that they ignored the printed extract altogether and focused instead on the portion of the set play in their own texts that corresponded to the given page numbers of the examination paper booklet. These answers rarely attracted more than a handful of marks.

The majority of candidates offered at least some practical examples to support their ideas, and there were some excellent, highly detailed and appropriately inventive responses.

However, some candidates did not clearly link their intended effects to the practical suggestions given and it was impossible at times to guess what effects were being attempted.

Some candidates failed to offer any kind of interpretation at all.

A sketch is a requirement in Section B; its intended function is to convey staging ideas in an economical way so that candidates are free to develop their ideas about the direction of the cast without having to go into lengthy details about the lay-out of the stage or about design elements in the body of their answers.

Many candidates do not understand this, so that, having offered a reasonable sketch with suitable labelling to convey relevant information to the examiner, they then duplicated, in continuous prose, all of the details that had already been indicated on their sketches. This is a waste of precious time.

In the vast majority of cases, another waste of precious time occurs when candidates offer one, two or three pages of casting and costume ideas that do not add anything at all to their interpretation of the printed extract. Examiners also reported seeing many instances where candidates spent a page of their answer booklet extolling the virtues of traverse staging or in-the-round staging or proscenium arch staging. The direction of the actors within the extract is the most important aspect of this task and candidates would do well to appreciate this fact.

The majority of candidates offered appropriate staging ideas for the plays, with a few exceptions. Where students choose to set an historical text from Section A in a contemporary setting, robust justification should be given.

There were some instances where candidates appeared to adopt an ‘anything goes’ approach to the extract and where totally inappropriate or incongruous design ideas were imposed on scenes that had very precise requirements.

Broadly, the standard of writing and punctuation was acceptable, and sometimes examiners were impressed by the fluency and cogency of candidates’ answers.

Please note that candidates should be discouraged from abbreviating the names of characters. It is not acceptable for candidates to write ‘L.D.’ for ‘Lord Darlington’ or to write ‘B’ and ‘M’ for ‘Bride’ and ‘Mother’. All candidates answering on the same play should be writing out characters’ names in full as this is the standard procedure and is an accepted convention of the examination script.

Examiners saw abundant evidence of insecurity with terminology in a disappointingly large number of responses. This insecurity was highlighted in candidates’ sketches which often lacked clarity and helpful labelling, suggesting a lack of forward planning and practice.

Examiners reported errors as glaring as referring to ‘all in the round’ theatre, to ‘end’ theatre, to the use of a ‘revolver’ on stage, as well as the fruits of mis-hearings/misunderstandings of terms such as gobo (‘gobbet’), flat (‘flap’) and the old favourite of ‘prescinio march’.

As reported in January, some candidates simply did not appear to know the basic stories of the set texts and much confusion and muddle resulted from this.

## **Section A – Pre-Twentieth Century Plays**

### ***The Revenger's Tragedy***

#### **Question 01**

Examiners saw some successful responses to this question although there were also many disappointing answers in evidence.

The most common failing noted was the absence of a clearly identified preferred response to Lussorioso, without which all performance ideas were rendered purposeless.

Where candidates did identify their preferred response, examiners saw a range of ideas. Some candidates viewed the character as wholly unsympathetic and loathsome, which is fully understandable given the character's clearly stated 'values' and his actions throughout the play. Others suggested the audience might feel sorry for him at various points in the action; notably, after surprising the Duke and Duchess in their bedchamber.

Many candidates dealt with a very narrow range of moments; weaker answers dealt only with Lussorioso's first appearances or they referred to two or three individual phrases from different parts of the play; in some instances they dealt with two 'sections' from different parts of the same scene. These answers did not fulfil the demands of the question.

Better candidates chose their sections wisely in order to reveal an overview of the character and they considered Lussorioso's interactions with his father and brothers as well as with Vindice/Piato and Hippolito.

Weaker candidates made little or no reference to the play's period or genre. Others wrote at inappropriate length about the play's provenance as if the authorship of the play was in some way relevant to the set task.

While justified modernisations of the play are acceptable, examiners reported seeing numerous unjustified and some unsuitable transpositions. Frequently, candidates spent a disproportionate amount of time explaining their transposition which was then not utilised in relation to their interpretation of Lussorioso.

As always, the best answers focused on specific sections which were used to illustrate moments of performance calculated exactly to achieve clearly stated and appropriate responses from the audience. Examiners reported seeing many inventive and darkly humorous interpretations of the role.

Unfortunately, some candidates evidently found this play too complicated, and too far removed from their own experience, to grasp. The intricacy of the plot, the multitude of brothers and the frequent employment of disguises resulted in many confused and inaccurate responses.

#### **Question 02**

Although not selected by as many candidates, this question produced some good answers, especially where candidates made an explicit statement about their preferred effects at the beginning of their answers.

Intended effects ranged from tension, intrigue and/or comedy to the revelation of the play's key concerns such as corruption or misogyny.

Many candidates failed to identify an intended effect for the audience so that any suggestion they made lacked a proper focus.

The characters of Vindice and Gratiana were often understood in only very superficial terms. Consequently, their relationship, and Vindice's disguise, were only treated generally.

Some good answers were very clear as to the moral content explored by the playwright and used this well in their practical interpretations. There was some particularly good work on Vindice's disgust at Gratiana's greed and there was some useful discussion of her scheming nature.

There was generally some understanding of the style of the play, although this was not always developed in terms of performance. As a result, discussion of Gratiana's "reform" was often less well understood and was not well handled.

There were some inventive suggestions for presenting the interaction between Vindice and Gratiana and most candidates appeared to understand the nature of the relationship as well as the convention whereby a mother does not recognise her own son.

Good answers considered the characters in context and were clearly aware of the function of the two characters within the narrative of the play.

Others did not appear to realise that Piato is actually Vindice in disguise and omitted the exchanges between Vindice and his mother involving the prostitution of Castiza because of this.

## ***Tartuffe***

### **Question 03**

It is pleasing to note that fewer candidates, in this series, prefaced their answers with lengthy introductions about, for example, the nature of Moliere's comic style, its origins in commedia dell'arte and/or Moliere's particular difficulties with religious zealots. A number of candidates still believed that such peripheral material would be rewarded but such material tended to detract from, rather than to enhance, the answers to the questions on *Tartuffe*.

The majority of candidates showed a secure understanding of the role of Dorine and interpretations of the role were mainly apt. However, some candidates failed to notice that this question demanded a director's perspective and they blithely trotted out ideas as a performer of the role.

Some candidates did not notice that the question specified a focus on creating comedy from Dorine's relationships with different characters and they chose to write about two scenes where Dorine interacts with Orgon, or they chose to write about her relationship with the audience.

A few candidates covered a full range of indicators and gave an informed overview of the role; they used the text well to illustrate their comical ideas and these were well developed and appropriate. However, a great many candidates focussed on very brief moments from the text, and did not develop the role fully or appropriately. Some took the role well beyond the realms of what would be tolerated in a maid, notwithstanding her lack of respect for Orgon.

Better answers generally developed her relationships with Madame Pernelle, Orgon, Tartuffe, and/or Mariane in some detail and offered clear performance ideas.

### **Question 04**

This was a popular question and it attracted some very well informed responses as well as some very weak ones.

There were some impressive answers to the question which showed a very good understanding of Orgon's attitudes towards Tartuffe; however, a significant number of candidates ignored the specific focus of the question and answered a question of their own devising which focused more generally on creating comedy from Orgon's performance.

Although Orgon could be said to be expressing his attitude(s) towards Tartuffe in every scene in which he appears, these candidates obtusely ignored the potentially apt material and devoted themselves to creating slapstick moments or to describing his interaction with Dorine – divorced from what this might reveal of his attitudes.

Weaker answers showed limited understanding of Moliere's style and intentions. Where the style was understood, there was often much irrelevant reference to the Pantalone role, stated but not then exploited in the performance suggestions.

Overall, however, this was usually a successfully realised question with good focus and some helpful direction. Orgon's emergence from under the table was often detailed, and his outrage with Tartuffe well described.

## ***The Recruiting Officer***

### **Question 05**

There were only a few answers on this question.

Good answers showed a sound understanding of the costume designer's role and applied colour and fabric suggestions with purpose. These answers linked their ideas very clearly to the text, and a few answers indicated how costumes could be used in action, in particular Silvia's use of her hat and cape as she develops her "breeches" disguise. A few very good answers commented on how the costume would aid movement and contrast with her more restrained movement in her formal, feminine attire.

The best answers showed a good understanding of both the role of Silvia and Sergeant Kite. These answers offered some detailed performance, and were clearly linked to moments of text. Use of colour and costume decoration developed ideas of characterisation often with clear evidence of research. Good answers paid attention to the use of costume and props and integrated their understanding of the historical context with apt and detailed direction. These answers paid greater attention to the realisation of a comedy, with appropriate use of timing, comic business and delivery.

Less successful answers gave lengthy accounts of the historical context and analysis of the type of role Silvia represents. However, these answers did not offer detailed designs or justification supported by textual reference.

Better candidates gave appropriate attention to specific moments in the text where costume design was instrumental in achieving the selected effects and some succeeded in realising the comic potential in the section with Kite 'the conjuror'. Others omitted this scene entirely and thereby missed opportunities for comedy through costume.

Some diagrams were very clear, others offered very limited information.

### **Question 06**

This was the more popular and successful question on this text.

The best answers showed a good understanding of the role of Rose and the comic potential of the role. These answers offered some detail of the stereotype 'country wench' and exploited the comedy implicit in her exchanges with Plume, Justice Balance and Bullock as well as with Silvia in the guise of Jack Wilful.

Good answers also explored the character interacting with a number of others with some particularly successful work on her interaction with Plume.

A few candidates were drawn into the contemporary morality of the play, often showing a naïve understanding of the nature of the characters and the play's context.

Good answers showed a command of comic direction, including pace, timing and comic business, and applied these features well in their realisation of their chosen sections of text.

Good answers selected their moments of text judiciously and paid attention to the comic realisation of these scenes through detailed practical examples, including some off-text but highly appropriate suggestions for comic business. In particular Rose's use of props, for



example her basket of chickens, was well used and added considerable comedy to moments of text.

Good answers also gave sufficient focus to audience and to their intended responses. These answers showed an awareness of pace and of the light humour of the text.

Weaker answers did not realise the complexities of Rose's character, interpreting her as either entirely stupid or a sexual predator. These responses showed only a limited understanding of Rose's function and the context of the play.

### ***The Servant of Two Masters***

#### **Question 07**

This was not a particularly popular question and it was attempted in the main by those with experience of and an interest in set design, although there were still some who took it on without realising the level of detail required.

The better answers were able to offer ideas that were clearly part of a coherent design approach. Swinging doors, stairs, ladders, traps and even conveyor belts featured, though they made more sense when being used on a suitable stage.

Successful answers showed a very good understanding of the necessary pace of the action, and incorporated entrances and exits that would facilitate this pace. There was some useful suggestion for levels, for example windows in the inn from which heads would "pop out" to instruct Truffaldino.

Less successful answers often offered practical suggestions for the use of set but this was not always made coherent to the whole play. This lack of clarity limited the effectiveness of the answers. Some answers had been influenced by the recent performance of *One Man, Two Guv'nors*, and had applied a contemporary setting appropriately. Weaker answers showed less understanding of design fundamentals in terms of scale, colour and material.

There were a few clear and detailed sketches. However, several candidates did not label diagrams and there was little indication of sight-lines or audience.

The choice of scene was usually straightforward, with the dinner and the suicide being most popular.

#### **Question 08**

This was a very popular question and, in general, was successfully answered; although, examiners reported seeing scores of answers where the creation of 'comedy' (often slapstick or scatological in nature) was put before a plausible creation of Dr Lombardi.

There are certain things that we know about Lombardi. He is an academic; a pedant; he is proud of his family name. He is the father of Silvio and keen to get him married to Clarice, largely because he wants the dowry. We also know, of course, that he is based on Il Dottore. Consequently we might expect that the comedy would be rooted in these ideas. In the better answers it was, but many offered all manner of silly ideas that might well have been funny in themselves, but which were not appropriate for the character or for the play.

There appeared to be a school of thought that believed that because this is Commedia (and actually it isn't) and improvisational (which it isn't) then anything goes (and it doesn't). One candidate even wanted to spontaneously invent the Latin sayings that Lombardi uses, missing the point, as did so many, that the Latin does in fact make sense and is not gobbledegook. Good answers rightly made comedy out of Lombardi's pedantry, his lack of self-awareness and the potential for him to fall from dignity.

The best answers showed a good understanding of the question and applied their comic invention to the text of the play and precisely to what Dr Lombardi says in the text and how the dialogue is delivered.

There was some particularly good work on the realisation of Lombardi in relation to Pantalone and the two scenes set in Pantalone's courtyard were exploited most effectively in a number of strong answers. Weaker answers appeared to be based on an insecure knowledge of where any of the scenes were set and, as a result, they often suggested comic 'business' that was reliant on armchairs or chandeliers, when the scenes were obstinately set out of doors.

Many weaker answers were also reliant on the repetitive exploitation of the stock characters' physical qualities such as height and girth. Examiners tired of Dr Lombardi's 'big belly' and of the many unlikely feats that it appeared to be capable of.

The best answers integrated their understanding of the appropriate comic devices into the direction of their selected scenes and offered detailed direction. However, some candidates offered very dubious examples of comic action and many suggested comic moments that would have destroyed the focus of the scenes selected and/or distorted the relationships that Goldoni has presented.

Examiners reported seeing many near identical answers on Dr Lombardi in some centres where there was a semi-corporate feel to candidates' responses. This type of approach is especially noticeable in answers where comedy is being attempted when every candidate in the cohort equips Dr Lombardi with a fake beard, built-up shoes and a copy of 'Latin for Dummies'.

## **Lady Windermere's Fan**

### ***Question 09***

This was an extremely popular play and the option on performing Lady Windermere received the majority of answers.

A wide range of responses was offered, from the highly successful to the barely acceptable and there were many overly literary and/or narrative descriptions of Lady Windermere seen.

Too many candidates appeared to believe that a lengthy exposition about Oscar Wilde and his 'bad' or 'much mis-understood' character was a good way to begin an answer on Lady Windermere, but this was rarely the case. Others began with a lengthy diatribe on the aspects of society that were being satirised by Wilde, including its hypocrisy, its views on marriage and the double standards that exist regarding relationships between the sexes. In effect they were answering the question that was set in the January series.

Better answers offered a brief contextualisation of who Lady Windermere is within the play and they revealed an understanding of Wilde's purpose in juxtaposing Lady Windermere against the 'backdrop' of a more cynical society. They discussed her qualities as a 'good

woman', they considered her 'puritanism' and they considered the dangers that she faced as a consequence of her mistaken belief that Lord Windermere is having an affair.

They then stated very clear preferred audience response(s) to the role and set about selecting the very best moments from the text that would enable them to achieve those responses. Performance ideas were detailed and appropriate both to the role and to the period of the play and they were tied specifically to lines of text.

Less successful answers began with peripheral matters. For example, many answers started by providing a sketch of the Windermere's drawing room and/or ballroom which added little if anything to the answer. Examiners noted that some candidates sketched **all** of the settings for this play before beginning their answer.

Other candidates drew a succession of Lady Windermere's outfits or they supplied a detailed sketch of the fan before embarking on the set task.

Candidates must also ask themselves how productive it is to copy out, for the benefit of the examiner, chunks of the notes that accompany some of the editions of the play. Examiners became somewhat weary of reading about conventions governing hand-shaking between men and women in the nineteenth century; especially as these points rarely contributed in any way to how an audience might respond to Lady Windermere.

Another difficulty with some of the answers seen was that candidates selected very brief moments of text, sometimes focusing on one or two lines, with which to illustrate their answers, which did not allow them to develop their responses in appropriate depth and detail.

There were, however, some very good answers to this question.

### **Question 10**

This was the less popular option although it elicited significant numbers of responses, covering a wide range of achievement.

A disappointing number of candidates did not clearly address the demand for two sections of the play, and several offered no direct interaction with Mrs Erlynne. Some candidates dealt with two sections but the focus of the answer was on responses to Lady Windermere not Mrs Erlynne.

Choice of section is always crucial in Section A and it was absolutely the key to success or failure in this case. Those candidates whose 'default' mode is to deal with the first two appearances of the nominated character, thus creating a restricted overview of the play/role, inevitably floundered with this question where much richer seams to mine in relation to Lord Windermere's attitudes towards Mrs Erlynne are found in Acts 3 and 4.

Good answers showed a very secure understanding of Lord Windermere's position in the play and the conflicting pressures on his actions. These answers interpreted his responses to Mrs Erlynne with useful practical detail, and showed his changing attitudes clearly, especially in terms of vocal quality.

Weaker answers offered a limited interpretation of the role, stressing his controlling and dominant qualities but failing to realise his protective nature.

At every turn, Windermere tries to do the right thing, but how this is expressed is different at different times and with different people.

Those with a more tenuous grasp of the role were prepared to suggest that Windermere had some motives that were less than wholesome and gentlemanly.

### ***The Seagull***

#### **Question 11**

This was a fairly popular question which was often successful.

The interpretation of Masha was generally very secure and her responses to Medvedenko and Konstantin were well detailed. The majority of candidates interpreted her personality clearly and there was some useful detail of her use of props, in particular her taking of the snuff as a displacement activity.

Casting was generally suitable and sometimes purposeful rather than perfunctory and, in the best answers, characterisation was well supported with these candidates offering close and frequent support from the text. Good answers offered appropriate ideas for Masha's physical appearance and vocal quality bearing in mind that Masha does not attract Konstantin and presents herself as gloomy and "in mourning for my life".

Masha's age was not appreciated by several candidates some of whom made her middle-aged for some reason. She is twenty two. There were also misunderstandings about Masha's position in the household. There is no reason to suppose that she is in tatty clothes because of her social position, though there is a case for making her careless about her appearance. There were some nice suggestions for the way that Masha's "mannishness" in taking snuff could be translated to voice and movement and some excellent images emerged, especially from that opening scene, which in the best cases were also quite funny.

Examiners reported what a pleasure it was to see so many candidates able to make much of Masha's brief interactions with Konstantin and of the sub-text that is at play whenever Masha and Konstantin were on stage together.

There were some very sensitive and imaginative ideas for non-verbal expression. Most had already given attention to the opening scene with Medvedenko and those who were able to cover some of Act Four were in a position to complete a good overview. Less successful answers gave too little attention to Masha's attitude to Konstantin, or tended to discuss Masha's scenes with Dorn and/or Polina, or her declaration of intention to marry Medvedenko which she makes to Trigorin in Act Three.

However, good answers offered some very clear moments of Masha's response, particularly her use of "fixed gaze" and pause as she absorbs the hurtful remarks that Konstantin unthinkingly makes to her. Practical suggestions were often detailed and there was generally very good use of text, showing an understanding of the play and of Chekhov's style.

### **Question 12**

This was a fairly popular question which was often successful. The interpretation of Sorin dictated the audience response and this was generally well handled, with the majority of candidates interpreting the role as affable and kindly albeit full of nostalgia and regret. Better candidates acknowledged that the audience response would vary as the play progresses.

There was some nicely detailed work on Sorin's relationships with Konstantin and Arkadina and particularly his role as mediator/peacekeeper. Practical suggestions were often detailed and there was generally very good use of text, showing an understanding of the play and of Chekhov's style.

Good answers offered appropriate ideas for casting (although this was not a requirement) and vocal quality bearing in mind that Sorin has to be seen as a kindly and avuncular character.

Weaker answers spent too much time on Sorin's deteriorating health, for example, a range of suits each successively bigger to reveal his 'wasting away', exaggerated make-up ideas and some unlikely suggestions for revealing his increasing decrepitude.

Most answers selected appropriate moments of text and gave a clear overview of the role and how they intended their audience response to develop.

It was surprising that so few candidates picked up on Sorin's mannerisms and his potential to annoy the other characters and too many were also unquestioningly sympathetic to the fact that he had done nothing with his life.

Only better answers revealed an understanding of Sorin's place within a play that deals significantly with themes of disillusionment and thwarted ambitions.

### **Section B – The Twentieth Century and Contemporary Drama**

The most important aspect of Section B that many candidates demonstrably failed to understand is that the question requires a detailed direction and interpretation of the printed extract in its entirety.

'Interpretation' implies that candidates will state what the substance of the extract signifies and that all their directorial ideas will be focused on bringing out the meaning of the scene for the audience.

Pre-prepared material about research, setting, costume and casting attracts very little credit unless it is shaped to the precise demands of the **extract**; biographical information about the individual playwrights attract no marks whatsoever. Where candidates failed to appreciate this fundamental point, they often wrote at least two thirds of an answer that attracted few marks.

As the question set in Section B is the same for all set texts, it is worth reiterating the following general points most of which have been made in previous reports, about the way in which candidates approached the extract-based question.

Better answers:

- offered a **personal** – yet entirely appropriate and justified – interpretation of the printed extract that revealed their understanding of the extract, of its context within the wider play and of the play as a whole
- attempted, through their directorial ideas, to communicate meaning to the audience
- supported ideas by using quotation from the extract
- considered the audience experience that they were aiming to achieve and offered suggestion that were likely to achieve these
- provided sketches that were of adequate size – about a third of a page - that were clearly labelled, and which related to the necessary traffic of the printed extract and were compatible with the play as a whole
- included evidence of **relevant** research discernible in the appropriateness of their practical suggestions as well as through explicit reference to it at particularly pertinent moments

Weaker answers:

- failed to locate the correct extract in their exam booklets but answered instead on the corresponding pages from the texts they had with them in the exam room
- failed to confine their interpretation to the material in the printed extract and wasted precious time directing moments before or after the material in the printed extract
- wrote **exclusively** about production elements – choice of stage configuration, set and costume design, lighting and sound effects and failed to offer a single idea about how they might direct their cast
- spent almost all of their answers writing casting and costume suggestions for every single character on stage, often betraying a restricted understanding of how casting and costume convey meaning to an audience
- referred irrelevantly to the biographies of the respective playwrights which had no bearing whatsoever on the interpretation of the extract
- wrote at length about their intentions for the audience without offering the concrete suggestions for achieving these intentions
- wrote about one or two lines of text in great detail but did not give a sense of understanding either of the rest of the extract or of the play from which it was taken

- failed to quote from the text in front of them
- ignored the context of the extract and made suggestions that ran counter to events that have just taken place in the section before the printed extract
- many weaker answers were swamped with references to research that was:
  - purely biographical
  - purely literary
  - gratuitous and/or clearly irrelevant to their interpretation of the piece
- sketches
  - many weaker answers did not contain a useful sketch
  - some sketches were crammed into three lines of the answer books with little or no labelling
  - some sketches contained so much labelling that it was impossible to see the sketch beneath it
  - some candidates repeated all of the information that they had supplied in the sketch in an unnecessary page or two of continuous prose
  - some candidates betrayed a lack of understanding by, for example, nominating a traverse stage setting but drawing a proscenium arch, or nominating theatre-in-the-round but depended upon back projection for their ideas
- many weaker answers contained a narrative account of the action contained in the extract and offered neither interpretation nor meaning to the reader/audience

These strengths and weaknesses were seen in relation to each of the texts. The following additional points are worth making in relation to specific texts.

### **Question 13: *Blood Wedding***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

This final section of lamentation offered a great opportunity to well-prepared candidates who had understood Lorca's intentions.

Unfortunately, too many candidates, perhaps disappointed that the extract did not allow them to draw on their ideas for the more surreal aspects of the play, ignored the text in front of them and did so anyway.

Examiners saw more outlandish suggestions for this text than for any of the other Section B texts (excepting perhaps, for *The Trial*) and, in some candidates' responses, there was a sense of 'anything goes', irrespective of Lorca's own intentions and of the actual content and dialogue in the printed extract.

Many candidates introduced their own bizarre forms of symbolism and made outrageous assertions such as 'In my interpretation the Woodcutters are the Moon' (neither Woodcutters nor Moon should be in the scene at all) or 'the neighbours all wear purple to connote royalty' (an idea with no justification).

Good answers revealed a clear awareness of the importance of the scene and its impact within the context of the whole play. They recognised that this was the latter part of a longer scene and acknowledged the immediate context – the Mother has just struck the Bride.

Better candidates worked closely on the text and noted, for example, the arrival of the Wife and the announcement that 'They are bringing them now' (the bodies of Bridegroom and Leonardo).

Weaker answers omitted the Wife altogether, had the bodies on stage from the beginning of the extract or omitted the presence of the Little Girl.

Costume designs also revealed insecurity in candidates' understanding of the period and context. The Bride often wore white in these answers and everyone on stage was wearing Flamenco dresses, often in varying stages of disintegration.

Many weaker answers failed to refer to a single line or word of text or they attributed lines to the wrong characters. Many weaker answers also had Moon and Beggar Woman as part of a 'congregation' of mourners that occasionally included the dead men themselves.

In better work, there were some useful and imaginative set designs seen and these were clearly linked to creating a valid interpretation of the section for an audience. Many of these took account of Lorca's own preference for a dazzling white effect 'with no perspective'.

However, some sketches were not very clearly realised and were difficult to follow. Some consisted of theatrical contradictions. Many weaker answers relied upon a myriad of projections – of knives, flowers, blood, trees, crosses, orange blossom alone or in any combination – to create their effects.

Some candidates had chosen to incorporate ideas from Salvador Dali's work, and these were often inappropriately applied. Other misinformed candidates believed that the drama was based on the Spanish Civil War which had not started when Lorca wrote this play.

Unjustified ideas often lacked focus and revealed a lack of understanding of Lorca's text.

Good answers put the piece in context and revealed a secure understanding of Lorca's purpose. Good answers showed a secure understanding of the style of the piece and its potential in performance. A few weaker candidates were prone to assertion, not developing performance ideas likely to achieve their aims.

There were many very muddled and unconvincing readings of the printed extract.

#### **Question 14: *The Good Person of Szechwan***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

As in previous series, many candidates wrote at great length about Brechtian techniques, some devoting about two thirds of their answer to asserting the value of distancing the audience, of making them laugh and/or think, and of ensuring that they knew that they were watching a play.

This only occasionally helped better candidates to interpret the extract and to clarify the political thrust of the play.

Many, many candidates failed to address the substance of the extract at all.

Instead, they drew sketches of the setting; they drew sketches of the costumes; occasionally, they drew sketches of Wang's water bottles or of Sun Yang's pilot hat or jacket. Some even drew sketches of tobacco leaves. It was often difficult to believe that these answers were from A2 candidates.



Better candidates appreciated that this extract explores the hollowness of the gods' 'precepts' in the face of harsh reality/poverty and satirises their refusal to adjust to that reality when the evidence is clear to see. Better candidates also recognised that Shen Teh's adoption of the disguise/persona of Shui Ta is meant to demonstrate the lengths she has to go to in order to survive in a capitalist society.

Many candidates failed to understand the significance of 'Shui Ta' giving Sun a 'second chance'.

As in previous series there was far too much theory here and also far too much 'borrowing' wholesale from the exemplar essay on *The Good Person of Szechwan*, that is part of the Teacher Resource Bank (candidates sign the front cover of their answer books to declare that the work is their own).

This play attracted far too much pre-prepared material that was not shaped to the demands of the extract and that the candidates would probably have trotted out irrespective of which extract was on the paper.

Better answers were original and refreshing in concentrating on directing the specific action and dialogue of the set extract remaining mindful of the need to communicate to the audience the specific political messages embedded in these specific scenes.

#### **Question 15: A View from the Bridge**

Good answers made an immediate start on the substance of the printed extract having offered a clearly labelled sketch giving relevant information to the examiner about the lay-out of the Carbone apartment.

Some weaker answers spent too long on the set design and revealed limited understanding of the Carbone's social milieu. It was not unusual to see references to vases of flowers and bowls full of fruit to make the flat 'homely'.

Some candidates mistakenly set the action of the printed extract in a kitchen with 21<sup>st</sup> century style work surfaces and wall units. A number of candidates had Eddie's rocker facing a large TV.

Examiners also reported seeing very many answers where candidates prefaced their focus on the content of the extract with several pages of unhelpful casting and costume details that contributed virtually nothing to the interpretation of the scene.

Time spent on describing skirts, blouses and shoes would almost always have been better spent uncovering the sub-text to the dialogue.

Some candidates also wasted a great deal of time providing biographical information about Miller and/or background information about the genesis of the play which attracted no credit whatsoever.

Nevertheless, this play is one of the more accessible texts in this section, with a strong story for candidates to get hold of. As a result, this question generated some very strong responses and relatively few very weak ones.

Miller's stage directions guide candidates to see the subtext beneath the dialogue and action and better answers then bring that subtext to the surface for the examiner/audience through subtle directions.

Although the focus of the extract appears to be the boxing 'lesson' that Eddie gives Rodolpho, better answers were able to track the action of the peripheral characters and to reveal the reactions of Beatrice, Marco and Catherine to the sparring between the antagonists Eddie and Rodolpho.

Less clear answers did not achieve such a focus and there were some answers that managed to ignore Beatrice altogether.

Where candidates had spent two or more pages discussing Miller's interest in immigration issues and/or describing Catherine's hairstyle and fashions of the fifties, it was not unusual for them not to reach the climax of the scene and the lifting of the chair.

Examiners saw some exceptionally sensitive answers on this text. However, there were very many candidates who failed to recognise that at the heart of the extract is Eddie's dawning realisation that Marco has seen through his charade.

### **Question 16: *The Trial***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

Unlike *A View from the Bridge*, Berkoff's text does not have a strong 'story' for candidates to 'get hold of' and in fact it was evident that many candidates who had studied this play did not understand it at all.

Some fairly bewildered candidates seem to believe they could do anything they wanted to on stage, irrespective of the substance of the dialogue/action, provided that it was somehow "nightmare-ish". Probably more than in any other question in Section B, candidates were prepared to ignore the dialogue.

Examiners saw scores of answers on this text that did not include a single line of text in support. *Bailiff* and *The Girl* were also frequently omitted.

Good answers set out precise intentions for this scene and then, having put it into context within the action of the play, they took the examiner step by step through the action, explaining and, importantly, justifying their use of different production elements as they went along and bringing out meaning for the audience rather than trying simply to 'confuse them'.

Many helpfully offered diagrams which tried to illustrate some of the more complex movement sequences. This is good practice, provided that the sketches do add something and make clear the form of staging being used and the position of the audience and entrances and exits. This could be true of any Section B answer, of course, but is particularly crucial in this play.

Some candidates struggled to reconcile Kafka's original novel and its roots in existentialist thought with Berkoff's highly physical adaptation and weaker answers spent far too much time theorising and/or tracing the influence of a myriad of practitioners on Steven Berkoff. These, often spurious, references rarely attracted any credit.

Many candidates contented themselves with repeating Berkoff's stage directions with no significant additions or explanations.

Many weaker answers failed to reach the end of the extract.

Many candidates failed to offer an interpretation of any kind.

However, a number of candidates showed a good understanding of Berkoff's style and developed appropriate ideas for the appearance and movement of the chorus. Some answers drew ideas from the filmed evidence of the Tokyo performance. Where ideas were clearly explored/explained this was appropriate and there was some very detailed explanations of the use of frames and of choral movement. Some candidates, however, assumed that it would be sufficient to state that they were following the ideas of the Tokyo production and failed to explain what that had been. The precise mechanics of the creation of a maze of corridors lacked clarity.

**Question 17: *Our Country's Good***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

This was a very popular question and generally a successfully attempted one on this, the most widely studied text at A2.

Examiners reported seeing many very good answers which dealt sensitively and imaginatively with the delivery of text and the creation of rounded characters.

There was some very good direction of Ross, and his confrontational relationship with Ralph was usually very clearly explored, especially where the text was used purposefully to bring the uncomfortable encounter to life.

Campbell was habitually depicted as a drunkard with no other evidence in the text offered for such a reading than his idiosyncratic speech pattern which denotes his general lack of articulation in a play that has much to say about the power of both language and silence.

This significant theme of the play is a central concern of the given extract which sees Liz Morden improvising in the idiom of a lady, Duckling having to accept that, as a maid in Farquhar's play, she has to be a speechless presence and Mary silenced in her eloquent delivery of Farquhar's text by the arrival of the thuggish Ross. Intelligent and word-loving Wisehammer is labelled by the single word, 'Jewish' and the power of Ross's pronouncement; 'Death by hanging' casts its powerful pall over the first rehearsal.

Only the very best answers recognised these unifying factors and recognised the potency of speech and silence in this extract. The majority of candidates utilised the well-worn phrase 'the redemptive power of theatre' to sum up their interpretation of the section and, of these, some understood its application to the scene.

However, weaker answers spent too long discussing set and technical aspects. A significant number of candidates persist in the mistaken belief that the play is set on the ship; others believe that the ship they were transported in was wrecked and the stage is strewn with the detritus of that wreck.

Other candidates provided some useful and clearly labelled sketches.

The main problem students' developed in their answers was a lack of focus on the given extract. Several candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the play as a whole, but lacked focus on the question as set. There was often a great deal of discussion of the Aborigine, despite his lack of appearance in this scene.

A few answers, very unfortunately, answered on the wrong section, having failed to read the question carefully. Similarly, some answers did not fully understand the context of the section and gave misinterpretations of Ralph's relationship with the convicts and Mary in

particular. Good answers highlighted the subtle changes in the relationships with some detail.

Good answers offered a balanced realisation between the rehearsal before and after the entrance of the officers. Others dealt with the first 20 lines only and did not reach Ross' arrival while some did not start their exploration of the section until Ross appears.

Weaker answers offered discussion of Brechtian theory at the expense of exploring the play, and some discussed the political and historical context of the play (frequently inaccurately) with insufficient application to the question. Candidates need to remember that although Wertebaker, in common with many later twentieth century playwrights, is writing in a post-Brechtian context there are significant differences between her style and Brecht's style, not least in her engagement of sympathy for some characters.

As in the last series, some candidates interpreted the hierarchy of officers and convicts by splitting the stage and putting groups of characters on different levels. This is very limiting and is an ineffective directorial strategy.

Good answers recognised that Ralph, Ross and Campbell are still fellow officers and therefore bound by a code of conduct which would not involve Ross spitting in Ralph's face in front of the convicts. A number of candidates chose to depict Ross knocking Ralph to the ground, which was inappropriate. Others also went over-board with the degree of violence inflicted randomly on the convicts at this point in order to reveal "the brutal treatment of the convicts" without recognising that such an approach would weaken the effectiveness of the Second Rehearsal scene.

### **Question 18: *Coram Boy***

Strengths and weaknesses as pages 14 and 15.

A few sound responses were seen on this text showing a good knowledge of the text and of Edmundson's style.

The majority of candidates showed a good sense of the context of the action and identified the importance of the scenes in relation to the play's dominant themes of parenthood and loss.

Weaker scripts showed no awareness of these themes, nor indeed of any other of the themes of the play and their answers were somewhat mechanical and focusless as they described the action without having a specific purpose.

In terms of design, a large percentage of the answers seen set the extract on a revolve. Some of these were successful, but a number were not and the answers suggested a lack of theatrical understanding as to how a revolve functions and how backdrops are used in this situation.

Use of costume was generally well considered and was often more successfully realised than the set design, showing an apt awareness of period setting and establishing characters and their position in society very neatly. Nevertheless, candidates need to appreciate that the purpose of the text is to direct the extract and that if due to time pressures, they have to 'skimp' on an area, it should be on costume rather than on direction of the cast.

The majority of candidates identified similarities between Aaron and Alexander in terms of appearance and mannerisms, and better answers suggested how these similarities might be enhanced through casting the same actors to play these roles.

Some answers spent too much time on Scene Thirteen and did not develop Scene Fourteen to the same degree. This has been the case in previous series where the extract has included a section without dialogue but with very specific stage directions. All of the extract should be considered and imbalance of attention affects the potential achievement of the candidate.

The majority of answers gave a sympathetic and quite detailed realisation of Melissa, and appeared to understand her feelings towards Aaron and the reasons for those feelings. Other candidates seemed not to have appreciated who Aaron actually is and their answers suffered accordingly.

Many candidates also showed a good understanding of Meshak's character, but only the most acute commented on the poignancy and significance of his line, "Mish Da. Mish Ma".

Several answers made useful reference to the use of sound and lighting, particularly for Meshak's panic. Weaker answers offered less detail at this point. Some very weak answers showed only a limited understanding of the style of music or the historical context.

### **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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