



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Drama and Theatre Studies

DRAM4

(Specification 2240)

Unit 4: Presentation of Devised Drama

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

DRAM4: Presentation of Devised Drama

In common with DRAM2, this is also now a well-established examination and, for those teachers who have been teaching the specification since 2009, its requirements are now very familiar.

Please see the AS report for more general comments about the 2012 series and about the administration of the examination/moderation session.

General

At least a month before the examination schools are reminded that form DTSV must be with the moderator so that potential difficulties can be picked up. In many ways this form is easier to complete than the pro-forma designed for DRAM2, but moderators still need to check that the group have chosen one specific performance style and that it is a recognisable one.

Some teachers and, therefore, students persisted in the belief that the task was to nominate a further practitioner rather than a style as the influence on the devised piece and this is clearly something that can only be put right, in advance of the examination, if the form is received by the moderator in plenty of time, and certainly well before the students have started to write their Supporting Notes.

Some of the students would have benefited from more guidance on the challenges presented by their selected styles.

Supporting Notes

Good students were able to communicate their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, their selected style throughout all three sections of the Supporting Notes.

In Section 1, justification of the selected style was clearly linked to the intended audience experience, with close linking also to the intended content. These students then went on to refer to specific moments in specific productions, analysing how key features had worked to create the intended audience impact.

They further explained how they were beginning to use the same features in their own work with detailed precision. Having read a good section, moderators were already aware that the student had actually understood the style in which they were working.

In Section 2, there was a clear sense of process and development as better students explained how they had got from nothing to the final piece via a range of exciting strategies, including script writing techniques. They made purposeful reference to staging and acting decisions that had been taken with purposeful reference to how they had used feedback to develop their work.

Having read this section the moderator should have a clear idea of what the piece is to be like.

Good students addressed all the requirements of Section 3, focussing more on the development of their own skills and assessment of the final piece, from the perspective of the chosen style rather than over-long health and safety.

There were inevitably some sets of notes which did not achieve high marks and a summary of the main problems are listed below:

Section 1

- no justification of chosen style linked to dramatic intentions, just that they were doing it
- no analysis of key features
- no linking of key features to their own work
- reference to everything they had seen rather than plays seen in the specific style
- reference to dance or film
- reference to practitioners rather than live theatre and plays read
- missing lists of plays read and seen.

Section 2

- thinking warm ups are devising strategies
- no explanation of how research had been incorporated in the piece
- no reference to devising strategies at all
- reference to hot seating or improvisation without how these were further developed or informed the piece
- no reference to changes made in light of feedback.

Section 3

- assessment of rehearsals rather than the final product
- no mention of vocal skills if acting
- missing items for non-acting students
- over-long health and safety at the expense of assessment of the piece and own skill.

Presentation of the Devised Work

There was a wide range of success and accomplishment in the presentations. Some excellent work was seen that caught the essence of the chosen styles with skill, sometimes with panache and which resulted in highly disciplined and creative work.

More students appeared to be using theatrical devices and techniques *with full justification and integration*, rather than the use of random songs/movement/projection/mirrors/blood/etc. because they had found techniques to be used in the theatre they had visited.

There has been some stunning work seen by moderators this year performed in a very wide variety of styles. Given that selected styles are informed by what students have seen live, it is hardly surprising that storytelling, creative adaptation and physical styles have been the most popular with features from productions such as *The Wild Bride*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Lovesong* clearly influencing students. There have also been a large number of drama documentaries and political pieces informed by such touring productions as *Pornography* and *Deep Cut*. Where students have fully embraced the techniques and methods of their chosen style the work has been more successful. It is certainly the case that the more a group sees in their chosen style the easier it is for them to draw on a variety of techniques.

Groups seem to have had plenty that they wanted to say to an audience and there were some very passionate pieces about the London Riots, which was probably the most popular subject matter this year. As always there have been many pieces about drugs, prostitution

and the seven deadly sins and sometimes all three in the same piece. Where students had thoroughly researched their content it had obviously helped them in conveying the veracity of their content and message though the spoken word and visual and physical imagery.

Whatever the selected style, features of the best work included a well-structured script with individual scenes also showing shaping and development to an overall climax and possible resolution at the end. These scenes contained linguistic registers that were consonant with the characters uttering the lines and had communicated the social context as well as the character. More political pieces often contained effective dialectic debate as well as posing obvious questions to the audience.

In more physical pieces there was evidence of precisely timed movement sequences and some expert ensemble playing. Those groups which had worked with naturalism did better when they had not tried to tell too much of a story but had created a single extended scene which was in effect a three act play in miniature that explored character relationships.

Inspirational material was taken from Nursery Rhymes, Poetry, Literature, Music, Political Transcript and Social Issues. Sometimes the work took the form of stories, or in some cases, the subversion of stories; others explored states of mind; there were examples of case-studies; also aspects of the human condition; music and song were explored to reflect psychological and social attitudes to events.

Some within this category used the medium of Physical Theatre as a stylistic approach; others explored Realistic paths. Whatever approach was used there were some presentations that revealed imaginative minds, a rigour of selecting material, an excellent control of skills, whether performance or design, and a unity of effort that resulted in excellence.

Some presentations stood out for the excellent integration of style with content and mastery of skills. One, *Old Salt* explored aspects of *The Ancient Mariner* with such incredible invention that it was mesmerising and was supported by a sound design of total appropriateness to the creative demands of the cast and was of a commercial level of reproduction. A political exploration *An Interview with Malcolm X* used legal transcript of Malcolm X and J Edgar Hoover supported by actual video material from crowd responses to the assassination of Malcolm X with such performance skill that the audience was totally absorbed in the reality of the interaction. A Physical Theatre piece *Blurred Vision* explored the music of *Blur* to reveal the causes and consequences of an accident, with very careful editing and physical work of such a demanding nature that, at times, it achieved the quality and skill of Dance. Another piece of Physical Theatre explored the poem *Goblin Market* and revealed the darker side of the poem through some highly inventive ensemble work and a similar work, *The Cradle Will Rock* took a path through the malevolent interpretations of *Nursery Rhymes* and revealed the sinister underbelly of menace, again with precise and disciplined ensemble work.

Although a comic approach was rarely offered, when it was adopted successfully it was often to hilarious effect. One such group had told the story of the Rebecca Riots using a story telling style. Very much a piece of 'rough theatre' they had used old pieces of tatty school scenery inventively to create toll gates and a castle from which the wicked witch (aka the cursed English) poured her scorn and her tea over the down trodden Welsh (both with suitable sustained but exaggerated accents).

At the other end of the scale one group had produced a riveting piece of theatre of cruelty that had been clearly influenced by the recent controversial RSC production of *The Marat Sade* as well as the more violent moments seen in a local piece of site specific theatre.

Some presentations of less successful students revealed a partial ability to control and communicate their material. They contained invention and commitment but experienced difficulty in integrating all the elements of their work into a successful whole. They were uneven in their devising and performance.

Sometimes groups had mentioned key features of their style in their notes but they were not apparent as having been used in performance itself. This was particularly a problem in physical pieces where groups had failed to consider how this style of theatre relies on visual imagery and symbolism and there were some very unexciting uses of costume, lighting and space. Other weaknesses included poor shaping or scripting of their material. There was some weak timing evident in several of these physical pieces.

Many groups had incorporated film as part of the presentation, no matter what the chosen style but in some cases these were of poor quality. Sometimes nothing else was happening on stage and audiences were left just to watch a poorly made film. Sometimes the use of film extended to almost a quarter of the length of the whole piece.

The weakest pieces suffered from very slow and numerous transitions or scene changes which interrupted the pace and continuity of the piece.

Sometimes for good or ill, under-rehearsed pieces were not lit well but performed in the gloom so the audience could not see students' faces properly.

On more than one occasion there seemed to be a uniform 'A2 style' all of its own developing in some schools/colleges where, regardless of the choice of style or content, groups chose to multi-role play (often with little differentiation between the roles), all wearing black and under white lighting with a bit of multimedia thrown in.

There was one particular situation which occurred on several occasions where students had opted to use a promenade or in-the-round approach to their piece which often showed real understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen theatrical form. What had not always been addressed, however was the need for the moderator and the teacher to be able to see every moment of the performance, not to be masked by the presence of other members of the audiences or events happening behind them.

Having said that it was clear at nearly all schools that students had thoroughly enjoyed this aspect of the course and were eager to show what they had done.

Individual Skills

Directing

Very few examples of this skill were seen at this level as many students seem to be unable to recognise the function of a director in devised work. Where there were students they often had a strong vision of how the piece should look and sound on stage; taking the responsibility for media effects, lighting and sound in addition to rehearsals and co-scripting the piece.

Prompt copies with the final script appended is a requirement of this skill in Unit 4, but many of these lacked the detail needed to actually run the 'show'. One can always see where a directing student has had little vision or practical awareness during rehearsals as the end product often is exemplified by poor grouping of actors on stage and over long sequences of repetitive action. Students with a more critical eye tended to address these faults in rehearsal.

Acting

As always this was the most popular skill and the range of ability was very wide.

At their best the students who identified the performance problems facing them and solved these through highly imaginative invention, and communicated the content of their presentation through a mastery of their skills achieved the quality of excellence. This was irrespective of the styles chosen. Their work was masterly and they showed a supreme confidence in the face of complex performance demands. They could demonstrate a range within their acting skills and offer nuanced work that was the product of intelligent interpretation. They were extremely watchable throughout their performances and demanded attention from their audiences without self-advertisement.

Others played intimate scenes fearlessly such as the actors in a piece about the miner's strike, where the scenes between husbands and wives were movingly communicated in a restrained, un-showy and simple style, juxtaposed with scenes of projected violence behind them.

Some acting students just drew the audience's eye to them through a combination of total focus allied to complete embodiment of the role. One such student playing Doreen Lawrence in a piece about the recent trials was able to capture the vocal patterns of the person she was playing as well as the accent and physical dignity and composure, by pacing her monologue with attention given to the thought behind the words. This student proved that often less is more when trying to realise a real person on stage.

Less able students showed varying control of their skills but could not synthesise them into a convincing whole. There were inconsistencies, moments of unevenness, good to partial control of their skills and, in some cases, a restricted commitment to the work. In some there were limitations of vocal delivery; in others there was a lack of precision and finish to the movement or gesture. These aspects limited the conviction of the performances for the audience.

Costume Design

Not many students offer this skill at this level and in some cases it had not been well tackled.

Whilst some students showed reasonable knowledge of the role of the designer in their Notes and could offer information on cutting and construction, the actual creation of the original specific design often revealed problems in the technical execution of the skill. If the costume doesn't fit the actor – it cannot be deemed a success.

Similarly, if a group insist on all wearing the same uniform outfit with just a few symbols sewn onto the costumes it is difficult for the costume designer to show off what they can do.

Those who had set their piece in the past gave the designer more scope and good designers had a 'top to toe' approach with accessories from hats to handbags provided.

In weaker designs, the footwear had not been fully considered which also meant that the relevant actor found it difficult to achieve the required period movement. Other weaknesses included trailing hems, unintentional showing of underwear and seams that split in performance.

Mask Design

Not enough examples of this skill were seen to make meaningful comments.

Set Design

A minority choice at this level, but there were some very good designs seen this year that helped to convey the message of the piece and gave the actors something to work with.

In one physical piece, no doubt inspired by a recent production, the designer had provided a fridge from which an actor emerged to great audience astonishment. In another a simple scaffold tower had been used to represent Satan's descent from heaven.

Some designers had chosen to include projected scenery and where the right equipment was available in the school, such as a deep enough stage for back projections and a cyclorama cloth or transformation gauze, these worked well, as they did not have the actor's shadows interfering with the pictures.

Design students are strongly advised to start work on the construction of their settings early on to allow time for the actors to experiment and explore the potential of the set in the given space and adapt what they do on stage accordingly.

Lighting and Sound

Lighting and sound skills continue to grow in popularity at this level.

Whereas at AS, students focus on one skill rather than the other, at this level the two are often combined. This appears to give technical students more overall control resulting in more seamless demonstrations.

In the hands of excellent students, what they create on stage can really lift the performance of the actors. Some inventive students used smoke and sepia tones to recreate a sense of the past.

They also used side lighting or up lighting to achieve eerie effects on the face or by using colours from the two extremes of the spectrum or complementary colours from two opposite sides they could create some very expressionistic nightmarish atmospheres.

As at AS there were some very evocative soundscapes created and in one piece about the London riots directional sound was used to create the sense of police cars passing by and the sound of rioters coming closer.

Another example of inventive work was designed for a creative adaptation that ran imaginatively through a series of almost surreal episodes exploring the poetry of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. The action called for a modern introduction, nautical battle scenes, storm and seascapes and the ominous circling of the albatross. All these were imaginatively created through orchestral music and sound effects. The mixing of the sounds was extremely well-done and the operation and sound reproduction was of the highest standard. The support that this creativity gave to the actors underlined the collaborative work that must have taken place in order for this excellent performance to have been given.

Weaker students showed little imagination in the positioning, angling and focusing of their lights and sometimes even left areas of the stage completely unlit or had shadows of the lanterns themselves on the backdrop. The use of sound and music was restricted to the playing of well-known tunes at full blast overpowering the spoken dialogue of the actors. Cues were mistimed sometimes to unintentional comic effect such as a telephone ringing after it had been picked up!

On the whole though, these skills were effectively employed by enthusiastic members of the group who saw themselves as valued and important contributors to the overall effectiveness of the piece.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion