



General Certificate of Education

Drama and Theatre Studies 1241

Unit 1B Prescribed Play

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Unit 1B – Prescribed Play

General

Examiners reported seeing responses across the range of texts with the most frequent being *Antigone* and *A Doll's House*, with an increase in popularity over previous sessions of *Taming of the Shrew* and *Oh What a Lovely War*. On the whole it was evident that most candidates had gained at least a reasonable understanding of the plays and were able to communicate their ideas for addressing the demands of the questions in the specified extracts with some degree of confidence. Good responses contained structured and well focused answers which used the text well to support their comments in a coherent and logical manner with, for the most part, all aspects of the questions being interpreted appropriately. Examiners reported that some candidates still failed to address the precise focus or did not read the questions carefully enough to realise precisely where the specified section starts and ends. Where this was the case it inevitably limited the success of the essay. Where candidates recognised and met the focus early on in their response, they were more able to demonstrate in a concise and appropriate manner their ideas for revealing the requirements of the text. Fewer candidates wrote lengthy, generalised introductions which, although revealing some background knowledge to the play, does little to explore the relationship between text and performance. It is important that candidates recognise that, given the time constraints of the examination, what the examiner is looking for is a demonstration of how the specified section can be brought to life through performance, direction or design as appropriate to the question.

Examiners reported fewer instances of period, genre or context not being fully integrated into candidates' responses, although in some cases this still continues to be an issue. Some candidates still open with an introductory paragraph (in some cases extending to over a page) which spells out all the general information about period and genre; this was often particularly notable in answers to *Shadow of a Gunman* and *Oh What a Lovely War* where huge amounts of material about the political state of Ireland or spurious Brechtian detail was included with there being little sense of how this might influence the candidates' final ideas. In some cases candidates did themselves no favours by adopting what appeared to be quite bizarre interpretations of the play. In general it was only the very strongest candidates who were able to manage such approaches, with the acceptable and weaker answers offering no justification for transposing the text to a different period or country, *Antigone* being the most obvious offender. Responses that attempted this approach rarely revealed sufficient understanding of the original context or setting. Some candidates only paid lip-service to period by suggesting, 'I would use the dress of the period' or 'I'd tell the designer to research the period costumes needed'.

What continues to differentiate between strong and weak responses remains the amount of purposeful practical detail, and precise and close reference to the text. Weaker responses tended to rely heavily on description, character sketches or largely irrelevant (to the precise demands of the question) pre-prepared ideas about setting or costume. Strong responses maintained a focus throughout with apposite use of quotations from the text. The use of the text needs to be sufficient to both allow the examiner to locate the moment and also for the candidates to be able to show how their ideas are linked to it; page references and very brief quotations, sometimes no more than a single word, do little to ensure that candidates have understood the moment sufficiently for their ideas to be coherent or developed.

Performance based questions continue to be the most popular, with most candidates able to discuss the characters' role and function within the specified section. However, what really impressed examiners was where the candidate was able to provide a complete synthesis of all performance aspects, vocally, physically and use of prop/costume to address the specific focus

of the question. At their best these answers revealed some truly creative ideas about how characters might be performed, very often in entirely appropriate, though not the generally received, reading of them. This was particularly true for Bianca in *Taming of the Shrew*. Candidates who only selected the briefest of moments to address, and then went into the minutiae of performance without considering the whole picture rarely achieved at the highest level, as these responses frequently lacked coherence and appeared disjointed.

Candidates tackling staging questions sometimes failed to recognise the scope of what they could be expected to include within the answer. The inclusion of a full range of staging demands and possibilities was rarely met, with candidates often only briefly mentioning blocking, the use of set, props and costume, and only passing reference to how lighting or sound might help to reveal their intentions for the specified scene. Examiners reported that in the best answers to these types of questions and those for design, the use of sketches was essential in helping to communicate a full understanding of the candidates' ideas. However, all too frequently, candidates tackling design questions did so without sufficient knowledge or understanding of the necessary design fundamentals, resulting in very disjointed and poorly thought through answers.

Examiners reported a couple of areas of concern which seem to have grown in prominence since previous sessions. Firstly, where candidates attempted to work through the extract taking a line by line approach, this invariably led to an over emphasis on the opening of the extract and meant that they failed to address either character or staging demands sufficiently. Secondly, and this may apply more to candidates re-sitting the module, some candidates adopted a DRAM3 Section B approach, offering everything about the staging of the scene without a clear focus on the question.

As a final point, it is very important that candidates have complete familiarity with their text. Some of the specified sections are quite lengthy, and this requires a degree of selectivity from the candidate. The need to pick the most appropriate moments to include in their response is the key to success – at times candidates appeared to ignore what were often the most potentially dramatic and exciting moments. Similarly, in questions that had a shorter extract, there is an assumption that candidates will be able to work through more of it providing the same level of detail. It was interesting to note that very few candidates appear to plan their work at the start of the examination. However, there did appear to be fewer instances of candidates following pre-determined answers which, however well drilled, rarely lead to a full personally felt response; candidates need to have confidence in their individual interpretations.

Lastly, all examiners reported reading some really engaging and detailed responses that clearly demonstrated a full understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen texts and that maintained a sense of the audience experience at all times.

Antigone

Question 01

This was by far the most popular question on the paper, and examiners reported seeing a range of responses with the vast majority demonstrating some understanding both of the relationship between Antigone and Ismene, and also how to present this for an audience.

There were some very clear casting ideas offered which were well justified with obvious understanding of the text. Many offered very detailed and thoughtful suggestions for casting ideas, considering height, build, skin tone and hair colouring, and the best gave clear reasons for these choices. Some reasons were very sweeping: "she is more innocent so she could not

be over 5'4". Weaker ones offered suggestions for specific actors but did not outline the qualities that they were looking for, whilst some candidates resorted to the usual blonde/brunette contrast. The ages of the sisters caused some problem with some candidates' ideas revealing a lack of understanding of the text. A significant number of answers strayed into a discussion of personality, as though an actor has to have the same personality as the character they are playing. Some interesting answers considered the likely family resemblance, or suggested that they are so different in personality that there should be little resemblance.

Some candidates set the play in an alternative context, e.g. Mugabe's dictatorship, and then referred to this within casting ideas, but on the whole these overall setting ideas were not followed up. Some candidates did transpose the period, with one interesting one being for Tudor England with a Protestant Elizabeth and Catholic Mary as Antigone and Ismene. The idea of setting the play in a parallel universe was less convincing.

Better answers explicitly defined Antigone's and Ismene's relationship throughout the section, from defiant and broken to revealing their sisterly love and reconciliation. There were some very impressive directorial ideas with clear reference to the text throughout, and with most candidates addressing the whole section. However, candidates from some centres provided a stock introduction which inevitably led to a loss of focus, or provided casting details for Creon and the chorus as well as the sisters. Weaker responses also tended to rely on rather repetitive and simplistic direction throughout, for example, eye contact or loss of it. Some included very detailed sketches of Greek theatres and then did not refer to them at all. The inclusion of arrow diagrams indicating where characters are entering from or moving to can sometimes help to clarify a candidate's ideas.

Many candidates failed to consider the whole stage picture with there being a distinct absence of guards on stage. Whether this was due to the chosen text or artistic licence was unclear. However, physical detail on movement and gesture was used to show the relationship effectively, and most candidates did engage with text to support ideas, although the stichomythic exchanges were underdeveloped or ignored in favour of other more accessible aspects of the scene. Many answers concentrated on Ismene rather than Antigone but the influences on their relationship and their responses to each other were explored in great detail, and with perception as well as practical suggestions by many candidates. In some the response was too general, and the main weakness was to simply plot the progress of the scene rather than address the 'relationship' it revealed. Some spent time discussing the section before Ismene enters, and others discussed Creon's part in the scene in as much detail as that of the sisters.

Question 02

Few candidates attempted this question, and examiners reported that those that did produced polarised responses being either very good or rather limited. The best provided excellent sketches with clear indications of the design fundamentals relevant to the three specified areas, plus the significance and application of these. Although many answers contained references to 'Greek scenery' the detail was often lacking, whilst others had obviously thought through the whole process and suggested effects such as pillars which had blood running down them, even mentioning the need to provide drains for the blood to run into. Sound effects used during Tiresias's speech were effective, powerful and often practical, though not always (the need for actors to speak at the same time as these 'ever louder' or 'deafening' sound effects was rarely addressed). Lighting was, on the whole, the weakest element, with an oversimplified use of red and purple washes being the most popular choices. There was little indication of angles, intensity, choice of lantern or other potential variations. Some answers were very weak, suggesting the candidate was unprepared for discussing the technical aspects. Few thought to

include a sketch, and many failed to make sufficient precise references to the text when considering cues and changes, rendering the answers rather generalised.

Taming of the Shrew

Question 03

Examiners reported seeing some very good responses to this question, which was by far the more popular of the two with the best ones clearly identifying a comic style and revealing a good understanding of Bianca's character. Candidates wrote with confidence about the role in relation to both scenes, and audience response was generally covered well. Some sophisticated answers recognised a suitably ambiguous portrayal, with some sensitive performance ideas offered.

The first of the two scenes was very well answered by most candidates with the majority of candidates identifying Bianca as being manipulative, and wanting the audience to dislike her, whilst a comparatively small number portrayed her as being a sweet and innocent victim. Most were able to offer some performance ideas as to how these intentions would be achieved, although some ignored the fact that her hands are tied, and others created a scene of such a violent nature that it was inappropriate. The fact that this is a comedy was not allowed to affect the nature of the scene between the sisters, and the words "violence" and even "torture" were used with little awareness of the effect of the scene in context. However, a very imaginative and physical cat fight was described in some cases, although trying to fit the text to the actions was often a little weak. There were many good ideas for Bianca to pull faces or poke her tongue out behind Baptista's back, because there were many who interpreted her as a very feisty character, similar to Katharina but cleverer about hiding it. Some suggested she was one of the reasons Katharina is as she is. Others saw her as the innocent, perfect, "goody two shoes".

The second scene was far less precise in its application, with many answers suggesting a serious lack of understanding of the actual content of the scene, who was who, who was in disguise, and what the text actually meant. There were many inventive and appropriate ideas for Bianca herself, involving lollipops, pigtailed and even schoolgirl outfits. These were acceptable if the candidate had suggested a transposed time setting, but many were preceded by a general paragraph about the role of women in 16th Century which all too often had them marked down as being nothing more than an underdog (with only one or two of the strongest answers recognising that this was not always the case). Many candidates failed to consider the section in enough detail, giving little more than a generalised account of Bianca's flirtatious nature. There was some humour in the way she reacts and uses both men, and her exit was occasionally well and firmly addressed. However, the lack of detail in this section led to some very uneven responses.

Perhaps the most unfortunate tendency among candidates which limited their mark was the lack of real explanation of audience response. Whilst only a few did not mention an audience at all, many others talked about what the audience would see, rather than how they would react to the suggestions made.

Question 04

There were very few responses to this question. Of those candidates that did attempt it many found it difficult to clearly identify their preferred effects, and answers tended towards rather generalised accounts of the action of the scene described in largely narrative terms.

There were however some good answers that clearly explained how comedy could be created from the mistaken identities and from the rapid entrances and exits. Some candidates offered detailed descriptions of the set, and explained clearly how it could be used by the characters at various key points during the scene. Weaker responses offered little sense of where the actors were on stage or how Vincentio and the Pedant might be separated. Some suggested a window might be flown in but then gave no clue as to how the Pedant might be behind it.

Most candidates suggested some performance ideas and showed some understanding of the text, making at least some reference to it. Stronger responses revealed that candidates had clearly worked through the scene and had precise ideas for a coherent realisation of it. There were a couple of imaginative ideas offered for Biondello's beating, but few candidates mentioned Katherina and Petruchio's kiss.

A Doll's House

Question 05

A Doll's House continues to be a popular text but this question was the less attempted of the two. For the most part there was a good understanding of Mrs Linde, with the majority of candidates at least attempting to address the matter of 'her new sense of purpose in life'. Most candidates were able to define this as her love for Krogstad and her desire for a happy life – few candidates developed the idea of her belief that Torvald should be brought to the truth, but most answers did reveal some sensitive understanding of the text, its period and the issues raised. Stronger responses revealed the candidates' understanding of the style through some very detailed and highly appropriate subtle performance ideas that really demonstrated the emotional journey that Mrs Linde undertakes during this act. Weaker responses digressed into a discussion of Stanislavskian techniques which were particularly inappropriate where they focussed entirely on rehearsal techniques. Some candidates' understanding of the mores of the time were somewhat lacking with Mrs Linde either throwing herself at Krogstad or batting her eyelashes in a way that would be more appropriate for a Mills and Boon novel!

Where there was careful use of the text, stronger answers revealed an understanding of the role, and exemplified this through a considered and practical view of the scene as the interaction with Krogstad unfolded. This was quite a lengthy section, and some candidates spent too long on the opening of it at the expense of getting to the end. A comparatively large number did not get to her exit and thereby omitted the section with Nora and Torvald. Where they did, stronger candidates were able to offer developed vocal and physical performance details which contrasted strongly with those offered at the start of the section. Weaker answers failed to sufficiently recognise that her behaviour changes during the scene, or described a very nervous woman who was so worried about seeing Krogstad that there was never any sense of her finding a new purpose.

On the whole though, examiners reported some good detailed responses to this question which revealed an understanding of Ibsen's naturalism not least through some precise and useful ideas relating to Mrs Linde's appearance in contrast to that of earlier on in the play.

Question 06

This was a very popular question and, for the most part, examiners reported that it evoked some very good answers, exploring the implications of both sections and managing to cover a considerable amount of material. However, there were also many that were uneven responses or that selected the wrong section at the end of the play. Some candidates included extended casting and costumes ideas which lacked direct focus on the question and meant that they had insufficient time to cover the detail of direction that was required.

Some candidates took too long establishing Nora's character on stage before Torvald's first line, which was frustrating given the long sections of text that there was to cover. However, most candidates displayed a good understanding of the nature of the interaction, purposefully using the text and often showing some subtle points of direction; most took an antipathetic view of Torvald, while a more sympathetic view of Nora was often related to a sense of the role of women at the time.

The focus of the question, the change in Nora and Torvald's relationship, was addressed in almost all answers. Some considered the full significance of the opening section with careful reference to the background circumstances. Unfortunately, many, if not most, answers did not discuss the facts which are not revealed until later in the play, but which are certainly known to Nora at this point; she is not simply wanting more and more money, she is wanting money to pay off the debt. Information such as this should inform a performance, even if it is only to acknowledge that Nora is putting on such a good 'act' that the audience should be deceived as well as Torvald. Where candidates did manage to explain this through Nora's performance and Torvald's responses, they revealed some excellent subtlety which was entirely appropriate for the naturalistic style of the play.

The analysis of Act 2 tended to be more descriptive focusing on Nora's new attitude, her change of costume, and Torvald's despair, and, unfortunately, some candidates who had started with a very practical approach to Act 1 resorted to a much more literary one in Act 3. Once again, weaker responses included numerous largely irrelevant reference to Stanislavskian theory. Some candidates were diverted to some extent by detailed considerations about set, costume and lighting which did not necessarily advance the particular focus of direction needed for this question. On the whole, this section was less well handled, maybe because of pressure of time, although there were some excellent suggestions for positioning on stage and use of particular chairs and levels, which were intended to highlight the role reversal. Overall though, examiners reported that candidates did reveal quite a clear understanding and awareness of how the relationship had changed and why. Very few candidates considered the door slam, which, considering its position in theatrical iconography, was a shame.

The Shadow of a Gunman

Question 07

This was a reasonably popular question but *Shadow of a Gunman* appears to be the chief example of a text where candidates are inclined to give a sometimes long and pre-prepared introduction to the nature and style of the play, its setting, its purpose, its author and a summary of Irish politics at the time. While some of this is pertinent to a sense of period and genre, the stand alone quality of the comments rarely aided the focus of the response. Many candidates would then further develop this approach by giving a comprehensive character study and casting pointers for both Donal and Seumas. As a result of this, many candidates left themselves insufficient time to meet the precise demands of the question.

There was, however, a reasonable understanding revealed in many of the answers, and some apt directorial points were made. A few responses plotted their way through the whole interaction making judicious commentary on how the humour, pacing and irony revealed the nature of their relationship, although at times these became very literary; many candidates spent a lot of time on a few lines but ignored whole sections and even more importantly failed to link their ideas to addressing the 'interpretation of their relationship'. A wide range of relationships was suggested, sometimes very well and meticulously supported, but most defined an emotion at a particular moment without taking an overview; when one was attempted, the interpretation was often disjointed and even, in many cases, contradictory. Most candidates defined it as argumentative and tense whilst some were aware of the way in which the banter could reveal a good natured relationship. Irritation featured highly with much sighing and rolling of eyes! Although many candidates recognised the tragic-comic nature of the play, few were able to suggest how this comedy might be created for an audience.

Quite a number of candidates did not manage their time well here and spent far too long on just the first section of text. Many did not get to the end, and it was only the most sophisticated responses that really understood and demonstrated the ambiguous style and interpretation of character. Many candidates saw the two men in very contemporary and caricatured terms sometimes seeing Donal as a dashing and romantic rogue poet and Seamus as little more than an Irish idiot and even bigot.

Question 08

This was one of the least popular choices of question on the paper with examiners reporting marking very few. Most responses did not go beyond listing what was mentioned in the stage directions. The volume, use of directional sound, live or recorded, even the voices heard off were rarely explored in any detail and with sufficient (or even any) awareness of the way in which the sound effects might be created. In the majority of responses marked it felt as though it was the first time that the candidate had considered how the sound would be created.

There were also one or two cases which, although demonstrating brilliant technical know how, considered all requirements for equipment, accessing the right kind of effects, the need to fade in certain sounds, the consideration of how the actors would be heard when speaking over the sound, but unfortunately failed to consider the words 'mood' and 'atmosphere' in the question. Some candidates suggested the use of pyrotechnics which was encouraging; one claimed he would create the sound of the explosion with a macaroon! The other chief problem with responses to this question was the lack of really precise use of text, thus rendering the answers quite generalised.

Oh What a Lovely War

Question 09

Responses to this text were divided equally between the two questions with candidates attempting this one generally achieving slightly better. Some of these answers were precise and practical, addressing the two scenes with understanding and directing them in an acceptable and workable manner.

Most candidates had studied the style of this text in some detail making reference to Joan Littlewood and The Theatre Workshop, as well as to Brecht, and the music hall style. At times the viewing of the play in Brechtian terms was rather broad and not precisely explained nor followed through in the analysis with comments about the fourth wall being broken and

distancing, thereby creating confusion rather than aiding the responses. Stronger candidates were able to explore the style, and link this effectively with set and staging ideas, and were able to incorporate creative suggestions in terms of an ensemble approach. Effects were almost entirely focused on the futility of war.

The Irish scene was approached in a selective fashion, with the soldiers' arrival, their reaction to shots and the death of Sergeant being the main areas of comment. There was some imaginative staging, often creatively using the whole of the auditorium though the entertaining aspect of the 'jig' was usually stated rather than illustrated. There were some very effective ends to the scene and very good transitions with the use of spotlights on the Sergeant, echoing from the dead Irish, and one answer which had a very good idea for how the dead Irish soldiers might stand, be given a coat, and quite seamlessly become the crowd listening to Mrs Pankhurst. There were also, however, many instances where the section was inappropriately dealt with, with several candidates hardly seeming to understand what was happening to the soldiers and many missing the opportunity to discuss the scene's black humour.

The Mrs Pankhurst scene was less successful in its execution. Although most candidates seemed well aware of who she was, the actual staging of the scene was usually quite weak, with little recognition of how the actors playing the crowd would be used and, apart from a brief reference to RP, and an accent, little real directorial material related to her performance. Raising her above others was a popular idea; she was usually said to be on some kind of platform, but very rarely was there any indication of how this was brought on or by whom. It seemed unlikely that she should bring it on herself, as a couple suggested, but at least this was addressing the problem. There was also some confusion as to her function – many casting her as a negative character who was dismissing the deaths of the soldiers rather than putting the other side of the argument, thus revealing rather limited understanding of the text. There was limited exploration of her vocal delivery, suggesting that many candidates found this scene difficult to understand.

With a staging question, candidates had the opportunity of using a range of theatrical ideas to communicate their intended effects and, whilst most mentioned costume (not always accurately) and some blocking, there was little sense of the wider staging requirements of the section. This inevitably hampered candidates' ability to communicate clearly. Where candidates had included a sketch, particularly one which developed their ideas for the transition between sections, this was particularly helpful.

Question 10

There were many good answers on the MC seen, suggesting real understanding of the special demands the role presents. Some were a little confused at the beginning because the initial references to him in the stage directions were not recognised, but there were inventive suggestions for him joining in the song, sitting in the audience and using new jokes. A few candidates with a real understanding of a stand-up comedian suggested including the names of local places in the joke section because 'that always goes well with an audience'. Some addressed how the jokes needed to be delivered, whether original or new, and showed real understanding of timing and how to play an audience. Most candidates began strongly, making purposeful use of how the audience might be seated, the comic method of direct address, the capacity for ad-libs and anecdotal delivery, and the brisk paced and commanding interaction with other members of the ensemble.

Audience response was generally quite well addressed and usually focused on general amusement and laughter; better candidates made sharper observations related to both style of

production and to the potential for a thoughtful or irritated response in terms of the potential of the MC to be both charming and biting in his delivery.

Most candidates showed a good understanding of the style and context of the piece and the MC's role within it. He was often described as the ring leader, circus master and controller of the opening scene. This allowed for some further commentary on the style and purpose of the play in production. Many described his costume of red tail coat and whip which was used to good effect hurrying the actors on and off stage

The disappointing aspect of the responses was the lack of real discrimination and pertinent analysis on the core of the section regarding his management of the War Game. In nearly every case, there was a very generalised and descriptive account, but new and inventive performance suggestions were lacking. This was a shame as this section would have tested candidates' understanding and appreciation of the political and satirical nature of the role. The focus tended to be on the MC as a comedian and his relationship with the audience and, although this was quite well achieved with reference to eye contact, vocal delivery and moving through the auditorium, the real sense of developing tension was often missing from the portrayal.

Playhouse Creatures

Question 11

This text was not popular with centres in this session, perhaps largely due to the constraints it places for DRAM2 and therefore there were not many responses seen to this question, although of the two it was the more popular, and examiners did report seeing some very good responses.

Those who did attempt it showed a better understanding of 'common' Nell at the start with some useful and detailed performance suggestions for realising her vulgarity and her attempts to instruct Mrs Farley, and most candidates were able to recognise the comic potential of her being duped. Here practical detail was lively with gesture and guttural language and delivery which helped to portray Nell and her attitude to those off stage.

Whilst candidates clearly recognised that her character has changed by the end of the play and that she is more pensive and fearful, the ideas for revealing this in performance were less well developed. Most candidates indicated a change in vocal tone and body language showing a more refined Nell. Her pride in her success, her embarrassment at stopping the lessons, and her nervousness of the future were reasonably well handled in a practical way. The more subtle answers gave her more depth than simply being arrogant about her success. However, many examiners reported a lot of missed opportunities when tackling this scene.

Overall there seemed to be less confidence with this text but also fewer pre-prepared statements about the theatrical and political intent behind De Angelis' writing.

Question 12

This was the other least attempted question on the paper with very few candidates choosing it. Those that did attempt it generally did reasonably well offering some appropriate ideas for the staging of the two scenes.

Preferred effects were generally included with the most common being shock at Mrs Marshall's appearance and amusement at Nell's 'performance' on stage. Most candidates made some

decisions about the staging form although some failed to fully explain how the transition from on-stage to the Tiring Room would be effectively achieved.

All candidates had some awareness of the roles and functions of each of the characters, and there was some reference to the interaction between them, but the approach was essentially narrative driven. Generally any understanding of the heightened performance style of Restoration acting was not exploited sufficiently well to allow the candidates to develop the potential of the first scene.

The second scene was covered in a little more detail, and there were some ideas for blocking the actors and some sense of where Mrs Marshall should enter from in order to create maximum impact for the audience, with some apt use of text and some casting details which did help to inform the response.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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