



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Drama 42401

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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GCSE DRAMA 42401

As this is the first year of the new style written exam, it would be reasonable to assume that candidates would experience some difficulties, but it is a credit to their teachers that most candidates were well prepared and answered questions with enthusiasm and a good level of specialist knowledge. Examiners reported that they saw the complete range of achievement, with a pleasing number of excellent scripts submitted. The format of this new GCSE Drama written paper required candidates to answer two questions split into a total of six parts. Most candidates coped well with the time management that this required, along with the reduction in the total time allowed to sit the paper of one and a half hours. The paper appeared to offer good opportunities for candidates of all abilities to be able to respond effectively to their chosen questions.

Most candidates followed the new rubric which required them to answer four discrete parts in question 1 in Section A and one further question chosen from Section B or C, which was divided into two discrete parts. A small minority of candidates failed to respond correctly to the rubric of the paper by either answering all parts of Section A in continuous prose or by responding to questions in all three sections of the paper.

Sketches and diagrams are to be encouraged if they illuminate clearly a point made in the written response, but these should not replace the written response and they should retain a focus on the question asked.

Some candidates disadvantaged themselves in Section B by writing about devised work, which is inadmissible, rather than the study and performance of a scripted play or by writing about the same performance of a scripted play in Sections A and B. These errors could be attributed to exam nerves but where whole centres made this mistake, it seems likely to have been the teacher's misunderstanding of the demands of the paper.

Section A

General

This Section is compulsory and allows candidates to write about either scripted or devised work performed during the course and its focus is on the skill selected by the candidate. The question requires that candidates identify their skill as 'actor, designer or technician' and for their choice of skill to be consistently applied to the four individual questions in Section A. The chosen skill is the one that they have undertaken during the practical part of the course. A significant number of candidates identified their skill as 'actor' in 01 but subsequently identified different skills in 02, for example directing (not a practical option in this exam), or dance, or singing, or switched to a technical or design skill area.

Candidates should select one of the approved skills of acting, designing or technical work for Section A and be prepared to write in detail about how they prepared for the piece, developed their selected skill and applied their selected skill, both in rehearsal and performance, in order to address the specific demands of each of the questions in Section A.

Question 1

01 This question demands a description of the piece and allowed candidates to give a clear context for the other questions in Section A. It was most pleasing to reward the many who answered all parts of this question in clear statements; thus gaining full marks. This is not a place for a long, detailed justification for the work undertaken. Weaker answers included too much detail about the piece at the expense of dealing with the other requirements of the question.

Examiners were pleased to credit responses where the candidates wrote enthusiastically about a piece of work for which they had a real sense of ownership. Excellent responses were received in both scripted and unscripted work, and across all skills. The better responses gave a very clear, pithy description of the piece, clearly stating the period, style and genre, performance space, target audience and the candidates own contributory skill.

02 This question demanded an explanation of how the candidate applied their chosen skill to a specific aspect of the piece. Where candidates focused on their skill identified in 01, excellent responses often followed, but too many candidates failed to make this connection, limiting the effectiveness of their response.

Where candidates understood that the focus of Section A is on the application of their nominated skill within the preparation and performance of a piece of drama, their answers were well directed and detailed. These candidates wrote with confidence about their creation of a role and the skills involved in either devising a character or interpreting a character from a script. Actors explained how they had applied their skills in terms of facial expression, physical skills and/or vocal technique; while designers considered their mastery of individual aspects of their nominated skill, for example, in terms of choice of lantern and/or experimentation with angle and intensity. One very good response focused on make-up and explained very clearly how it was applied and the impact it had on the performance. Another good response on stage management, detailed 'get in', 'get out', preparation of a props table, call sheet, rehearsal scheduling, health and safety issues and cooperation with Front of House.

03 This question demanded an analysis of a specific aspect of the piece. This question was often answered well, with almost every candidate able to identify a moment in the rehearsal process where improvements were made, whether it was an issue involving simple blocking matters or the audibility of the actors. Some candidates wrote purposefully about addressing a difficulty in staging a scene that contained many characters. Others focused on technical aspects such as recognising the need for an atmospheric sound track or lighting state and providing the necessary technical support. Only the very weakest answers failed to suggest a suitable improvement made.

The second part of this question required that candidates 'refer to at least one specific occasion where you developed your own skill' and this demand was met well by candidates who continued to write about their nominated skill and who had reflected on the process that they had gone through from 'page to stage' or from 'idea to realisation'. They wrote persuasively about mastering an accent or a physical theatre approach to a sequence within the piece. At the lower end of achievement candidates wrote about how their lines were learned, although some candidates omitted to write about their own skill altogether.

04 This question demanded an evaluation of a specific aspect of the piece. Some excellent responses were submitted that generated enthusiasm for the work that the candidate had contributed, with very clear examples of specific moments, either from the preparation or the performance stage, where candidates developed their nominated skill. Some candidates ignored the word 'your' and wrote indiscriminately about the whole piece on stage or in rehearsal and the contributions of the other group members. Weaker answers contained no reference at all to the contribution of the individual candidate.

The best candidates chose two or three moments from the production and evaluated the application of their skills in those moments. Many good answers contained quotations from the specified scenes and detailed reference to how these lines were delivered or how a costume had made a particular impact on entrance or how some gory make-up had shocked or scared the

audience at particular moments. Successful candidates first outlined what the intention of the piece had been and then evaluated whether the effect had been achieved.

Section B

General

This is an exciting opportunity for teachers to teach the texts for which they have personal enthusiasm. There are no prescribed set texts in this new Drama specification and there is a requirement that at least part of the play has been performed by the candidates. It was noticeable how secure a number of the candidates were with the scenes that they had performed, freely quoting lines in support of a specific point in their response. Answers in Section B must be based on a scripted play. It was noticeable, and understandable, that a majority of centres stayed with previous set texts such as *Blue Remembered Hills*, *The Crucible* or *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, but there were also other popular scripts referred to in the responses such as *Abigail's Party*, *Coram Boy*, John Godber's *Bouncers* and *Teechers*, and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Question 2

05 Candidates responded well to this question. They appreciated that there were two parts to the question; an explanation of the preparation of the role and an explanation of how the role was interpreted during the process. This dual focus was sometimes missed by candidates who wrote either about the preparation process in terms of research into period and/or accent or location, off-text improvisation or about how they used their acting skills - their voice, facial expressions and movement - to interpret the role. Both these aspects of the preparation work were required.

There were some very lively answers where candidates identified the role they were playing, explained how they came to an understanding of the role and then explained how they used their skills to create a three dimensional interpretation of it, as appropriate to the style of the play. These candidates invariably quoted from the text to support their own interpretation.

Weaker answers sometimes failed to identify either the role or the play that had been studied or the candidates merely outlined how they had actually played the part, with no reference to research or the rehearsal process. Some responses were self limiting because the candidate had only a minor role.

06 This question required an analysis of the candidate's personal success with reference to moments from the performance in support of their answer. Candidates either chose different moments from the extract to illustrate their performance or they amplified points already made in 05 and included careful analysis of the effects of their performance. Good answers were enlivened by quotations from the play to illustrate how lines were delivered or how characters interacted or how a monologue affected the audience. Weaknesses identified included the loss of lines, blocking, forgetting props, missing cues, losing concentration, coming out of character, poor physicality or poor projection. Some of the strengths identified included being a committed member of the ensemble, sustaining a role, projecting both voice and role, interacting with others on stage and engaging the audience.

Weaker answers either re-stated information given in 05 with the occasional assertion that it had been very successful or included little detail about particular moments from the performance. Other weak responses included discussion on the work of other members of the group rather than candidates analysing their own performances.

Question 3

07 This question required a focus on the preparation of a design or technical skill in relation to a set text. Few candidates attempted this question and unfortunately some candidates attempted this question with little or no experience of the skill to which they were referring and therefore did not have the technical experience or vocabulary to write a good response to this question. This question is, however, an exciting opportunity for students choosing a design or technical skill.

08 This is a question that required an analysis of personal success in an area of design or technical work identified in 07. Few responses were experienced this summer and candidates who had not actually pursued work as a designer or technician under-performed.

Section C

General

This was a popular section and some of the most popular productions seen by candidates included *Blood Brothers*, *Woman in Black* and *War Horse*. Other productions discussed included *39 Steps*, *Wicked* and *Billy Elliott*. A few candidates wrote responses on work performed by classmates, which was self limiting, but some very good responses focused on a school production, where the candidates sustained a very clear focus on the skills displayed. In Question 5 (11 and 12) some candidates failed to identify **one** area of design, as stipulated by the question, but wrote instead about all areas of design.

Question 4

09 This was a very popular question and many excellent answers were seen where candidates selected an individual actor for attention and wrote purposefully about that actor's use of skills to create comedy and/or tension in at least one scene or section from the production. Candidates who described in detail the work of a chosen actor and who supported their answers with precise reference to the actor's use of voice, movement and facial expression to create comedy or tension achieved high marks.

The most frequent error made by candidates was to fail to spot this need to focus on comedy and/or tension and this resulted in some unfocused responses where candidates wrote, sometimes very well, on how the actor had engaged the audience, but not on how they had created comedy or how their skills had contributed to the creation of tension within the chosen extract.

Occasionally candidates suffered from having over prepared one particular moment of the play that they were going to use irrespective of the question asked of them and although the candidate offered a high level of detail, they failed to answer the particular question asked with any great effectiveness.

Some of the more mediocre responses concentrated on a particular role and focused on what the character did, rather than how the actor performed the role. Some candidates did not nominate a single actor but wrote generally about the cast of the chosen production or wrote about a pair of actors. For example the characters of Eddie and Mickey from *Blood Brothers* made frequent appearances as a double act, but only the work on one or other of this pair could be credited. The question required a candidate to choose one actor only who created comedy and/or tension, so in this case examiners had to concentrate on the actor that the candidate had dealt with more successfully.

10 This question required that candidates evaluate the effectiveness of the actor in creating comedy and/or tension. Good answers relating to both comedy and tension focused on Mickey in *Blood Brothers*. *The Woman in Black* was a rich source of material for those candidates who wrote about tension whereas *Billy Liar* was frequently selected to exemplify comedy. Good answers were enlivened by quotation from the production to illustrate how a line was delivered in performance to achieve comedy or how, in the case, for example, of The Narrator in *Blood Brothers*, a monologue affected the audience in a comical or tense way. One candidate focused on a pantomime dame, writing very clearly about how the comedy had been created through the use of double entendres, pause, repetition and slapstick.

Weak responses were purely a narrative retelling of the plot or merely descriptions of the action on stage, without any evaluation.

Question 5

11 A significant number of candidates chose to answer this question on the use of design/technical skills. The choice of production was crucial here as the question demands that the skills described 'made an important contribution to the atmosphere or style of the production' and popular productions chosen were *War Horse* and *Woman in Black*; both of which were often excellent vehicles for good candidate responses.

When one technical or design skill area was selected, candidates often wrote good responses. However good answers were also seen on the mounting tension that is created in *Woman in Black*, as Kipps approaches the dangerous-looking glowing doorknob to the accompaniment of a quickening heartbeat. Here the joint skills of lighting and sound can be accepted as one area of design or technical skill, where the effect is so closely inter-related.

Other good responses referred to the use of projection in *War Horse*, although there was a surprising lack of detailed attention to the design specifics of puppetry in the work of candidates who chose to write about the puppets in this production.

Lighting was a very popular skill option and some of these responses were very good indeed with an excellent awareness of lighting intensity, the use of different lights, gobos, chasers, follow spot, colours and blackout. The candidates who impressed most were those who were fully focused on the demands of the question and considered either atmosphere or style with careful attention to the chosen skill being applied in production.

12 This question required candidates to evaluate the success of the selected area of design or technical skill. Good candidates selected different moments from the chosen production to illustrate the contribution made by design/technical skills to the atmosphere or style of the production or they amplified the points already made, with a further layer of detail and included careful evaluation of the success of the skill in achieving the required effects.

This question asked for 'at least one scene or section' and this gave the candidates the opportunity to look at a different part of the play in question 12 from the one selected in question 11.

Only those candidates with more than a passing knowledge and understanding of the chosen area of design/technical skill were able to deliver a highly successful evaluation and there were many very good answers seen.

This question offers an opportunity, or even a requirement, for illustrative sketches and diagrams to accompany these responses to further exemplify some of the points being made.