



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Drama

42401

(Specification 4240)

Unit 1: Drama Written Paper

Report on the Examination

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GCSE DRAMA 42401

In this, the first certification year of this exam specification, the dominant reaction from examiners is to report how well prepared in general the candidates were for the written exam; a credit to the teachers who prepared them. There was evidence that centres have embraced the opportunity to explore exciting, creative performance work from a satisfyingly practical perspective. Examiners saw a complete range of achievement, with a pleasing number of excellent scripts. The paper offered opportunities for all candidates to be able to respond effectively to their chosen questions with most candidates coping well with the time management necessary to answer the required six questions.

Students had been exposed to a wide variety of texts including *The Caretaker*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *Once A Catholic*, *My Mother Said*, *Our Day Out*, *Sparkleshark*, *Birdsong*, *Ghost Stories*, *Mother Figure*, *Top Girls*, *Woman Alone*, and a fine range of Shakespeare plays, while previous favourites *The Crucible*, *Blood Brothers*, *Blue Remembered Hills*, *Woman in Black*, *Billy Liar*, *War Horse* and *39 Steps* are still popular. There was also clear evidence of some very successful devised, improvised and Theatre in Education projects which candidates enjoyed discussing in Section A.

Some students very clearly demonstrated that they understood their material and were able to use it purposefully. A very small minority disadvantaged themselves by not answering the questions individually, submitting instead a single essay in continuous prose, to the four questions in Section A or the two in Section B or Section C.

Section A

General

This compulsory Section is focused upon a single piece of practical drama and the same identified skill across the four questions asked. This piece should be one performed during the course and could be scripted, improvised or devised work. The skill should be one for which they have been recognised during the course, as either actor, designer or technician. It is not appropriate for the students to consider multiple skills here as the question asks for a response from one perspective. Candidates need to be prepared to write in detail about how they prepared for the piece, how they developed their selected skill and how they applied it, both in rehearsal and performance. They need to be aware that they will have to shape their material in order to address the specific demands of each of the questions in this Section. Questions 02, 03 and 04 will vary from year to year. Teachers are encouraged to carefully consider the relevant section in the specification (page 7 section 3.1).

Question 01

This question does not require lengthy justification of the work undertaken. It requires a description and context with regard to specific aspects of the piece itself, period, style/genre, target audience, performance space and personal contribution. The marking of this question is related to the clarity of response, so full marks were awarded to those candidates who responded clearly to the question. Weaker answers were either very brief or contained far too much detail about what their piece was about at the expense of the other identified aspects. The best answers took each element of the question in turn, gave brief details and moved on to the next element. It is worth ensuring that candidates know in which style and genre they have been working.

Question 02

This question demanded an explanation as to how the candidate developed their creative ideas for their chosen skill, with at least one example, to prepare for performance. Where candidates understood that the focus of Section A is on the application of their nominated skill within the preparation of a piece of drama, answers were well directed and often detailed. Some candidates were disadvantaged by focusing on group preparation techniques rather than their own personal work. Many students gave good details of preparation work with reference to a range of rehearsal techniques such as hot seating, role on the wall, off text improvisation. However identifying these techniques alone is not enough; there needed to be some indication as to what was discovered as a result and how the techniques were applied to the specific role played or contribution made within the piece.

Question 03

Successful candidates wrote purposefully about addressing a difficulty in staging a scene that required precise timing or synchronisation. Others focused on technical aspects such as recognising the need for an atmospheric sound track or lighting state, and providing the necessary technical support. These successful responses were characterised by a consistent focus on the question which concerned teamwork in the later stages of rehearsal. A number of candidates became fixated upon personality conflicts, attendance, early suggestions or a list of rejected ideas. There were some good examples of group exercises devised to animate a moment of the piece, but as with the last question, merely listing techniques, without specific application to the work, does not bring much clarity to the work done. In the least successful cases the writing could have referred to any piece of practical work and concentrated upon generic aspects like line learning and commitment, with no specific references to the piece under discussion.

Question 04

This question demanded an evaluation of how far candidates had achieved their personal aims in the final performance. Some fine responses made specific reference to 'personal aims' and then made clear reference to 'particular moments' to justify how these aims were met or not. Weaker candidates were rather vague and general in their analysis or ignored the question entirely, merely reviewing the final performance in very general terms with little reference to particular moments. A few candidates merely told the story of the work, lacking any sense of evaluation apart from a statement that it was 'good' or 'brilliant'. The best candidates chose two or three moments from the production and evaluated their achievement of their aims in those moments. Many good answers contained quotations from the scenes they were considering and referred in detail to how these lines were delivered or how a lighting effect had made a particular impact or how some ghostly music had enhanced their performance to shock or scare the audience at particular moments.

Section B

General

This Section allows teachers to select the texts to study with their students. It was apparent that some adventurous, exciting scripts had been studied in some centres, where the students clearly responded to the enthusiasm of their teachers. However it was not surprising that a number of centres stayed with previous set texts like *Blue Remembered Hills*, *Crucible* and *Billy Liar*. The key to student success was clearly related to the careful matching of the

group to a text that suited them. An important consideration for this Section is that students have studied the whole play, even if they perform just an extract, usually for their practical controlled assessment. Page 7 of the specification (section 3.1.2) provides a number of bullet points identifying what students should be able to demonstrate in this part of the exam. A very small minority infringed the rubric of this Section either by not focusing on a scripted play, or by using the same play as they used for Section A. In general, students referred with excellent knowledge and understanding to lines that they had learnt for performance in a way that let their written argument flow.

Question 05

Candidates were mostly confident with this question. Stronger candidates gave very clear details of the scripted aspects of their character. Typically they would refer purposefully to lines that they had delivered, and often to stage directions, relating the information gleaned to the application of skills in performance. Excellent responses were able to use good detail of rehearsal, preparation and research in consideration of the performance of the character or design/technical skill. Weaker responses tended to be based around over-prescribed preparation for the exam based on previously circulated exemplar questions and these did not focus on the actual question asked. In a minority of cases candidates failed to identify either the role or the play that they had studied. There were however, some very lively answers where candidates used the lines they had delivered (and which were therefore relatively easy to remember) to support details about their decisions for performance.

Question 06

This question demanded an analysis of the performance in relation either to the playwright's intentions or to the group's interpretation of the extract. Stronger candidates clearly stated the playwright's/group's intentions and gave clear details of how this was achieved with examples from performance. Weaker responses rarely mentioned either their intentions or that of the playwright. Better candidates were able to discuss whether their intentions were in line with or differed from those of the playwright and were able to say why, with a clear analysis of success.

Question 07

This question required a focus on the development of skills as a designer, actor or technician to communicate style, period, location and/or culture selected for the extract. It was possible for candidates to score well from two approaches; some excellent responses concentrated on one of the aspects in good detail, while there were also fine responses that indicated how each of them had informed their performance. Credit was given when candidates included specific examples from the rehearsal process with details about accent, setting, costume and/or movement that contributed to the communication of the selected aspects. Where candidates identified the style, period and location of the chosen play/extract at the start of their responses, more clarity and focus was achieved. There were some excellent responses that considered the culture of childhood in *Blue Remembered Hills* or the clash of class cultures represented by the Johnson and the Lyons families in *Blood Brothers*.

Question 08

The focus in this question is the application of what was learned about the identified skill. Better candidates used the precise terms of the question and began their answers by stating that they had applied what they had learned, with brief specific identification of aspects, and then evaluated their success in each case. Some candidates failed to appreciate that this

question was not simply inviting an evaluation of success but an evaluation of the candidate's success in applying what they had learned about their chosen skill. Stronger answers selected two or three particular moments and clearly explained which aspects of the skill they had learned about – such as the breath control required for voice projection or the techniques learned to create a convincing accent for their role. There were some excellent responses, showing a very clear learning process, based on how rehearsal and preparation had resulted in a successful performance.

Section C

General

Many candidates chose to respond to questions from Section C and Question 4 (09,10) proved more popular than Question 5 (11,12), suggesting that most candidates are more confident with acting skills than design/technical. However, examiners reported outstanding responses to both areas. Teachers are providing their students with a really exciting breadth of experience in terms of the productions they see. They included *Private Lives*, Knee High's *The Red Shoes* and Complicite's *A Disappearing Number* which made for very interesting responses. Other productions included musicals like *Wicked*, *We Will Rock You* and *The Lion King*. A sizeable majority had seen *Blood Brothers*, *The Woman in Black* and/or *War Horse*. Work performed in school proved to be really exciting when accompanied by a workshop by visiting companies and there were some very good responses focused on school productions. A minority focused on work performed by classmates which often proved to be self-limiting. Teachers are referred to page 8 (3.1.3) of the specification giving the requirement for candidates to study the production from a practical point of view, and this work undertaken should inform responses to Section C.

Question 09

This was a very popular question and many excellent responses were seen where candidates selected two actors for detailed attention and wrote purposefully about each actor's use of skills when working together. The characters of Eddie and Mickey from *Blood Brothers* made frequent appearances as did the acting duo from *Woman in Black* and these generated some very detailed descriptions, as did a whole range of other productions. This question was best approached with the two actors and the scene clearly identified at the beginning of the response. Credit was awarded to those who provided evidence of strong understanding of the skills employed by the chosen actors. This was often accompanied by a clear indication of what was happening on stage enabling the examiner to visualise the action. Weaker responses gave little attention to the actors' skills, simply telling the story, often of a short section of the performance. Occasionally candidates wrote about just one actor or sometimes several actors.

Question 10

This question asked for 'at least one further scene or section' and this gave the candidates the opportunity to look at a different part of the play in Question 10 from the one selected in Question 09. There was an additional demand that the candidate should evaluate the success of the actors in engaging the audience. A popular approach was to consider how the actors playing Eddie and Mickey engaged the audience in the final scene, having written in 09 about the actors working together in the scene where the brothers first meet. In a number of responses there was good understanding of how the audience was engaged through the

successful application of dramatic irony. Less successful candidates failed to recognise the need to describe one further scene and tended to repeat the scene used in 09.

Question 11

The focus for this question is clearly stated as one area of design or technical skill, and some excellent responses described the selected area with vivid detail. Especially good was the work of a candidate who had been to see *A View from the Bridge* resulting in a very clear description of the set design, or the candidate who focused on a production of *Birdsong* and the effective use of projections onto a gauze, reflecting what was going on in the protagonist's mind. Others considered *The Trial* and *Swallows and Amazons* to excellent effect. Sketches and diagrams were often usefully included, illustrating the description, though not replacing it. *War Horse* was a popular choice where there was a very clear description of how the staging was used or indeed where the focus was on the design of the horse itself. Credit was always given to those candidates able to apply accurate technical terminology.

Question 12

This question required candidates to evaluate the success of the selected area of design or technical skill combining with other aspects of design or technical skill. Where candidates had focused tightly on one area in Question 11, they were able to increase their focus to include other contributory aspects of the production, including other areas of design/technical skill and also performers. Candidates who did not follow the requirements for Question 11 and/or conflated design elements in Question 11 often struggled with this question as they had nothing left to talk about. The candidates who were able to show how their chosen design worked with other elements were very successful in creating a strong picture of how the production worked. An answer on *A View from the Bridge* concentrated on a scene change and very clearly showed how a revolve was used to create the moments in conjunction with lighting and sound effects. Some excellent answers had considered the set of *Woman in Black* for Question 11 and in Question 12 took two or three key moments of the production to discuss how lighting, acting and costume enhanced the use of set. Most answers that were unsuccessful were because the candidates had not appreciated that they must still continue to write about the area of design nominated in Question 11 and how that area had combined with other areas in the production.