



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Drama

42401

(Specification 4240)

Unit 1: Drama Written Paper

Report on the Examination

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GCSE DRAMA 42401

General

This is the third exam in the current format and there is continuing evidence that teachers are preparing their students effectively to do themselves justice in the exam. It was clear that successful students demonstrated sound knowledge, understanding and enthusiasm for their own drama coursework and also for a wide range of live theatre that they had seen. Examiners reported that they saw the complete range of achievement, and that there was pleasing evidence of students experiencing a range of skills during their course.

Unfortunately, it was disappointing to note that some teachers have not taken on board the requirement that question papers must not be too predictable, and that there should not be an expectation that certain question numbers will always be linked to the same skills. Students should be prepared to read both questions in Sections B and/or C to be able to select the one that best suits their course experience. Also some students appeared over-prepared for 'expected' questions, providing responses that were self-limiting answers to questions from previous series, rather than responses to the question set for them in this series.

A few schools had trained their students with the specimen paper or with other support scripts, with the result that they framed their responses with insufficient regard for the actual questions set for this exam.

There were a minority of students who breached rubric requirements by mistakenly answering questions from both Section B and C, but this affected very few. Very rarely students used a bullet point format and they need to be reminded that responses to this exam must be in continuous prose and not in note form. Sketches and diagrams can also be very helpful if they support the written response, but should not be expected to replace the written answer.

Section A

General

Although in the main students were well prepared for this Section, there were still too many students who failed to acknowledge that it is focused on one piece of performed work related to one of the practical options undertaken by the student. This report repeats the instructions from 2010 and 2011, that they should not switch their focus to a new skill between questions. It is worth noting also that neither the role of director nor that of choreographer appears in the list of performance options in the specification and should therefore not feature in responses to Section A. There were some exceptional responses submitted this year, identifying excellent practical work that included in their number scripted, devised and improvised pieces completed in schools during the course. To succeed in Section A, students need to discuss in detail the specific skills that they applied to the performed piece, their research, rehearsal and preparation, together with an evaluation that includes examples from the final performance. Successful students provided engaging responses that demonstrated their own personal commitment and enthusiasm for the piece, rather than presenting a taught response that differed little between students in a cohort. There was evidence that some students did not manage their time well, with some giving a disproportionate amount of time and space to Section A at the expense of their second Question; occasionally within Section A there was uneven time management between the four questions asked.

Question 01

By now it should be clear that this question is not one to differentiate students' abilities to any great degree. Students and teachers should now be aware that it has a standard content and that high, even maximum, marks are available to all. The question is designed to elicit a context for the rest of Section A and a significant proportion of this years' candidature gave an excellent account of themselves. Full marks were denied to students who defaulted in a number of different ways; most obviously if one of the named aspects was omitted this affected the mark. Beyond this, if there was a lack of clarity in addressing the component parts of the question there was also an effect. Students were asked for a description of the piece and too many students did not offer a description beyond the title of the piece; they should not assume that the examiner knows the piece, but write a pithy description that makes the work clear, and while this does not mean a lengthy plot synopsis it should give a flavour of the content and context of the work, so a bald statement that it was 'Hamlet' or 'Cinderella' is not enough to secure full marks. Successful students usually despatched this requirement in a couple of well-honed sentences. There must be a clear statement identifying the period, not just calling it 'a modern piece' as this does not clearly identify the period in which it was set, but could relate to the performance approach. Some students still have difficulty differentiating between style and genre. The genre is the kind or category of piece it is, under what heading you would find it in a library, and the style is the manner in which it was performed by the student's group in this particular performance. Therefore, the genre might be described as a comedy or a tragedy or a melodrama for example, and the style might be physical or naturalistic or epic. The emphasis here is on giving students the opportunity to identify their work for the examiner in informed terms. So, calling the work 'stylised' is not clear enough. If all performance work has in mind the audience to whom it will be shown, a statement of the target audience should be easily provided and should avoid saying that it was 'for everyone'. With the performance space it is not clear enough to say that it was performed 'in the Drama studio' as this does not provide enough information; there should be identification of the audience configuration included. Comment on design and technical elements is not an absolute requirement of this question as these are not always available when work is performed, but when aspects have been used it can give a useful flavour of the performance context that informs the rest of Section A. It should be noted that problems may occur if factually incorrect statements on design and technical elements appear here.

Some students reduced their 01 response to a very few lines that increased the likelihood that some clarity might be lost, while others wrote pages of material that was largely superfluous to requirements and left relatively less time for later questions.

Question 02

This question will always relate in some part to the application of the student's skills to the piece as suggested on page 7 of the specification. High scoring responses this year focused on preparation, with consideration for audience effect as requested. Less good responses defaulted either by giving a sometimes fulsome description of their final performance or by giving a list of rehearsal techniques with no explicit application to this piece. Two popular techniques mentioned were hot-seating and forum theatre, but many students failed to explain either the purpose or the outcomes resulting from their use, instead giving a long description of the technique itself, with little reference to specific application. Also, there should have been a focus on the student's own skills rather than the approach of the group. Here as elsewhere some students had prepared, so answered last year's question instead of that set this year.

Successful students wrote with confidence about their creation of a role, for example, or about their experiments with costume, dyes and fabrics. They explained how research

helped to structure performance work, such as first-hand accounts of specific events, period details to inform acting, stage lighting, costume, set and make-up design for example, and they remembered the ‘engaging drama’ aspect of the question. They also explained and exemplified moments from the rehearsal/preparation period where their skills were applied.

Question 03

There were some outstanding responses to this question, where a technical problem needed to be resolved, perhaps the creation of a mood or an atmosphere or where actors analysed the process of rehearsal with regard to selecting a complementary tone, pace, timing, pause and emphasis of voice and of movement. Often students considered the difficulties of adopting an appropriate accent, which was fine, except where these lacked any specific detail of the selected accent, the context of the piece or the skills required. Successful design and technical students considered how aspects of their skills impacted on the development of the piece. Weaker students commented on generic difficulties like the learning of lines or the attendance of members of their group at rehearsals. The response to this question must be specific to the piece selected for Section A, so general references to line learning and group constraints are considered rather bland aspects of a limited response. Again, too many students wrote about their group’s ability to work as a team and therefore lacked the required focus of this year’s question.

Question 04

This question asked the students to focus on the effect of their final performance on their audience. Here, as everywhere in Sections A and B, the skills of the candidate were central to a successful response. There is a prompt in the question to consider ‘at least one particular moment’ of the final performance as evidence of their success and of audience engagement, but too many gave broad statements of success without supplying this evidence from the performance, while others narrated their action on stage with little reference to the audience and with no evaluation included. There were many thoughtful and detailed answers seen, where students wrote enthusiastically and honestly about the final performance of the piece and of their contribution to its success. The best students wrote in terms of the application of their nominated skill, and they referred to particular moments from the performance to support their comments. Many good answers contained quotations from the scenes they were considering and referred in detail to how their lines were delivered, or how a sound effect had made a particular impact, or how their imaginative ‘fantasy’ costume design had engaged their target audience of youngsters. Weaker students tended to repeat ideas about the preparation from previous questions, and missed the opportunity to focus fully on the performance. Here again, some answers were compromised by discussing a combination of aims, intentions, strengths and weaknesses, all elements of questions asked in previous series rather than the specific requirements of this year.

Section B

General

There were some excellent responses from students who had ownership of the plays upon which they were basing their answers, often with an enthusiasm that could be fully credited by examiners. Too often there was evidence of very tightly focused teaching, which resulted in all students responding on the same section of the same play and often the same character; this seems a shame when there are so many good plays from which to choose, and there was evidence that students reflected this rather tired approach with a homogenous standard of moderate responses that allowed for little differentiation between the full cohort. There is also a growing trend of multi-role approaches, which has fine precedence in the plays of Godber, Brecht, and many touring productions of plays, but there is a problem if the

roles played do not reflect a possible performance of the play; for example, more than one candidate selected the roles of Mrs Johnston and also the role of Mrs Lyons on which to comment. This caused problems when focus switched between the roles during the two parts to this answer. Students who selected plays by or in the style of Godber had similar difficulties, but could score well when their responses were based in the core character over the two questions. Rubric infringements resulted in a score of zero in the rare cases when the same material was used for Section B as for Section A and when the material used in Section B was clearly not of a scripted play. Where the description given by the candidate was unclear as to the play's provenance, the candidate received the benefit of the doubt but these were by definition low scoring responses. It is important to mention here that students should be prepared to identify the playwright as well as the play at the start of their response in this Section.

Question 05

Examiners reported on some excellent responses to this question with thoughtful application of vocal and physical skills to the preparation work undertaken by students. Strategies used to develop skills included, workshops, character profiles, off-text improvisations, role on the wall, reading and discussion of the script, use of Youtube and seeing a live production of the play. Too many students thought that providing a list of techniques like these was enough to answer this question, but it must be emphasised that in order to score well there needed to be some specific application of the preparation work to their role in this particular play. Often students included much detail of design and technical material, which rarely supported their approach to vocal and physical skills, so did not gain them credit. Stronger students were clear about their group's interpretation of the play and why their own character was appropriate to this interpretation. They also referred in detail to a scene or section and the vocal and physical skills applied within. It was surprising, however, to note the absence of any quotations or specific textual references from so many of the responses as this Section is concerned with the **study** of a scripted play. Often the focus of these answers was related more to appropriate casting aspects rather than character development, with gender issues dominating many responses; female students spent far too much space on how a female might play a male, with lower pitch of voice and sturdy posture, rather than how this particular male character was to be played. Some male students provided huge detail on wigs, dresses, high-pitched voices and demure postures, but this must be made relevant to the textual role played. Similar approaches existed for age, with pages of description about the bent backs and croaky voices of the aged, but little to suggest why these aspects were particular to the role actually being studied and ultimately performed. *Blue Remembered Hills* and *Blood Brothers* were easily the most represented texts in Section B, but these responses were often dominated by general observations of seven year olds and generic material lifted from Potter's foreword on playing a child, without enough to distinguish between the different seven year olds in the play and the specific role played. There were, however, some very lively answers where students used the lines that they had delivered to support details about their rehearsal, often going on to meet the question focus 'that helped you to understand and perform your character', and these were duly rewarded with high marks.

Question 06

This question was also well answered by many of the students, who focused on the interactive dimension of their performance. These were often demonstrated with specific moments of intense action to, and clear understanding of, complicated emotional relationships which were realised through the application of specific skills. Many fine responses went into detail about a well-defined relationship and/or attitude related to their character, with clear analysis of success. Weaker students did not discuss the acting skills used, but adopted a text based literary appraisal of social relationships in the story. Once

again too many students did not discuss the relationships or attitudes of their character as the question required, but instead repeated their prepared response to last year's paper. There were answers which ignored the matter of relationships on stage completely and gave narrative accounts of their action on stage, often with little reference to acting skills. Here as elsewhere students scored high marks by answering the question asked of them with secure reference to their own specific acted moments on stage.

Question 07

This question was successfully answered by many students and required a focus on the development of skills as a designer, actor or technician from first reading of the script to just before the performance of it. High achieving responses focused on the process and specifically on how their chosen skill was developed, with good detail of preparation work. Weaker responses discussed the performance and did not go into detail of how their skill was developed. Many successful answers included reference to the first reading of the script and a detailed explanation of the character, design or technical element, with some reference to personal research, rehearsal and preparation work. A number of them were then able to clearly link this preparation work to the application of their skills as required by their particular text. Many students also made good references to analysis of script in this question including quotes and stage directions to demonstrate how this influenced their design, technical or acting skills. These students were able to show how the preparation had informed the development of the skill, and were able to balance the preparation and skill detail. Responses based on technical or design skills could occasionally be very short on skill detail and appropriate terminology, although there were some lighting pieces which gave excellent detail; explaining the selection of colour and of lanterns based on research and experiment during the preparation period, showing how this informed their final decisions and enhanced the group's overall concept. Establishing location and period were effectively researched by sound, lighting, costume and set students, with careful thought given about how sound would underscore action. A significant few differentiated their responses by revealing a full understanding of the question's demand to reveal their 'understanding of the play'.

Question 08

Some students failed to appreciate that this question was an evaluation of their success in a particular moment where they felt their skills were best appreciated by their audience. Too many responses concentrated only a narrative of the action on stage in their account of the performance, with no analysis or reference to audience appreciation. Many designers had a very clear idea about their success because of earlier feedback from the actors and their teacher, and were then able to substantiate this with post-performance audience response. Some technicians outlined their fears for what might have gone wrong and then qualified their success with a clear account of their success with evidence of what had gone well. Many successful students gave details of how the audience responded and why, with detail of their chosen skill included. Weaker responses did not discuss audience appreciation, and were vague in their details of the performance, some still referring inappropriately to the research and rehearsal process, material which belonged in 07.

Section C

General

The focus of this section is on the study of a live theatre production. While it can seem to require a review, it should be clear that the intended emphasis here is on the **study** of a live production seen. Responses should consist of the personal and considered opinion of each candidate as an informed member of the audience. It is stated in the specification that

students must study the play before and after the theatre visit through practical workshops. It also specifies that the candidate should be equipped to analyse the effectiveness of the production as a whole and not just one scene. If students choose a design or technical aspect there must be appropriate terminology utilised to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the skill upon which they are focusing. There were a few productions that featured heavily this year, as they have in previous years; these include *Blood Brothers*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Woman in Black*, *The 39 Steps* and *Warhorse* and, as these are all productions that are largely well received by this age group, they are all entirely appropriate for use in this exam. Unfortunately, this often resulted in the submission of corporate responses from many of the students in the same school, often on the same effective moments, with the same close detail repeated by all students. It must be made clear that top level success rests more securely with the students voicing their own personal responses, tailored to the specific question asked of them. Some very interesting responses were recorded this year for Frantic Assembly's *Love Song*, Splendid Productions' *Medea*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Journey's End* and *Ghost*. There was evidence this year that teachers had made the assumption that the questions in this Section would be targeted at particular skills, and it must be emphasised that students should be encouraged to read both questions in this Section to make a decision on the one that best suits the material they have to answer it.

Question 09

Some engaging responses were reported by examiners. The focus here was on 'visual impact' and there were very good responses referring to *Warhorse*, in terms of the puppetry, the 'ghost' horses and battle scenes, to *The 39 Steps* in the transition of the stage to a Scottish Bed & Breakfast, *Love Song* in the use of projection, and to *Woman in Black* in the use of gauze and lights. References to acting were effective when briefly putting the scene into some context, with a synopsis of the action, the performance space and perhaps the lighting, before describing the visual impact of the acting against this context. This was demonstrated in the ensemble acted approach of *The Wild Bride*, and in descriptions of the early scenes of *Blood Brothers*, successfully evoking a period childhood. There were strong responses from students who chose to describe design or technical elements, especially when they used specific terminology and then successfully linked their description of particular moments to the visual impact. Often sketches would help to support and complement descriptions.

Again there was evidence that students had insufficient regard for the question asked of them, with detail on voice and sound offered here with no regard for how this affected visual impact. Better students, as always, were fully focused on the demands of the question and considered the impact created with careful attention to visual detail.

Question 10

Examiners report that some high-achieving students analysed the effects created in the moments they had previously described and did so in meticulous detail explaining, for example, how emotional effects were created through visual means or how the combination of performance and visual elements had created a powerful effect. They referred to the scene and methodically went through each performance aspect, analysing why there was impact, and included what effect it had on the audience. Weaker responses did not discuss the same scene or repeated the same description from 09. Good answers were enlivened by apposite quotations from the production, chosen to locate specific moments of the performance.

Question 11

This question attracted many excellent and very detailed responses. Students who described in detail an actor's first appearance, supporting their answers with precise reference to the use of voice and physical expression achieved very high marks and there were many of these vivid and enthusiastic answers seen. Often the action on stage was clearly defined by the use of specific stage positions which really helped to visualise what was happening in the actor's first appearance. In a number of cases there was good evidence of prior study of the play, students having read it, researched it and often having work-shopped themes and ideas relevant to the play. The skills to which students referred included the delivery of lines indicating vocal tone and pitch, as well as the actor's gait, use of gesture, use of movement, use of space and facial expression. Successful students focused clearly on how these skills combined to establish the actor's character for the audience. Some students failed to pick up on the demand to write about the character's first appearance, and they lost opportunities if they made this mistake as they were less likely to write about 'establishing' the character.

There was some excellent detailed work submitted on *DNA* as well as *Journey's End* and inevitably on *Blood Brothers*, and it was encouraging to see when students supported their explanations with quotations from the text. Some selected multi-role productions, and as a consequence described more than one character established by the actor in the play which compromised the appropriate detail at their disposal. Some students narrated the action of the character rather than how the character was established, and the skills application was not described adequately or used in an advantageous way. Mickey from *Blood Brothers* featured heavily in responses with some excellent detail of the actor's skill in the first scene. Richard Hannay from *The 39 Steps* was also a popular choice. It is worth adding that students are advised to use the actor's real name in these responses as this keeps the perspective of the response with the actor rather than the character.

Question 12

Examiners reported seeing some excellent responses to this question where the student's appreciation of an actor's skills was vividly realised and analysed. Many of them were able to clearly identify a further moment in the play than that described in 11, and included purposeful references to specific details of acting skills that the actor used to maintain or develop their character. A minority of students focused on the same scene, and some focused on how the actor created a different character entirely in a multi-role play rather than how the original character was developed or maintained. These students had difficulty sustaining focus on the question asked of them. A very few students were also disadvantaged when they wrote about a role which was played by two different actors to show the character at different stages of his life (*Coram Boy* and *Lion King*). Some others provided a narrative of the plot to explain how the character developed, rather than how the actor's skills were maintained or developed, while some students had clearly prepared only one scene from the production seen, and therefore were only able to give rather vague information in responding to this question. A good proportion of the students scored impressive marks when they referred in detail to specific moments, using quotations that very clearly supported their evaluation.

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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