

# EXAMINER'S REPORT AS DRAMA 2008

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Paper 8286/02  
Written examination  
Marker's Report

## General comments

This year four schools were involved in the examination, answering questions from *Antigone*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Children of the Poor*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*. A range of abilities was demonstrated in the examination.

Candidates should be very clear early on about the 'Overall Production Concept' (OPC) and should aim to develop this in detail. Candidates who took this approach, and were consistent with it throughout their answer, were generally able to access marks at the top of the mark scheme.

Those answers that did not have a clear OPC were at times a little confused and led to obvious contradictions in the answers.

Effective answers used short but relevant quotations from the play extract to justify their interpretations. Answers that did not reference the play in terms of quotations were rather ungrounded, and although candidates appeared to understand the text, the answers were not fixed to specific scenes or lines from the plays. Seeing the play in performance and therefore understanding the staging possibilities, often enabled candidates to access the higher end of the mark scheme. Staging a play in a specific place facilitated discussion of the use of space with real insight. Generalisations in answers led candidates to discuss plot rather than the play in performance and could only achieve marks at the lower end of the mark scheme.

Candidates should use correct terminology in order to be specific about their production intentions. The stage should be discussed from the actor's point of view – some answers referred to movement around the stage in a rather vague manner. Stronger answers referenced actors' movements from a starting position. For example, "entry upstage right onto the block which is on the right of the stage." Any movement from this point should then refer to an actor's right or left and whether movement is downstage, upstage or to centre stage.

In the questions relating to 'acting', candidates who either imagined themselves in the role, or who had actually taken part in a production gave the most effective answers. Candidates are encouraged to take ownership of their production intentions and, rather than suggesting "perhaps the character jumps to the left on the stage", are advised to give more definite directions such as, "she jumps to the left", giving a specific textual reference.

Weaker answers tended to repeat rather than build on initial ideas. This was not helpful and meant they could only gain marks within the lower bands. Each paragraph should address a new idea and be supported with diagrams where necessary and textual reference to give depth.

The use of clearly annotated diagrams as well as the use of colour was helpful in understanding the design concepts. Those candidates who answered design questions – whether on set or costume – who did not draw a diagram to explain their ideas tended to produce weaker responses. Design requires an element of drawing and those questions that relied on contrasting costumes had more impact where designs were clearly explained.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1 CLASSICAL TRAGEDY**

***Antigone* Sophocles**

#### **Question 1 (a)**

This question asked candidates to interpret the role of Haemon from an actor's viewpoint in the scene where he confronts his father, Creon. Candidates were required to indicate what they would want to convey about Haemon's character using specific examples from the text.

Detailing with apposite information from the OPC assisted the actor's interpretation of the role and a short textual outline was helpful to the clarity of the answer. Long plot outlines or, in fact, totally plot-driven answers were not helpful.

Strong answers provided firm acting advice for the role of Haemon and took on the role for themselves. These candidates were very clear about how they would move in the space and interact with other characters on the stage, and used effective textual referencing to support their acting interpretation. Responses which included 'unheard' characters such as Creon's wife were innovative. Candidates who were specific about the use of body, voice, movement and space giving clear information as to gesture and facial expression with clear understanding as to why they had made these decisions were more successful. The use of the text to assist the way in which this answer was argued was a real help to some candidates.

Some questions focused too much on one aspect of Dramatic Techniques such as voice, whilst ignoring the need for an actor to be in role from head to toe.

#### **Question 1 (b)**

Candidates were required to outline the set that they would use for the play with close reference to the text. An explanation of how the plan would help communicate the play's message to the audience was also needed.

Candidates needed to be aware of the time in which the play was going to be set whilst recognising the original setting of the play. This meant that the OPC needed to be described in detail so that design decisions were based on this concept. Whilst it was important for candidates to understand the context of the play, this should not have been the main focus of the answer. The OPC should have, therefore, a strong theme or idea that the set designer is trying to express, and the question should be argued with regard to this theme. Supporting this with references to the text and pertinent moments within it was helpful in responding to this question. It was extremely important that detailed diagrams are drawn for this type of answer and labelled fully in order to make best use of them.

#### **Question 1 (c)**

This question required candidates to explain how, as a director, they wanted the chorus to move and deliver their lines.

It was extremely useful for candidates to explain the role of chorus both historically and within the context of the play. Added to this, strong design ideas – costume and mask – and OPC were helpful in explaining the importance of the role of the chorus.

This question was primarily about direction and therefore answers needed to specifically direct the actors in the space and in their interaction on stage. Candidates who used direct textual referencing wrote stronger answers, and some were imaginative and explored the range of characterisation given to the chorus within the play. Referencing should be as brief as possible, and needs to support the directorial commands for the actors.

Recounting the plot was not helpful and candidates needed to focus on body, voice, movement, and space as well as mentioning costume, staging, set, and technologies that might influence the actors' performances. Good answers focused on the candidate's intentions as a director with effective reference to the text.

## **Question 2 MEDIAEVAL MYSTERY OR MORALITY PLAYS**

No candidates answered questions in this section.

## **Question 3 ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMA**

### ***A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare**

#### **Question 3 (a)**

In this question candidates were asked to explore the character of Puck and how an actor might attempt to create the character with the use of voice and physicality.

This was an actor question and was asking for an actor's interpretation of the role. In order to answer this question in depth candidates needed to decide the setting of the play – time, place and the director's intention in terms of design. Strong answers referred to the many times Puck is seen within the play and addressed the role of Puck in terms of use of body, voice, movement and space. Answers needed to be supported with effective use of text and required analysis of Puck in relation to other characters on the stage: those he interacts with and those he observes or follows.

This question required an in-depth knowledge of the play and how the role of Puck develops within it. It was useful for candidates to also think about costume in terms of movement, and also to consider the stage setting and the way in which it influences and assists the actor's movement around the space.

#### **Question 3 (b)**

Candidates were asked to choose two contrasting characters, discuss costume design for them and explain how their design ideas would demonstrate their overall approach to costume design.

Candidates needed to consider the OPC when answering this question. The play was written during the reign of Elizabeth I but the question does not require the play to be set at this time. The costume designer works collaboratively with the director and would need to have a thorough understanding of the ideas the director wants to focus on, their needs in terms of design and how that design relates to the setting of the play. Choosing two *contrasting* characters was extremely important and candidates who examined one character from the fairy world and another from the human world were better able to respond to the idea of contrast, and address with some conviction the second part of the play.

The most clear answers were those where candidates used drawings of their designs to support the ideas expressed in their essays. Understanding of the functions of the contrasting characters was important to the answering of this question and referencing events in the text was useful in supporting candidates' responses.

#### **Question 3 (c)**

No candidates answered this question.

## **Question 4 COMEDY OF MANNERS**

### ***The Importance of Being Earnest* Oscar Wilde**

#### **Question 4 (a)**

Candidates in this question were asked to explain, from an actor's perspective, how they wanted the audience to respond to the role of Lane the Butler and how they would use voice, movement and space to build the character to achieve this.

Candidates needed to explain their OPC for the production and the play in context, referring to the genre of Comedy of Manners and how this would influence the actor's interpretation of the role.

The best responses showed an understanding of the importance of the minor character, and also how Lane supports Algernon within the early scenes. Candidates needed to explain in depth how the actor would create the role with focused reference to body, voice, movement and space, and how they would use the text to support their ideas. Confusion over interpretation meant that some answers lacked direction or a clear insight into the part and the role of a butler within a Victorian household.

The comedy within the role needed to be addressed and, in particular, how candidates wished the audience to respond to their interpretation of the role. Status is an important part of the answer and candidates were required to show an understanding of the accepted conventions of the time and how Wilde manages to explore status within Act One. Some candidates relied on a 'working class in opposition to aristocratic class' response which ignored the subtle subtext of the relationship between Algernon and Lane. Reference to Lane's costume was useful to give an insight into how his role is further established in the eyes of the audience.

#### **Question 4 (b)**

Candidates in this question were to consider costume design for two characters: Algernon and Jack with reference to the quotation "That is better than being overdressed as you are."

Explanations of the OPC and the setting of the play were useful and gave context to the dress that was expected of the era. Specific information about colour, texture and style were appropriate to the question, and details about how the characters change costumes for the different locations was also necessary. Design drawings of the costumes and the changes that would be made supported stronger answers and gave an obvious visual aid to the reader. Some confusion between the roles of Jack and Ernest, and Algernon and Bunbury were evident and closer textual reference was required in these answers.

#### **Question 4 (c)**

Candidates were asked to describe how they would direct the play in order to bring out the way Wilde examines conventions within his society to show their absurdity.

This was a big question and required candidates to discuss a number of issues: set design, costume design, acting style and characterisation within the play. Candidates needed to explain their OPC with reference to the context of the setting and genre of the play and to consider Wilde's world and how this influenced his writing. It was also necessary for candidates to understand how the play would have been received within a Victorian context and how, as a director, they could make these ideas relevant to a modern audience.

Both setting and character were focuses of this piece and careful reference to text and choosing appropriate moments which reflected the key themes of the play enabled candidates to produce imaginative and well considered responses. Some candidates became a little confused as to the messages within the text and did not use it to support their answers. Actions and thematic concerns needed to be linked to support this answer.

#### **Question 5 EPIC THEATRE**

***The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* Bertholt Brecht**

#### **Question 5 (a)**

In this question candidates were asked to examine the role of Roma as the ghost in Scene 14 and to indicate how this is similar or different to other scenes in the play when he was alive.

This was an actor question and as such required the candidate to consider the role of Roma from an actor's point of view. Candidates needed to provide detail about Scene 14 quoting specific lines from the text to support their answer using body, voice, movement and space to interpret Roma's role as a ghost. It is useful to the actor to consider the role of the OPC in this question and the context of the writing. However, long paragraphs about Brechtian theory and the background of the play were not useful unless they were fed directly into the reasons for performing the role in a particular way. Those essays that referenced the theory and the relevance of the role within context created a much stronger response. Comparing this scene with a

number of scenes that Roma is in, for example scenes 10 and 11, was a key part of the response. A clear understanding of Roma's role and interpretation in these scenes was necessary and the OPC should feed into this in relation to whether the actor's interpretation is similar or different in these scenes. This was a complex question and needed careful referencing to the text to support the answer.

### **Question 5 (b)**

In this question candidates were asked to consider the role of the set designer and the Brechtian devices that could be employed and incorporated into the set.

The question needed a discussion of the OPC and the themes which are paramount in the play. Strong answers showed a clear understanding of Brecht's theories about reality and the theatre and used them to support their responses. Innovation was the key to this question and whilst candidates could include the concept of minimalist set, exposed stage lighting and use of placards, the answer required them to think of design ideas that went beyond the basics of the theory. The need to challenge the audience with the design ideas had to be considered in order to create a fresh and imaginative response to Brecht's original ideas. Drawings of set design were helpful in supporting candidates' responses. Candidates who had been to see Hurst's *Threepenny Opera* were able to reinvent some of the innovations they saw in this production to good effect in this answer.

### **Question 5 (c)**

In this question candidates were required to examine Scene 12 in the play and explain how a director would ask the actors to play the scene with reference to the overall production ideas for the play.

Firstly, this question required candidates to consider the director's OPC, and it was imperative to discuss this in relation to the Brechtian theories of reality and theatre. Answers needed to consider the challenges the scene holds for actors and how the director is going to use those challenges to communicate with impact to the audience. Specific instructions for the actors about voice, body, movement and space were required in terms of the director's OPC. There also needed to be due consideration of the two sections of the scene – that which occurs in normal speech patterns and the section that occurs in rhyme. Candidates needed to consider the director's role in informing the audience and in asking the actors to interpret the two sections to make a strong impact on the audience. Textual referencing and use of the context of the play were important in this answer. Diagrams were also useful in explaining the setting of the scene within the whole.

## **Question 6 NEW ZEALAND THEATRE: THE MAORI VOICE**

No candidates answered questions in this section.

## **Question 7 NEW ZEALAND THEATRE: LOOKING AT OURSELVES**

***Children of the Poor* Mervyn Thompson (an adaptation of the novel by John A Lee)**

### **Question 7 (a)**

Candidates were asked to consider from an actor's perspective how they would develop the role of Rose throughout the play.

This answer required candidates to explain the OPC of the play and the themes that are focused on in the play. They should do this in relation to the character of Rose and how the context of the setting affects her life as she grows up and loses her innocence. Actors must consider this role in relation to the use of body, voice, movement and space, and candidates needed to convey the process of how Rose hardens herself to the circumstance and situation around her and relate this to the concept of the play. Examining the role of Rose in relation to other characters was important, particularly Rose with Albany, Rose before the Vaudeville and Rose and the children at Christmas. An understanding of Rose's plight and that of the poor within the play should be conveyed to the audience – the context of the idea of Thompson's episodic play.

**Question 7 (b)**

Candidates were asked to consider set design in relation to the social message of *Children of the Poor* and how their ideas would help the audience understand this message.

This question needed to be discussed with a strong understanding of the idea of the OPC. Setting the play on a well known space was useful as it gave the reader a clear understanding of where the set was within the acting space and in relation to the audience. Detail was required of the set and how that set would change for the different scenes within the play. Considerations of layout, colour, set pieces and symbolism were all important to the answering of this question.

The set design needed to support the social message that candidates were hoping to represent, and effective textual referencing backed this up. Imaginative responses and clever use of set and set pieces were an integral part of this question and a consideration of how the actors would use the set were all relevant to successful answers. Labelled diagrams were a necessity in responding to this type of question.

**Question 7 (c)**

No candidates answered this question.