

DRAMA AS EXAMINATION 2009

Paper 8286/02
Written examination

General comments

This year five schools were involved in the examination, answering questions from Medea, Wednesday to Come, She Stoops to Conquer, Everyman, Much Ado About Nothing and Rhinoceros. 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 in order to use it as the "coat-hanger" on which to base their answers. 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. However those who talked about the OPC with little reference to how these decisions impacted on the acting choices or the costume choices did not produce coherent responses. Also questions that did not stick to the question and just added in every OPC opinion they had thought of did not fare well. In addition 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. Those that did this in the "acting" questions were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the text and their answers which focused on the Dramatic techniques required to perform the role. Answers that did not reference the play in terms of quotations or that gave one or two unrelated quotations were rather ungrounded and although the students appeared to understand the text the answers were not fixed to specific scenes or lines from the plays. This meant that the answers lacked a through line which could be followed and jumped from idea to idea without a "drawing together" influenced by textual reference. Seeing the play in performance and therefore understanding the staging possibilities enabled candidates to access the higher end of the mark scheme. It was also apparent where students had staged the play and were able to bring this into their answers. Theoretical staging of the play in a specific place also enabled candidates to discuss 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 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. A couple of answers confused stage left and right when talking about stage space and use of space which is problematic if the question hinges on this. If one is discussing from an actor's point of view a stronger answer references from the starting position eg entry upstage right onto the block which is on the right of the stage. Any movement from this point should then refer to the actor's right or left and whether movement is downstage, upstage or to centre stage. Those answers that did this confidently enabled the examiner to imagine how the actor was to move on 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. However the better answers still used quotations to give a through-line to the answer. Candidates are encouraged to take ownership of their production intentions and, rather than suggesting "perhaps the character jumps to the left on the stage", should 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. Also just writing everything known or covered in the work done in regards to text is not at all helpful and the candidates that did this scored in the lower bands. Picking out relevant knowledge is extremely important in the time given.

The use of clearly annotated diagrams as well as the use of colour was helpful in understanding the design concepts. However if students choose a design question – specifically costume they must costume as many of the cast as they can to demonstrate their design concept in relation to the OPC – the main protagonist and

year and labelling of the diagrams was generally clear. Those students who answered design questions – whether of set or costume who did not draw a diagram to explain their ideas tended to be weaker. Design requires an element of drawing and those questions relying on contrasting of costumes had more impact where designs were clearly explained. In these answers students still need to relate their ideas to the overall design concept and should also consider how they might be worn and the impact they would have in performance.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 CLASSICAL TRAGEDY

Medea by Euripedes

Question 1 (a)

The question required candidates to interpret the role of Jason from an actor's viewpoint in the scene where he confronts Medea for the second time. Candidates were required to outline how they would want the audience to respond to the role and how they would go about achieving these aims.

Detailing with apposite information from the OPC would assist the actor's interpretation of the role and a short textual outline would be helpful to the clarity of the answer. Long plot outlines or, in fact, totally plot-driven answers were not helpful in answering this question. In this question it would be useful to have a diagram of the set being used so that the student could discuss use of space in relationship to Medea and the children

Strong answers provided firm acting advice for the role of Jason and took on the role for themselves. These candidates were very clear about how they would move in the space, interact with Medea on stage and used effective textual referencing to support their acting interpretation. Those who performed at the higher end of the mark scheme did so because they discussed the subtle shifts in Jason's characterisation in this scene and how they as actors would interpret the different facets of Jason. 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. Solid answers reflected on Jason as an arrogant man and were able to interpret the role using Dramatic Techniques to support this but they failed to consider the nuance of his character and also how this related to Medea's scheming and his treatment of his children in this scene.

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. This was a particular issue with the character of Jason where his vocal interpretation became the main focus of some students answers.

Question 1 (b)

Candidates were required to outline the set that they would use for the play with close reference to the text at the point of the Deus Ex Machine where Medea flies through the air. Obviously the question itself caused some confusion for the students. The students who were able to interpret this moment in an effective way in relationship to their Overall Production Concept fared better in terms of marks. An explanation of how and why the candidate chose the set and the design was also required in order to highlight either the themes or ideas highlighted in the play

Candidates needed to be aware of the time in which the play is going to be set whilst recognising the original setting of the play. This means that the OPC should be described in detail so that the design decisions are based on this concept. The use of a known space enabled students to create clear responses to the staging of the play and clearly those who had staged the play were able to add some relevant detail. It was also very important for candidates to understand the context of the play but this should not have been the main focus of the answer. The historical nature of this play does not mean that it must be set in the time but clearly reference to the "tragic tradition" was helpful. Unrelated acting or costume comments were not helpful to a coherent 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 reference to this theme. The answer should then have focused in on the moment of Medea's "flying out" of the scene and detail how this would work within the whole. Supporting this with textual references and pertinent moments in the text was helpful in responding to this question. It is extremely important that detailed diagrams are drawn for this answer and labelled fully in order to make best use of them. Some students did not answer the question fully leaving the examiner in doubt of an Overall Production Concept and therefore scored in the lower mark range.

Question 1 (c)

This question required candidates to explain how, as a director, they would bring out the feminist themes in the play however the question required this to be done in a contemporary context. It was extremely useful for candidates to explain the role of Feminism within the context of the play, particularly in relationship to the historical position of women. In fact the students should have some sense of the irony of the concept of Feminism as related to a Greek Tragedy which would originally have been played by an all male cast and the fact that Euripedes chooses a female protagonist. Added to this a strong OPC would be needed that could place Medea in a modern context as well as a strong directorial intention in regards to the actors interpretation of role.

This question was primarily about direction and therefore answers needed to specifically direct the actors in the space and in their interaction on stage. How the main role of Medea would interact to the female chorus members to create the empathy required which enables the audience to view her with some sympathy inspite of her actions (the killing of her own children). Candidates who used direct textual referencing wrote stronger answers and some were imaginative and explored the range of characterisation given to the both Jason, Medea and the chorus in the play. Referencing should be as brief as possible, and needs to support the directorial commands for the actors. This was a complex question and was not answered by many candidates.

Question 2 MEDIAEVAL MYSTERY OR MORALITY PLAYS

Everyman Anonymous

Question 2 (a)

In this question candidates were asked to consider the role of Good Deeds from an acting point of view and how they would develop the role using body, voice, movement and space.

Candidates should answer this question using the OPC as a coat hanger which justifies their interpretation of the role and puts it within a context that is relevant. For example candidates could suggest a modern interpretation of the text and a contemporary setting which would influence the character choices for Good Deeds. Clearly this is a character that does change through the play and becomes an assistant or co-traveller with Everyman, advising and staying loyal as his journey develops.

The question was not answered by many candidates and the main thrust of the answers was how to interpret the role with little focus on the setting, era or production concept. This meant that the answers were rather general and did not have the strong through line of well-argued answers. The lack of textual references in some of the weaker answers meant that the question was not answered in relationship to the play from when Good Deeds first appears in the play, then agrees to accompany Everyman and did not continue on through some of the issues that Everyman meets on his journey. This was a necessity of this question and would have assisted candidates with definite structuring of their answers.

Question 2 (b)

In this question candidates needed to decide on an Overall Production Concept that would be the coat hanger for the production which would result in an effective. Further, students needed to draw and label a diagram or diagrams of the set in order to show the set for the production. They then needed to be able to explain how the set was going to be used in production and what the impact of this would be in performance. The candidates would need to use textual reference to assist their understanding and explanation of the OPC.

This question was not answered by many students but it was answered with enthusiasm. The ideas for the Overall Production Concept were for the most part explained but in the weaker answers there were gaps in the creation of the coat hanger for the answer. It was felt by the examiner that some of these answers demonstrated their knowledge but could have used more depth in their responses. Those students that used a through line to their responses had stronger answers because each part of their essay built to draw effective conclusion at the end of the essay. The diagrams were for the most part clear although labelling could have been more detailed in some of the responses.

Question 2(c) No one answered this question

Question 3 ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMA

***Much Ado About Nothing* Shakespeare**

Question 3 (a)

In this question candidates were asked to explore the character of Beatrice and how an actor might attempt to create the character with the use of voice and physicality. This was ostensibly an actor question – and was asking for an actor's interpretation of the role. In order to answer this question in depth candidate's needed to decide the setting of the play – time, place and the director's intention in terms of design. This then is used as a coat hanger from which to move forward. Comments about set, properties, lighting and costume are then only useful if they refer to how the actor's interpretation is influenced by these things, or how the actor uses these elements to create their role.

A strong answer would then refer to the different times Beatrice is seen within the play and who she interacts with on stage and how the character is portrayed in her relation to others and how this develops through the play. The role of Beatrice should be described in terms of use of body, voice, movement and space, with reference to the text

This question requires an in-depth knowledge of the play and how the role of Beatrice develops within the play. It is useful for the actor to consider costume in terms of movement, makeup and hair in terms of impression on the audience and the stage setting which will influence and assist the actor's movement

around the space. However commenting on these without referencing the dramatic techniques and how they are effected created weak and rather vague answers.

Question 3 (b)

Candidates were asked to discuss costume design for Act 4 Sc 1 – the wedding and how their design ideas would influence the whole of the production and their concept for design, in consideration of the Overall Production Concept.

Answers need 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 and their needs in terms of design and how it relates to the setting of the play. Choosing this scene was a marvellous opportunity to create meaningful costumes which could be used to make symbolic statements about character, enable the use of contrasting shape and colour in costumes for the “lovers” and enable the candidate to be imaginative once the “setting” for the play was established in the answer.

Those answers that used drawn designs rather than explanation of costume were more clear and the designs supported the ideas expressed within the answers. 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 the candidate responses. However some answers failed to costume enough characters to give a clear insight and many were not that adventurous with their Overall Production Concept – which meant the costumes perhaps lacked some depth of interpretation.

Question 3 (c)

This question was not answered

Question 4 COMEDY OF MANNERS

***She Stoops to Conquer* Oliver Goldsmith**

Question 4 (a)

Candidates in this question were asked to examine the role of Kate Hardcastle from an actor’s point of view and how they wanted the audience to respond to this role at the start of the play, considering the use of body, voice, movement and space. 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 their actor’s interpretation of the role. They were required to show an understanding of the importance of the way Kate reacts to her father in terms of respect and how this contrasts with her brother Tony’s reaction. The audience need to be shown her interest in “frippery” and some of her “town” mind set so they can later be surprised by her as a barmaid. They also needed to explain in depth how the actor would create the role with focused reference to body, voice, movement and space and use the text to support their ideas throughout. Clearly stronger answers considered Kate as she progressed from the early scenes to the later playing of a maid which required a lowering of status. The answer would focus particularly on how they wished the audience to respond to their interpretation of the role. More simplistic answers did not refer to the subtleties of the playwrights interpretation and did not analyse the contrast in the characters response to different situations.

Question 4 (b)

Candidates in this question were to consider set design of the Alehouse and how this setting was to fit within the Overall Production Concept. Explaining the OPC and setting of the play are useful to the candidate in this answer and give context to the set design and how it would work within the whole production. Strong answers used detailed diagrams to support their responses and how the actors would use the space in this scene. They also were able to relate the set design for this scene within the context of the whole play. Weaker answers created a set for the Alehouse but did not describe how it would work within the whole play and some candidates made mistakes in their answers about the positions on the set in terms of Stage left and right – which meant their responses were somewhat confused.

Question 4 (c)

In this answer candidates were asked for a directorial interpretation of an acting role – so therefore was a question about director interpretation. It was important for this answer to use a strong Overall Production Concept for a starting point for the interpretation of characterisation on stage. The candidates needed to concentrate specifically on the characterisation of Mrs Hardcastle with reference to Act 3 Scene 1 and her reaction to the jewels in this scene. The question would need to refer with specific textual reference to the use of body, voice, movement and space and how these would support the directors overall interpretation of the piece.

Stronger answers were able to show contrast between the public and private face of Mrs Hardcastle and had a good idea of directorial intention in their answers. They wrote about the impact of this interpretation on performance and gave clear instructions to their actors as a result of this. It was pleasing to note that they referred to Mrs Hardcastle in relationship to other characters and how her actions could be interpreted by others during the scene.

Question 5 EPIC THEATRE

Rhinoceros Eugene Ionesco

Question 5 (a)

In this question candidates were asked to examine the role of Berenger and to indicate how his character changes through the play due to the circumstances that he is forced to deal with as the play develops

This was an actor question and as such required the candidate to consider the role of Berenger from an actor's point of view. The candidates needed to provide detail about the first time the audience meet Berenger quoting specific lines from the text to support their answer using body, voice, movement and space to interpret his role

. 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 absurdist theory and the background of the play are not useful unless they are fed directly into the reason the actor performs the way he does on stage.

Those questions that referenced the theory and the relevance of the role within context created a much stronger response. Understanding the changes in Berenger's character and how these can be supported with costume changes and dramatic interpretation changes were important and stronger answers were able to do this effectively to whether the actor's interpretation is similar or different in these scenes. This is a complex question and needs careful referencing to the text to support the answer.

Question 5 (b)

In this questions candidates were to consider the role of the set designer and how the design would work within the Overall Production Concept. Diagrams were required as part of this answer – and were imperative in order to gain a clear understanding of the response

This question needs a discussion of the OPC of the piece and the themes which are paramount in the play. The candidate needs to show understanding of absurdist theories about reality and the way in which suggested windows and walls separate the audience from the action of the piece.. Innovation is the key to this answer and some innovative answers dealt with the concept of "new Rhinoceroses" appearing on a lower level as advertising boards rather than a "real Rhinoceros". These were still without a voice and were part of the concept of society being led or controlled by the "wave or influence" of the current ideology. The need to challenge the audience with the design ideas must be considered in order to create a fresh and imaginative response to this absurdist play. Students who had staged this play gave strong responses to this answer.

Question 5 (c)

This question was not answered

Question 6 NEW ZEALAND THEATRE: THE MAORI VOICE

No one answered questions in this section

Question 7 NEW ZEALAND THEATRE: LOOKING AT OURSELVES

***Wednesday to Come* Renee**

Question 7 (a)

Candidates were asked to consider the role of Iris as an actor at the end of Act 1 when she is dealing with Granna and Molly.

This answer requires the audience 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 Iris and how the context of the setting affects her life as she struggles to be the family's pillar of strength. Actors must consider this role in relation to the use of body, voice, movement and space and they need to convey the process of how she deals with the "Chorus" nature of Granna's diary, where she has to hear the judgemental comments from the journal and maintain her equilibrium whilst facing the tension that comes from Molly arriving at the house. Molly who is the mistress confronts the wife and ultimately Iris loses her self control. In this scene the audience should feel sympathy with Iris, and understand the subtext in her behaviour which comes from grief. Strong responses dealt with each part of the question equally and understood that although Iris is written as pragmatic at this point in the play the tension becomes too much for even Iris. They clearly describe the actors physical and vocal interpretation in relationship to the other characters and showed the pressures that she was feeling with an uncharacteristic loss of temper. Effective use of textual reference supported these stronger responses and gave their answers a through line that could be followed clearly.

Question 7 (b)

Candidates were asked to consider costume design in relation to the social message of *Wednesday to Come* and the setting of the play and how their ideas would help the audience understand this message.

This was a costume design question which had to be discussed from a strong understanding of the idea of Overall Production Concept. This design question required an understanding of setting and era and how these would relate to the privations the family would have experienced. Detail is required of the costumes of the main characters and although not all characters need to be considered the main characters should be addressed with descriptions and labelled diagrams. The contrast between Molly and Iris should be made extremely clear in the costume choice. The idea of an overall colour palette which is also reflected in the set design choices was important and some candidates were able to demonstrate this understanding – that costume fits with the whole context of the play in terms of design.

Question 7 (c)

This question required candidates to answer as a director in terms of how they would interpret the use of space in the scene where Ben's sugar bag and carton are unpacked in Act 2. The candidates were also required to draw a diagram to explain their interpretation of how the space was used in the acting of this event on stage. The question required the candidates to establish the Overall Production Concept of the performance from a director's point of view and how the "kitchen" and the table within the space was a focus for the action. It was also important for the candidates to show how all the actors responded to the bringing in of the sack and how the unpacking of the sack impacted on them and how they reacted within the space should reflect this. Granna's positioning throughout this scene is also important to the overall effect of the scene and clearly the togetherness of the scene and situation should be reflected in the overall use of space.

This was answered well generally. Diagrams assisted the strong answers as well as a detailed breakdown of how each character related to the unpacking of the contents and where the actors would position themselves during the process. The Director also needed to interpret the dramatic techniques that the actors should use in response to the situation and referred to the diagram/s to support their answers. The stronger answers also reflected the effect this would have on the audience and the intention that they wanted to create as a result of the physical action of the extract