

8286 DRAMA

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

New Zealand based course

Report on the Written Examination paper 2 November 2019

General Comments

The candidates for the 2019 AS Drama examination responded to questions on six plays of the twelve set by the curriculum. Of the 72 responses from 36 candidates, 23 were on *Romeo and Juliet*, 29 on the political theatre of Fo and Brecht, seven each on Sophocles and Berkoff, and six students responded to *Bare* by Toa Fraser.

Broken down by question focus, 26 responses were to directing questions, 21 on acting, and 25 on some aspect of set/costume/OPC. Note that there is some crossover between set design/OPC questions and directing ones, so the preference of the students for a wide view of the plays was clear.

As always, students who provided textual evidence and good contextual understanding in support of a relentless focus on the question as asked were able to achieve high marks. Scores below 20 were received by the weakest exam scripts, each of which showed a tendency to neglect one or both answers.

One persistent feature that prevents candidates from high band marks: a tendency to begin responses with prepared preamble. Statements about the playwright's background and biography, social context, theatrical techniques and other factual material are interesting but must also be relevant. Unfortunately, unless the respondent connected that material directly to elements of the question being asked, they received little credit for those preambles. The material may testify to the candidate's preparation and fundamental knowledge, but credit could only be given when the preparation could be wedded to a consistent attempt to keep the question in focus.

The tension between prepared material and what the question was really asking was at times distressingly apparent. A stronger knowledge of the text itself would provide much of the support weaker answers needed. The ability to connect quotes from the text to aspects of the questions is at the core of the AS Drama examination.

There was a balance in this year's examination questions to enable candidates with a strong interest in OPC (set, design, lighting) to thrive. Candidates who prefer to tackle the acting/directing focused questions should remember that textual allusion and quotation need to be the primary support for discussion and directing choices.

Some students scored maximum points (when writing about Berkoff, Sophocles and Brecht). It proved more difficult to excel in writing about Shakespeare and Fo. In those responses, pre-prepared material took up too much of the candidates' valuable mark-scoring time and effort.

It was encouraging to see examples of broader knowledge in some responses. Some candidates showed they had taken seriously the class arguments made by Fo. There was evidence of feminist awareness in some discussions of the character and social context of Juliet and several appropriate mentions of climate change as a pressing political issue.