

## 8286 DRAMA

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

New Zealand based course

Report on the Written Examination paper 2 November 2018

### General Comments

In 2018, FOUR schools were involved in the AS Level Drama examination. Of the TWELVE plays examined, answers were attempted for SEVEN: *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!*, *Metamorphosis*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mother Courage and her Children*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *Bare*. No students attempted to answer the Greek Theatre questions, or the questions on *The Miser*, *Waiting for Godot*, or *Ka-Shue*. The plays favoured by candidates were clustered thus: Shakespearean Drama (TEN answers), Comedy of Manners (FIVE answers), Political Theatre (EIGHTEEN answers), British Contemporary (FOUR answers) and New Zealand (NINE answers.)

This year's examination leaned toward questions of set design and directing, and a majority of answers (26 out of 46) were in response to these. The other 20 responses were to questions focussed on acting and performance.

There were a few examples of candidates misreading instructions and answering BOTH questions on a single play (only one could be credited).

Weaker responses tended to demonstrate some knowledge of basic plot, character names, and perhaps a scene or two. These responses sometimes spent valuable time cataloguing rote knowledge (about the author, the author's background and philosophy, publication/performance history, and/or plot) rather than clearly and directly addressing the question. A similar weakness was sometimes displayed in more successful responses, where an eagerness to display general knowledgeability led responses away from relevance to the question.

Another challenge for candidates was the use of OPC ('Overall Production Concept') in responses. Generalised description of OPCs (often taken from staging produced during class) took time from more relevant material. This is true particularly of this year's answers on set design and on acting; both were too often presaged by very general discussions of an OPC and its many elements.

Candidates who mustered (accurate) quotations from the text tended to write more focussed responses, particularly regarding acting and directing. The ability to recreate detail from plays depends on confident quotation of text; this year only a few candidates displayed that confidence.

On the matter of detail, some very entertaining and descriptive work was achieved by students who wrote about their experiences with actual performances of the play in question. Whether these were their own staging of scenes, or as audience members for performance, the sense of seeing a living piece of theatre helped some responses measurably.

Generally, this points to the usefulness of imagination in drama, and in the study of drama. A student who was able to fully imagine acting a role, directing a production, designing costumes, or creating a set design received marks at the higher end of the mark scheme. An inhabited and living sense of involvement with theatrical performance engendered higher marks than a rote knowledge of a play's basic elements.

Time management seemed generally better among 2018's candidates in the two-answer format of the AS Level Drama examination. Still too often a thorough and engaged response for a first response was followed by a hasty and incomplete response for the second question. Generally, the (few) diagrams and illustrations helped provide necessary clarity for responses.

Above all, the ability to successfully imagine the practicalities of stage and performance and to describe those imaginings in evocative detail shone through in superior work in this examination. A confident imaginative approach, embracing textual material, sketches, stage descriptions, actor awareness, and audience response is the ideal to which a candidate should aspire.