



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Drama and Theatre Studies

DRAM1B

(Specification 2240)

Unit 1B: Prescribed Play

Report on the Examination

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DRAM1B - Prescribed Play

General comments

Examiners reported seeing responses across the range of texts, with the most popular continuing to be *Antigone* and *A Doll's House*. It was clear from the majority of responses that most candidates had gained at least a reasonable understanding of their chosen text and were able to, for the most part, address the demands of the question. Good responses revealed a well-structured and focused understanding of the requirements of the specified sections, and drew upon background knowledge in an informed and coherent manner that explored the relationship between text and performance.

Coverage of extract

- the best responses revealed through apposite reference to a range of moments from across the specified section that the candidates had clearly understood the whole text, and were able to use the text to bring their answers to life
- candidates must be prepared for questions that refer to any length of extract. In order to succeed there is an expectation that, within either a comparatively short or lengthy extract, they will be focusing on the key moments that will allow them to address the specific demands of the question
- better responses in performance-based questions demonstrated that the candidate had thought about what all the performers were doing on stage, particularly when the reactions of characters other than the central one demanded by the question, helped to inform the audience's understanding of their situation
- in a minority of cases, examiners reported incidences of candidates who had written on entirely the wrong section; in these cases it was very difficult to award marks for anything other than a generalised understanding of role.

Use of text and quotation

- examiners reported that the requirement for candidates to make detailed and precise reference to the text was generally improving. Without this reference to text, answers become generalised, and performance or directorial details become sketchy. Making reference to the odd word from a character's speech or referring in loose terms to 'the whole speech' are unlikely to elicit satisfactory responses, as it is often very difficult to visualise the candidate's desired intentions
- stronger responses linked precise ideas to very specific moments, developing these across several lines of text which therefore allowed for the performances to be built up.

Genre and context

- it was pleasing to note that far fewer candidates prefaced their answer with generic biographies, backgrounds or historical diatribes about their text. There are, however, still some candidates who completely ignored any reference to genre and/or context or paid so little attention to it – simply stating that, for example, Tiresias in *Antigone* would enter from the left parados or that *The Taming of the Shrew* is a comedy by Shakespeare – as to be of little use
- the best responses made use of contextual knowledge to inform the practice on stage and this often helped to reveal an understanding of the playwright's intentions. It also continues to be useful that candidates make some reference to the context of the specified section in order to demonstrate an awareness of the characters' situation. Where candidates have done this it often helped to invest their performance or directorial decisions with greater significance.

Transpositions

- examiners reported far fewer attempts by candidates to transpose the original period or setting to an alternative, with the exception of *The Taming of the Shrew*, where some candidates effectively justified these decisions with close reference to the context of the specified scenes.

Types of questions

- candidates should be reminded that there is no prescribed format for questions in this paper, and that they should be prepared to answer regardless of which text is being studied from the perspective of performer, director or designer, and that across each of these areas there will always be a specific focus that the candidates need to address. Examiners reported some instances where candidates appear to have only read part of the question or had attempted to mould the question to suit something that they had previously considered. When preparing their work on set texts, candidates should be presented with a range of possibilities allowing for a personal response to any question set
- performance-based questions should be answered in the first person, as adopting a directorial standpoint rarely allows for complete success. Many candidates strayed into the realms of discussing other characters on stage in more detail than the one required by the question. This was particularly significant in some answers on Tiresias where, although some thought to Creon's responses is entirely valid, many candidates ended up discussing his performance in greater detail than that of Tiresias.

Finally, it must be reiterated that the road to success in this paper lies through precise, purposeful and practical detail that is firmly rooted in the text and that, in order to be successful, candidates should write with precision using a range of appropriate vocabulary to describe voice, movement and interaction between characters. The use of colloquialism and terminology derived from popular culture rarely produces effective responses.

Antigone

Question 01

This was by far the more popular of the two questions on *Antigone* and many answers concentrated very well on the focus of the question which was how Tiresias's performance creates a reaction of respect in the audience. The nature of his character, his blindness, his knowledge and his approach to Creon were discussed well in many answers and the audience response of gaining respect was well justified. In the less successful responses there was often very little indication of what Tiresias was saying or why. With insufficient reference to the text, the basis for him to gain respect is largely lost. Some candidates managed to answer without any reference to Tiresias's blindness, and the presence of the boy caused some confusion. In some otherwise good answers, the idea of respect was considered but not in relation to Tiresias's own performance, relying on that of the Chorus or Creon to create the effect. Many responses failed to consider the whole section with many candidates spending an inordinate amount of time on Tiresias's entrance, often explaining this in very great detail but with the result that the prophecies towards the end of the section were almost completely ignored.

Question 02

The candidates who answered with reference to the Chorus tended to be both very clear and theatrically effective with their suggestions or extremely generalised, showing insufficient understanding. Although not specifically required in the wording of the question, some indication of certain aspects of how the Chorus would be performed was essential as a prerequisite to the presentation of the scene. More explicit decisions about the number of actors involved, the use of males or females, the types of ages and vocal qualities, would all, if considered, have led to more accurate answers and would have enabled the candidates to visualise the scene much more effectively on stage. Where candidates had thought in these terms it was clear for them to suggest how they might be positioned and divided on stage, helping to reflect their attitude towards Antigone. Indeed, it was this aspect of the question which seemed to cause the most problems for students, many of whom seemed unsure as to what attitude they wished to create, sometimes being confused as to whether this should be sympathy, respect, or annoyance. Given that the specified section for this question was not particularly long, many candidates failed to make sufficient use of the text to demonstrate any real understanding of it.

The Taming of the Shrew

Question 03

Although not a particularly popular text, examiners reported seeing some excellent responses to this question that fully addressed its demands. Most candidates recognised Tranio's function in the specified scene and were at least aware of some of the aspects of his character that contribute to the scheming of the plot in this section. Better responses demonstrated an understanding of the full range of his scheming, considering aspects of his relationship with Hortensio, Lucentio and Bianca and then his manipulation with the Pedant/Merchant. Some candidates spent too long on the opening section, particularly those who devoted too much time establishing a transposed context – although in some cases these were quite inventive and useful, particularly where fully justified by the themes of the play – for example, the role of women (transposed into the 1960s). Good answers showed a real understanding of comic conventions, with them making full opportunity of Tranio's relationship with members of the audience through a variety of winks and asides to them.

Weaker responses failed to engage fully with the text or became so embroiled in explaining Tranio's new-found enjoyment of being a 'master' that they lost sight of the comedy inherent within the text. Similarly, some candidates attempted to make everything that Tranio did fit into a Commedia style and this also sometimes got in the way of exploring his scheming. At their best, answers to this question revealed some highly inventive performance ideas that included precise reference to movement, voice, and relationships with others on stage which really brought the text to life and demonstrated sound understanding of its potential.

Question 04

There were very few examples of this question, and examiners reported seeing a narrow range of responses. Candidates who did attempt it generally failed to offer any clear justifications for their ideas, one in particular choosing to set the scene in an Islamic state and dressing all the characters (including Petruccio) in purple robes. As has been previously stated, transposition isn't necessarily a bad idea but does require some contact with the text that was not sufficiently explored or developed in this example. Some candidates appeared to be uncertain of what intended effects they were attempting to create for an audience and simply offered rather simple ideas for their chosen characters (frequently without any sketches) or resorted to generalised direction for the scene as a whole. Additionally, some candidates, although discussing costume, failed to consider any props or accessories for the characters.

A Doll's House

Question 05

This was marginally the more popular of the two questions on *A Doll's House* and revealed the full range of responses. At their best, candidates gave a clear overview of Rank's character, discussing his development from his initial appearance of comparative optimism to his acceptance of his death. Most candidates paid some attention to his appearance, and this usually helped to set the period of the play, although lengthy descriptions in minute detail were not particularly helpful in highlighting how the character changed. The best responses offered some highly detailed performance suggestions that demonstrated quite a subtle approach to his character and, in particular, his relationship with Nora. Unfortunately, some candidates failed to consider enough of the opening section so that the change into Act Three sometimes became very extreme. Weaker responses showed some lack of understanding about his relationships, with examiners reporting some answers that had him so jealous of Mrs Linde's presence that he started to appear as a Victorian villain, or when discussing the macaroons with Nora, was doing so in hushed tones because he was afraid, for himself, of Torvald over-hearing. In these rather exaggerated portrayals there was a lack of lightness of touch that meant that Rank's character would be unlikely to perform in the way he does subsequently in the play. On the whole his appearance in Act Three was dealt with in a more satisfactory manner, with a greater range of moments being considered that revealed better practical knowledge. Some candidates, however, implied that his physical (and mental) condition had deteriorated so badly that they appeared to have not recognised the time-scale of the play. Almost all candidates did, however, offer some practical performance suggestions that highlighted the character's change. The best responses considered precisely how Rank interacted with a range of characters, offering thoughtful and developed performance details that were closely related to the text and subtext.

Question 06

Examiners reported some polarisation of responses to this question, with the best providing very clear, explicitly expressed and thoughtful details regarding the state of Nora's and Torvald's relationship; to others, that either failed to make any direct reference to it, leaving the examiner attempting to work out what the candidate's intentions were through frequently very sketchy details, or offered a very simple statement of 'father/daughter' but then failing to fully address this through the practical analysis of the section. Candidates' ability to provide casting details were also polarised from very brief statements that did little more than suggest a height and age difference, some of these being so extreme that they revealed a lack of knowledge of the play. The best responses linked the casting details exactly to their interpretation, so that the image of a dominant or patronising Torvald was clearly presented through some carefully thought through period details with the same being true of a 'doll-like' Nora. Nearly all candidates considered the opening of the section with some quite well observed understanding of Nora's initial attempts at a dutiful response to Torvald. However, there were some examples that showed a lack of understanding of Nora's true motives, or were so extreme in their suggestions that Torvald would almost certainly question his wife's intentions. Although many candidates recognised that Nora might use her sexuality to entice her husband, some went to such extremes of behaviour, whilst still purporting to be both naturalistic and in keeping with the period that a Victorian would have most certainly been blushing! Surprisingly the section of the text that appeared to receive the least attention was the actual introduction of the debate about Krogstad, with many candidates jumping from Nora's initial approach to Torvald to his anger with her. Similarly, few candidates tackled the very end of the section, possibly due to lack of time. Better answers focused equally on Nora and Torvald; however, many failed to provide a clear directorial approach and chose instead to focus more on the performance of one or other of the characters – in these cases it was particularly difficult for them to establish and maintain the demand on interpreting the relationship.

The Shadow of a Gunman

Question 07

This was a reasonably popular question, and one that was generally well approached. Most candidates were fully aware of the part that Davoren plays in this section of the play, and demonstrated some reasonable knowledge of the text. Similarly, most made at least some reference to his guilt, although in weaker responses this failed to 'grow', with candidates recognising little change in Davoren's behaviour or attitude between the start and the end of the section. Better responses explained precisely what aspects of his character were likely to demonstrate guilt, the most common being his cowardice and his fear of being caught up in the action, with some well-developed and subtle ideas about his relationship with Minnie Powell. Simpler answers focused exclusively on Davoren's lines from the text, but where this was the case, there was often an over-simplification and a lack of development, with the lines being delivered almost in isolation of the action going on around him. More sophisticated responses considered the section as a whole and the ways in which they would perform Davoren, particularly at times when he doesn't speak (which is actually quite a significant amount of the section). Some candidates' interpretations bordered on the melodramatic, and given the cramped conditions of the tenement and the reactions of the other characters, these failed to be entirely convincing. There were, however, many interesting ideas that demonstrated a clear change in Davoren's vocal and physical qualities as the character becomes increasingly more despairing.

Question 08

This was the least popular question on the paper with only a handful of candidates tackling it. Of those that did, there was only some understanding of both the term visual elements and also how they might be used to establish appropriate mood and atmosphere – although nearly all focused on the claustrophobia and squalor of the room. Most candidates opted for an entirely naturalistic approach, with some adding more symbolic touches, one notable example being where the candidate had piles of paper littering the set, which, although potentially interesting, wasn't exploited as to how this would be used. This was a common feature of answers to this question, that there was little recognition of the fact that the specified section includes several entrances and exits where in fact the mood might change – few candidates moved beyond set design, failing to recognise how lighting might play an important part in the creation of mood and atmosphere. Candidates tackling design questions must be aware that there is generally a requirement for them to do more than simply outline, as in this case, the set. Where sketches did appear, these didn't always reflect any understanding by the candidate that actors would be required to inhabit the space – cramped conditions still require room for some movement!

Oh What a Lovely War

Question 09

Some answers had a very clear audience response based on precise understanding of the roles and their relevance in context. The tragedy of the Irish Sergeant's scene was evoked by a variety of methods but created suitable audience responses, usually of a mixture of sympathy and amusement. Mrs Pankhurst was recognised as an unusually strong woman for her day, and her battle with the crowd was tackled through a range of performance ideas, and admiration and empathy were created effectively. The role of the Nurse was possibly the least successful, as many candidates seemed unsure exactly what response they wanted, and were quite imprecise about reference to the section. Weaker responses reflected a similar lack of understanding of the play in relation to the other two choices too. The black comedy of the Irish scene was not recognised or applied, and Mrs Pankhurst was presented as being in favour of the war (one extreme case suggested she should be smoking a cigar to indicate her similarity to "Churchill, the Prime Minister at the time"). Other candidates who had done their own research and discovered her link to the Suffragettes assumed this speech was actually about Votes for Women.

Question 10

This was marginally the more popular of the two questions on this text, and although the general idea of each of the songs seemed to be clear for most candidates, few seemed very precise about the way the song fitted into the context of the play, and how it should be performed. The answers created an impression that the candidates hadn't always considered the effect that the words and music were intended to have on the audience, both in terms of Littlewood's intent or their own. Relatively few candidates provided sufficient detail about the style of the singing, the quality of the music or what, if any, instruments would be used, and many failed to quote any lines of the actual song, treating the whole in a generic way. The use of the newspanel and the slides referred to in the text of the play do not necessarily have to be adhered to, but the fact the script indicates their use should have been addressed and variations indicated. Some ideas for the changing effects and multitude of props and pieces of scenery could only have been achieved through a film, rather than in the theatre. Some candidates failed to explicitly identify the mood of each song, and therefore didn't consider the need to establish a contrast, whilst others provided ideas for, in

particular, 'I'll Make a Man of you', that were at best salacious, and at worst entirely out of keeping with the period. In some cases, it would appear that the candidate had never really thought about the staging of the songs, and presented ideas that were little more than a literal physical rendition of the text.

Playhouse Creatures

Question 11

In many responses to this question, candidates started out by clearly identifying the contrast between the three characters, with this being addressed very precisely with appropriate details of character, voice, physicality and costume, all of which had the potential to provide useful material. Unfortunately, quite a number became less effective as they progressed, losing the focus on contrast, and lapsing into a more general discussion which simply considered the direction of the scene. Relatively few candidates made use of the extract from Macbeth, failing to realise that this was a rehearsal, not a performance, and missing some opportunities to consider aspects of Mrs Betterton's style and approach, and her instructions to Doll. Other answers were somewhat distorted by candidates who became obsessed with making the three different, as though it was essential they should be vastly different in terms of height, build, colouring, costume, as well as the other more relevant aspects of age, experience and social class. Some answers made insufficient use of textual references in order to support comments made, or to make the significance of contrast more theatrically relevant, and when dealing with the acting lesson lost a sense of the question, choosing only to discuss how this moment could be realised for comic value.

Question 12

The answers on Mrs Marshall were at their most effective when the candidate clearly understood the fact that a range of audience responses could be created at different moments in the section. Few candidates paid more than lip-service to the first part of Scene Eight, although there were several examples of candidates who were overly intent on revealing the sub-text of Mrs Marshall's performance as being a metaphor for the position of women in the theatre, at the expense of considering how she might perform in an appropriate style; these often failed to recognise exactly what was happening during the end of the performance, and therefore misunderstood her reaction to Nell. Many candidates then skipped to the end of Scene Nine, and whilst most recognised that the audience should respond in a particular way to her re-entrance covered in the muck, several were unable to express this in an effective way as a result of the performance details offered. On a more practical note, very few answers indicated what they would use as the manure, and even less offered any practical indication as to how the removal of it would be dealt with. At their best, answers to this question offered clear and precise detail about Mrs Marshall's character, identifying her youth and her beauty as being key in creating and altering the audience's response to her.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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