

GCE English Language and Literature

Case Study 1

Torquay Boys' Grammar School

Unit 2 Coursework

Explorations in Drama

Edexcel is grateful to the staff and students for their collaboration in supplying guidance and examples of student work

Case Study 1

TORQUAY BOYS' GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Students in this centre studied together Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*. The teachers guided the students towards a range of critical materials, including website research, *EMC e magazine* and collections of critical essays. Students were then presented with a range of titles from which to choose for their Explorative Studies:

1. "Henry has more in common with Cassius than with Brutus as an effective leader." In the light of this quotation, compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare dramatically presents leadership in 'Henry V' and 'Julius Caesar'.
2. "Shakespeare argues that absolute power should be celebrated". Despite this assertion, compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare dramatically presents a message about the dangers of absolute power in 'Julius Caesar' and 'Henry V'.
3. "Rhetoric makes things happen, on a frightening scale" (Nuttall, 2007) Compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare dramatically presents the power of language and its effects in scenes of your choice from 'Henry V' and 'Julius Caesar'.
(You may wish to select the Harfleur/ Crispian speeches and Antony's funeral oration, for example)
4. Shakespeare is preoccupied with "the masculine self-interest of the Elizabethan court" (Khan). Compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare dramatically presents the theme of self-interest within male relationships in 'Henry V' and 'Julius Caesar'.
5. "Political assassination and waging war are presented by Shakespeare as morally justifiable." In view of this statement, compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare dramatically presents the moral justification for bloodshed in 'Henry V' and 'Julius Caesar'.
6. "The factors that render someone an effective king are nor necessarily morally admirable ones." (Maus, 1997) In the light of this assertion, compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare dramatically presents the moral dilemmas of a leader in 'Henry V' and 'Julius Caesar'.

Moderator's comments:

This approach allows teachers and students the security of studying the plays together initially and yet encouraging more independent work as their explorations develop. Notice how the tasks not only invite students to consider all four assessment objectives but also give the student a 'critical hook': something to get their teeth into and argue about. This scaffolding approach by centres is much more productive than, for example, 'Discuss the tragic heroes in...' or 'Compare the presentation of women in ...' The results, as you can see from the explorative study below, are that students produce pieces that are evaluative and analytical because they have been encouraged to engage with, and debate, the ideas underlying the texts.

This centre has also, over the course of the syllabus, developed a range of approaches to the Creative Critical Response, allowing students to choose from a variety of task types that have been successful in allowing access to top bands of the two assessment objectives but at the same time developing their own creative responses. Tasks that have been used effectively include:

1. Write a RSC director's blog entry after the opening performance of *Henry V* where he discusses the challenges of the production.

2. Script an extract from an internet forum where A Level English students gather to compare ideas and seek advice. The discussion concerns a plea from a student about an essay he has to write on Shakespeare's handling of Henry's motivations.
3. Produce an excerpt from Radio 4's Any Questions with Kenneth Branagh and Laurence Olivier answering questions from the audience on what influenced their differing interpretations of Henry V, with host Jonathan Dimbleby. Set in 1989, on the release of Branagh's film.
4. Script a podcast of an interview for a Radio 4 arts programme with Marlon Brando, star of the 1953 film adaptation in which he is questioned about his portrayal of Antony.
5. Imagine that Shakespeare has had to defend himself in court against charges of censorship contravention after writing Henry V. write about the courts case in the style of a local newspaper report.

Moderator's comments:

What is key here is that these tasks all give the students a clear steer towards the expected form, register and audience. This makes it much easier to assess the candidate's performance on Assessment Objective 1. The task also offer the candidates a clear critical agenda to pursue so that the critical awareness required of AO4 is developed fully.

The work displayed with this case study was awarded 62 and 18 marks.