

DRAMA

Paper 9482/11 Open-Book Written Examination
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Key messages

Candidates who appear to have had 'hands-on' experience of directing extracts from their chosen set texts, of performing different characters - even in a workshop setting – or of generating their own designs for the plays, clearly benefited from having had practical experiences to draw upon in their responses to the various 'practical' demands of the examination questions.

Most questions attracted answers reflecting a range of candidate achievement. The majority of candidates approached the tasks set, in their chosen question option, in a practical way, but there were some answers that betrayed a more literary approach to the study of their selected text.

General comments

Candidates should be reminded that, in **Section A**, material that does not relate specifically to the prescribed lines will not be credited.

In **Section B**, most candidates selected appropriate sections of the play to support their ideas and to meet the brief of the question; but this was not always the case.

Candidates who chose to respond to the design-based questions frequently included appropriately sized and labelled sketches which were pertinent to their chosen question, illustrated their ideas very clearly and were fully credit-worthy.

Many candidates did not respond to the requirement to make pertinent reference to the style, genre and/or context of their chosen text; others incorporated 'blocks' of pre-prepared SGC information which had not been tailored to match the demands of the question or of the extract set, in **Section A**, so that this aspect of their answer was often largely irrelevant.

The greatest barrier to candidates' success was misreading the question, answering as a performer when the subject of the question asked for direction or of ignoring the precise question focus and so missing out on the opportunity to attract credit for relevant material.

Questions in **Section A** always demand that candidates illustrate their answers with reference to 'particular moments' from the extract, while question in **Section B** specify the number of sections required to support candidates' discussion of the question task. Most, but not all, candidates followed the relevant guidance in this regard and those who did not rarely achieved their potential for success.

Candidates who used short but entirely appropriate quotations to support their practical ideas always fared better than those who did not. In **Section B**, where editions of the plays are not prescribed, candidates should be reminded not to use page or line numbers to identify moments from the text. Use of ellipses, in place of quoted text, should also be avoided, as so frequently the sense of the quotation is lost.

Candidates generally responded well to a range of question in this June series, where *As You Like It*, *A View from the Bridge* and *Small Island* were the more popular texts in **Section A** and *Oedipus Rex*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *Blood Wedding*, were the most frequently chosen texts in **Section B**.

Whatever perspective candidates were writing from, they need to be reminded that only through the use of carefully chosen textual support can they access the higher mark levels where the descriptors refer to the selected detail 'strongly' supporting the practical interpretation, in Level 5, and 'effectively' supporting the practical interpretation for Level 4. In some answers, candidates had offered no textual support, thus inhibiting their potential to reach the higher levels.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

As You Like it

- (a) It was clear that many candidates had a good understanding of the volatile character of Duke Frederick and how he might conduct himself in the given extract.

Some candidates introduced their responses with a succinct summary of the background to Duke Frederick's hostility towards Rosalind, having usurped her father's Dukedom.

Better candidates always kept the question focus at the forefront of their answers and concentrated on providing an interpretation of Duke Frederick's character. Many successful candidates chose to focus on the unreasonable and vindictive aspects of Duke Frederick's character, and they frequently made useful suggestions for how these qualities might be presented using his stern tone of voice, his glowering facial expressions and his unpredictable movements, to illustrate his anger with Rosalind.

Many candidates differentiated between Frederick's agitated and harsh treatment of Rosalind and his manner with his daughter, Celia, by commenting on his change of tone, softened facial expressions and gentler hand gestures. Others interpreted his attitude towards Celia as one of utter frustration.

Some candidates presented Frederick as something of a 'pantomime villain', and when this approach was justified by the candidate, this was also an acceptable reading of his character.

- (b) Candidates revealed an awareness of the close, 'sisterly' bond which exists between the cousins, Rosalind and Celia.

Some candidates made it clear from the outset that they were offering a 'contemporary' transposition of the play, and they set the scene in Celia's bedroom where some kind of 'pyjama party/sleepover' event was in progress. The girls were depicted deep in 'girl-talk', as some candidates described it, while trying on outfits or make-up, while they discussed Orlando. As the girls sat closely together, holding hands in some answers, lying on the floor on their stomachs in others, their mutual affection and good humour were clearly depicted.

Some candidates attempted to illustrate the affinity between Celia and Rosalind through costume design: with both girls wearing similar costumes but in different colours or wearing different 'outfits', but in the same colour. While this was not an inappropriate choice, only those who used costume to amplify directorial strategies, rather than relying entirely on costume to show the relationship, made this interpretation work.

Many good answers were seen where Celia's protectiveness of Rosalind was clearly foregrounded. For example, by Celia stepping in front of Rosalind to protect her from Duke Frederick's wrath and by Celia comforting Rosalind after his exit. Nearly all candidates focused on the sacrifices which Celia was prepared to make for her cousin Rosalind and on Rosalind's evident gratitude for her love and support. After Frederick departs, the cousins' mutual love leading them to plan their escape together, confirmed their close bond and willingness to take risks to stay together.

Most candidates used the text well to illustrate their responses.

Style, Genre, Content

Those who referred to the comic action of the play or its pastoral genre were more successful than those who simply stated that it was written by William Shakespeare and performed at the Globe theatre.

Question 2

The Rivals

This play was a minority choice.

- (a) This was the more popular of the questions. In general, there was an understanding of the comedy of the extract. However, several candidates misunderstood David's cautionary advice and were unable to draw out the comedy from the relationship between 'Master' and 'Servant'.

Most candidates focused on the irony of the fact that Acres did not know that Absolute was 'Beverley', but among these, few candidates knew how to create comedy from this in practical terms. Some candidates resorted to generalised 'comic' tropes such as David 'dropping things' – where the 'things' in question were not specified, or 'falling over' at random moments, which showed limited comic invention. Candidates appeared unfamiliar with the idea that the power of the comedy resides in the delivery of specific lines and the actors' reactions to what each is saying.

Successful candidates did see the comedy in David's apparent dominance over Acres; they had some good ideas for contrasting Acres' show of bravado with his true cowardly feelings which are manifested throughout the 'argument' about 'honour' and 'ancestors' in the first half of the extract.

In the second section, candidates exploited the comedy of Absolute's amusement about Acres' challenge of himself as 'Beverley'. Many extracted good comic 'mileage' from Bob's redefinition of himself as 'Fighting Bob' in the hope of discouraging his opponent who (unbeknownst to him) stands before him. Practical suggestions for Acres' posturing – puffing out his chest and generally adopting the poses and tones of a conquering hero – were often successful.

- (b) This was not as popular as (a) but there were some, generally straightforward, answers seen, where candidates had familiarised themselves with the fashions of the late eighteenth century.

Many of the responses illustrated vaguely appropriate costume designs for the characters of Absolute and David.

Absolute was most frequently dressed in a military uniform – only more successful candidates described one appropriate to the period – and David was dressed in neutral coloured clothing (sometimes inappropriately patched/worn/mismatched) to illustrate his relative 'poverty', being a servant.

Many answers revealed a lack of understanding of Acres' desire to appear 'aristocratic' as well as a lack of understanding of the convention of the period of servants being 'liveried' as a mark of their employers' rank.

Several candidates chose to costume the Servant, who announces Absolute's arrival, as a second character. This was generally not well attempted.

One or two candidates designed costumes for characters who do not appear in the extract – for Mrs Malaprop and for Lydia. These answers attracted no credit.

Style, Genre, Content

Very few candidates commented on the genre, the style or the period of the play.

Question 3

A View from the Bridge

This was the most popular text. It should be noted that, in general, while many candidates demonstrated that they knew the text well, in some instances, they did not answer the precise focus of the question selected.

- (a) This was one of the most attempted questions, and many good and some excellent responses were seen.

The most successful answers centred on the question's precise demand to explore the intense emotions experienced by the characters as the play reaches its climax.

Some candidates did not identify any emotion experienced by any character.

Most frequently selected moments/intense emotions included Catherine's anger and bitterness as she shouts at Eddie and calls him a 'rat' who belongs in the 'garbage' followed by Beatrice's tearful defence of Eddie and her sincere wishes for Catherine's happiness, despite not being able to attend the wedding.

Most candidates focused on Catherine's contrasting interaction with Eddie from what she showed in the early part of the play. Many candidates focused on her intense emotion of resentment towards Eddie, shown through a lack of eye contact with him, except when criticising him, and they commented on her keeping her physical distance from him – and this before his betrayal is uncovered.

Many candidates focused on the sudden appearance of Rodolpho with his desperate warning about Marco they 'directed' Rodolpho's emotional apology to Eddie, which Eddie rebuffs.

There were some excellent ideas for highlighting intense emotions during Beatrice's chilling accusation of Eddie and his stupefied horror at hearing his feelings for Catherine actually named out loud.

Some candidates acknowledged a production which they had seen (most frequently this was Ivo Von Hove's production for the National Theatre) and successfully integrated some of his staging idea for the final section of the extract into their responses. Many candidates dealt extensively with the death of Eddie.

(b) This costume designer's question was chosen by only a few candidates.

In general, candidates were able to describe the costumes of both Beatrice and Catherine. Some included detailed sketches and others offered minimal drawings. In the latter category, candidates often offered sketches for individual parts of a costume such as a veil for Catherine, or a posy, and a hat for Beatrice.

The most successful candidates had done some research into the fashion of the period setting and designed costumes that were entirely appropriate both for the period and for the circumstances under which Rodolpho and Catherine organise this hasty marriage.

In better answers, candidates noted the fact that the Carbone family do not have a great deal of money, that Eddie is opposed to the marriage, and that the wedding is arranged quickly and (some would say) expediently, and that there is little expectation that there will be wedding guests other than the immediate family.

In these answers, costume designs were modest, they were economical/practical, and they reflected Catherine's youth and Beatrice's maturity.

Other answers appeared to ignore the economic factors as well as the period that the play is set and the generally sombre tone of the event – with Marco about to be deported and Eddie refusing to attend. Putting all of these circumstances aside, a significant number of candidates went for the 'Big Wedding' effect with metres of white lace, satin bodices, veils and even a tiara for Catherine. Candidates devoted one or more full page(s) to drawings of full length bridal gowns – often very contemporary in appearance - and sketches of accessories/shoes/posies.

In more appropriate designs, if jewellery was mentioned, it was described as having been 'handed down' or made of 'paste' and Catherine, though almost always in white, was wearing an outfit that could be worn again in 'real life' – some suggested that Rodolpho might have made a modest dress for her.

In general, candidates were more successful in their designs for Beatrice. Most acknowledge that she would be in her best clothes rather than clothes bought for the occasion (as stated in the text) and the fabric and colours were more muted.

A number of candidates who attempted this question appeared to believe that Beatrice and Catherine are sisters. In one answer, Beatrice's handbag was covered in blood and concealed a 'bloody knife'.

Style, Genre, Content

Candidates were knowledgeable about America in the period of the play, the situation regarding illegal immigrants and the importance of family to the Italian community. However, in most cases, this information was not integrated into their responses but was included as a separate paragraph either at the beginning or end of their answers.

Question 4

The Beatification of Area Boy

No responses were seen.

Question 5

Small Island

- (a) A number of candidates wrote about *Small Island*. **Question (a)** attracted more candidates than **Question (b)**.

Most candidates recognised that the meeting takes place following Hortense's unsuccessful and humiliating experience at her interview for a teaching post in post-war London.

Most candidates adopted a director's role, although some only offered a narrative of the scene's events.

Better candidates appreciated that their task was to convey an interpretation of the relationship between Hortense and Gilbert at this point and that this would require them to define that relationship at the outset.

There was often a clear focus on how Gilbert might display his nervousness as he waits for Hortense, showing his concern for her feelings. Some candidates suggested that he would be pacing and looking around for her to appear.

Candidates recognised that Hortense's humiliation fuelled her reluctance to encounter Gilbert by walking away from him and not wishing to engage with him at all. Both of which helped to illustrate her feelings of humiliation. Some candidates made use of 'the Passerby' to highlight the status of the pair as 'unwanted' outsiders in London, both humiliating for them, but also helping them to come together in their joint dismay at the actions and attitudes of their new 'hosts'.

When Hortense finally admits to her degrading experience and her mistake with the cupboard, candidates seized on Gilbert's ability not only to find humour in the discussion of Hortense's mishap with the cupboard, but to encourage Hortense to laugh at herself, and to join with him in mocking the interviewers who allowed her to undergo this degradation.

More successful candidates offered ideas for Gilbert's teasing of Hortense to show his empathy for her; the way he looks at her and holds her eye-contact, his smiling face which finally earns a smile in return, and Hortense's gradual acceptance of his concern for her. Candidates often showed a subtlety in their understanding of how this event, and their reaction to it, marked a change in their relationship.

- (b) Most candidates who attempted this option showed a clear understanding of Hortense's situation and her feelings at this point in the play.

However, only in better answers did candidates focus on the main thrust of the question which required them to identify the audience responses to Hortense that they wanted to achieve, through her performance.

In strong answers, candidates began by outlining their preferred audience responses to Hortense which included sympathy for her, due to the extreme 'culture-shock' that Hortense experiences and

because of her humiliation in the education office. Others focused on an audience's likely respect for Hortense's sense of her own identity and her determination to uphold her own high standards of living, even in the unpromising squalor and the discrimination that she finds in London.

Some candidates focused more on the comic aspects of her somewhat self-righteous character and suggested that an audience might be amused at Hortense's overly serious approach to life. Candidate also thought that an audience would begin to warm to Hortense as she begins to warm to Gilbert whom the audience have come to like.

In strong answers, these intended audience responses became the focus for careful attention to the performer's communication of Hortense's character and her situation, through detailed suggestions for her facial and physical expression as well as for the delivery of individual 'key' lines of text.

Style, Genre, Content

This question gave rise to many prepared answers which focused on the time period, the Windrush generation and the prejudice which existed. Only more successful candidates integrated these into their respective answers and so illustrated their relevance.

Some candidates also mentioned the generally comic tone of the extract and others wrote quite well about the play's unusual mix of theatrical styles.

Section B

Question 6

Oedipus Rex

- (a) There were three specific requirements in this question: candidates had to refer to one or more design element(s), they had to state their intended effects, and they had to apply the chosen elements to achieve these effects in reference to two separate sections of the play.

Some candidates did not meet these specific demands. While one or more design element was generally discussed, candidates seldom identified their intended effects and did not always reference two separate sections of the play.

The most frequently chosen design elements were costume and lighting, but examiners also saw answers that involved set, sound and make-up.

Where candidates identified their intended effects, these were most frequently cited as, for example, creating tension, creating a sense of mystery, creating horror when Jocasta's suicide is discovered and when Oedipus appears with bloody eye-sockets. Some candidates mentioned an intention to highlight the power of the gods over mortals.

Many candidates did not identify a potential effect, the absence of which, rendered any design ideas that they did put forward ineffective.

Costume ideas often showed a lack of understanding of the Greek context. Many references to togas, for example, illustrated only a slight grasp of the play's setting.

With one or two exceptions, lighting suggestions were restricted to the use of spotlights and coloured gels, suggesting a limited technical vocabulary and possibly limited technical experience.

- (b) The focus of this performer's question was on highlighting Creon's strength of character.

In several, less successful responses, candidates simply wrote a 'character study' type answer on Creon paying little regard to how his role would be performed.

In more successful answers, candidates integrated their knowledge of the character with their suggestions about how best to enact the role to emphasise Creon's strength of character.

Where candidates dealt with Creon's strength of character they normally referred to his confidence in the Oracle's message that Thebes may be 'cleansed', to Creon's resilience in rebutting Oedipus' accusations of treachery and in his fairness and kindness to Oedipus at the end of the play, when the balance of power has shifted in his favour.

Strong answers referred in detail to two clear sections of the play and they used references to the delivery of the text as well as to Creon's physical and facial expression, to support an interpretation of Creon's strength.

Style, Genre, Content

Many candidates made some comments about Thebes as a City State and about ancient Greece, generally. Grecian costume was occasionally accurately identified, and the polytheistic belief system was referenced in some answers. Only in stronger answers was this information integrated into their answers. More successful candidates commented on some technical aspects of Greek tragedy and how this might be displayed on stage.

Often, marks for the understanding of style were derived from sensitive performance detail that reflected the nature of the tragic form, and/or the delivery style most appropriate to the play.

Top level candidates were those who demonstrated a confident use of appropriate terminology associated with the classical Greek stage and always integrated their knowledge of SGC into the body of their answers, rather than offering it as a separate section of knowledge at the start or finish of the answer.

Question 7

The Government Inspector

This was a minority choice.

Candidates should be studying a translation of Gogol's play and not a 'free adaptation' of the play.

(a) This was answered by a minority of candidates who chose this text. While all candidates acknowledged that the Judge was corrupt, very few attempted to translate this knowledge into performance ideas. Some less successful answers were from candidates who produced responses which were essentially literary 'character studies' of the Judge and did little more than identify various points in the play which illustrated his corrupt nature.

(b) Although more candidates answered on this option, there were still a relatively few responses to the questions on this text.

While there were a very few memorable, highly inventive and comical responses to the question, these were outweighed by short responses that contained very limited ideas for comedy.

The comedy suggestions offered were most frequently not linked to the delivery of the text – which is where the majority of comedy is found in comic texts – but depended on fairly hackneyed physical comedy tropes such as Khlestakov 'falling over' or unsubtle actions such as Anna and Marya 'hitting each other'.

As with all answers on this paper, the best offer precise detail about what the 'audience' will see and hear, when watching a candidate's imagined 'rendition' of a section of text. The more detail that is included in the answer, the more successful that answer is likely to be.

Even 'falling over' and/or 'hitting each other' could be made comical by a candidate when the relevant lines that identify when these 'actions' occur is included, and its delivery explained. When Anna and Marya are described as 'hitting each other', for example, some comedy was created by an inventive candidate who specified the 'weapon of choice' as velvet cushions, seized from the chaise longue, which, as the performers bashed away at one another, began to split, causing feathers from the cushions to fill the air and get lodged into the hair and on the costumes of the pair concerned, as they became increasingly violent with one another. The 'fray' ended with the delivery of Anna's final line, which was spat out, along with a mouthful of feathers.

Thus, a simple trope was transformed into a genuinely comical moment with a little practical detail.