

DRAMA

Paper 9482/12
Open-Book Written Examination

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** specifies 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* 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 whatsoever, thus inhibiting their potential to reach the higher levels.

These candidates also focused on the initial conversation between Orlando and Rosalind and how they demonstrated an ‘instant connection’. Some mentioned how Rosalind spoke reverently of her father’s love of Sir Roland and how this affirmation was received by Orlando.

There was some sensitive handling of the moment where Rosalind bestows her own ‘chain’ necklace upon Orlando. Some presented this action as being quite impulsive and bold in Rosalind, others as a tentative, coy moment. Some spoke of the symbolic meaning of the chain and the fact that it ‘yoked’ together these two gentle souls. In fact, Rosalind’s action of giving Orlando the chain and the manner in which he received it, was often the discriminator between the more sensitive candidates and those who adopted rather too ‘modern’ an approach to this ‘sweet’ moment where the two ‘noble’ characters exchanged, ‘first looks and then hearts’ – as one candidate put it.

Some candidates appeared unable to appreciate that ‘courting conventions’ are ever changeable and that – unless they had specified a contemporary setting – some of their suggestions for a ‘laddish’ Orlando and rather too ‘flirtatious’ Rosalind, somewhat grated with the formality of the Duke’s court.

Although it was rare to see, some candidates picked up on the way in which Orlando and Rosalind both use the language of combat, ‘overthrown’ to express their sudden feelings of love, signalling their mutual attraction.

Whether or not they made mention of this, many 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.

Very few candidates commented on the etiquette of the period. Many noted that in Shakespeare’s time, Rosalind would be played by a young boy and there were some candidates who developed this idea in relation to the comedy of the scene.

Question 2

The Rivals

This play attracted too few responses to allow for meaningful comment.

Question 3

A View from the Bridge

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

- (a) Most, but not all, candidates revealed awareness of the context of the extract. However, many did not focus on the wording of ‘breakdown in the relationship between Eddie and his family’ and they simply focused on Eddie.

It was in answer to this question that many candidates produced drawings of their chosen stage, for example, ‘a thrust stage’ or a ‘proscenium arch’ set-up, but it should be noted that less successful candidates spent excessive time describing the advantages of their chosen stage configuration and not enough time/space in considering how its use served their intentions in relation to the breakdown of Eddie’s relationship with his family.

It was also in response to this question that many candidates quoted the stage directions, as a strategy for ‘getting through’ the extract, but only the more successful ones linked these directions purposefully to the demands of the question.

The prescribed extract starts with Beatrice’s entrance, and nearly all candidates used this as their starting point. In more successful answers, candidates used the ensuing conversation between

Beatrice and Eddie to comment on how their marriage had broken down and that Beatrice was no longer accepting of her role as the dutiful and submissive wife.

Although these candidates were aware that, because of stage directions such as 'she goes to him, holds his face', Beatrice still wants Eddie to change his mind about attending the wedding, she knew that he would not.

In more successful answers, candidates produced some effective commentaries on how Eddie would react at this moment, recognising the shift in the relationship.

Although Catherine makes a brief yet very significant contribution to the sense of family breakdown in this extract, many candidates chose not to consider Catherine's performance here, and they moved quickly on to the end of the extract.

In more successful answers, candidates focused on the intensity of the conversation between Eddie and Catherine at this moment and then how they both reacted when there was 'A knock on the door'.

Some candidates linked this moment to the question and to Eddie's realisation of what he had done and the consequences which would ensue, in terms of his relationship with Beatrice as well as with Catherine.

Many focused on Catherine's 'shell-shocked' delivery of her line 'My God, what did you do?' and the way that Eddie received the implications of this question. At the end of the extract, candidates often focused purposefully on Marco and his reaction to what Eddie had done using the stage direction 'Marco spits in Eddie's face' as a hook for some inventive staging strategies to show the polarisation of this once close family, which linked their answers to the thrust of question in an effective way.

- (b) Although this was a popular question many candidates did not focus on the 'mixed emotions' that Eddie experiences in the extract, nor on his feelings about the consequences of his actions. These candidates missed the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to follow the question brief.

Where candidates offered answers which, although focused on Eddie, simply traced his actions throughout the extract, they were unable to demonstrate that they understood how a performer actively seeks to communicate with an audience.

In the case of this question, many candidates did not address and therefore did not demonstrate Eddie's 'mixed emotions'; indeed, some candidates appeared only to understand a single emotion of Eddie's – his jealousy. This did not make for 'rounded' performance strategies.

In the best answers, candidates demonstrated an understanding of the consequences of Eddie's mixed emotions, including his initial horror at the news that Catherine will marry Rodolpho and his sense of helplessness as he realises that he is unable to change her mind. Many commented on Eddie's use of numerous rhetorical questions and how these were indicative of the various emotions which Eddie was experiencing.

In good answers, candidates noted Eddie's alarm when he hears about Lipari's relatives boarding upstairs. Some used the comment 'How do you know what enemies Lipari's got' to begin to trace Eddie's mixed emotions of guilt, panic and fear about what he has done; quickly followed by 'pious outrage' at Beatrice's well-founded suspicion that he has called 'Immigration'.

Some candidates discussed Eddie's guilt about his betrayal of the family and his sudden burst of desperation to save Marco and Rodolpho.

Eddie's final emotion was identified as shame, as he is insulted in front of his neighbours and family.

Although by no means restricted to answers to this question, Examiners reported seeing many candidates who, writing from the perspective of a performer or of a director – appeared to believe that an actor can 'blush' or 'redden with anger', at will. This is not an accepted theatrical fact. Very few actors are able to 'blush' on demand. And while 'method' actors may be able to weep

effectively on stage, few can manage the 'single teardrop' that falls in the answers of many an optimistic would-be actor/director.

Style, Genre, Content

With regard to both questions, most candidates revealed secure awareness of the context of the play. There were frequently detailed paragraphs about the influx of Italian Immigrants to the USA and especially in relation to Brooklyn. Others focused on how the Italian immigrant population valued family and how they continued to honour their own culture and traditions, when living in the USA. In most cases, this information was not integrated into candidates' responses but was included as a separate paragraph either at the beginning or end of their answers.

Question 4

The Beatification of Area Boy

This play attracted too few responses to allow for meaningful comment.

Question 5

Small Island

- (a) Most candidates were aware of the context of the extract, and they generally selected a naturalistic style of setting for Gilbert's room in Queenie's house in London, after the 'blitz'.

Few candidates considered the possibility of this setting for Gilbert's room as being part of a composite, less realistic, style of theatre design.

In successful answers, candidates focused initially on the fact that Gilbert's 'room' was one of several others in a house, not especially converted for 'communal living', and located in post-war London.

Almost all candidates who attempted this question recognised that Gilbert's living 'quarters' would be fairly shabby in nature.

The detailed stage directions at the beginning of the extract provided a good indication of what the room was like, and nearly all candidates incorporated elements of these into their set designs.

In more successful answers, candidates had developed the outline provided by the playwright and offered some details of their own.

Only in more successful answers were the designs accompanied by clear justification of the designs offered.

Most candidates offered suggestions for the staging form chosen and the positioning of Gilbert's room on stage. Those who had watched the streamed production, from the National Theatre, invariably replicated that as far as they could remember it. Some candidates acknowledged this production as a source of their inspiration while others did not.

The best answers referenced the period and the location of the setting. These answers also found a way to suggest 'the grey, starkly realistic world' that Edmunson refers to as a heading to Act Two, Scene One.

Most candidates suggested an appropriate design to suggest cramped/compact living quarters, that were just about adequate for Gilbert as a single man.

In good answers there were some details offered about the fairly shabby, ill-matched pieces of furniture that were likely to have been moved into the room for the 'convenience' of the tenant.

Some described various pieces of set dressing, for example worn rugs, tatty bedspread, cupboards with poorly attached doors or drawers.

Section B

Question 6

Oedipus Rex

- (a) This was the more popular of the two questions but was only attempted by relatively few candidates.

Some candidates offered insufficient textual support where selected detail is needed to 'strongly' or 'effectively' support the answers to the question set.

It is also worth noting that, although some candidates had included references from the play, these were not always appropriate to revealing different aspects of Oedipus' character.

In the middle range of responses, candidates tended to focus on Oedipus's character in a very general manner. Although they, perhaps, selected two or more moments from the play to explore, there was little focus on the different aspects of Oedipus' character being analysed or communicated.

Only more successful candidates focused on Oedipus' initial pride, his determination to root out the truth, his arrogance and personal animus towards Creon, his stubborn refusal to heed the advice of Tiresias and his humility, in the closing sections, as he accepts his guilt.

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

In more successful answers, however, candidates integrated their knowledge of the character with their suggestions about how best to enact the role, to demonstrate the variety of aspects of Oedipus' character which makes the role so engaging for an audience, as well as challenging, but rewarding, for an actor to perform.

- (b) The focus of this director's question was to highlight the changing attitudes of the Chorus towards Oedipus.

In some ways, the question was dependent upon candidates recognising that the Chorus changes their attitudes when Oedipus displayed different aspects of his character, and although answers to this question were few in number, they often revealed as secure an understanding of Oedipus as answers to **Question 6a**.

Strong answers referred in detail to two or to more than two clear sections of the play and they used references to the delivery of the text as well as to the movements of the Chorus to highlight their changing attitudes.

In very good answers, candidates considered the concern of the Chorus that Oedipus honours the gods and their wishes, as well as their gratitude towards him for 'saving' their city.

Some candidates focused more on the ways in which Oedipus's words and actions turned the Chorus against him, as when he violently curses the murderer of Laius, and treats Tiresias disrespectfully.

The sympathy of the Chorus for Oedipus was often considered as being won back, latterly, in the wake of Jocasta's suicide, and Oedipus' reaction to loss of his wife/mother, in particular.

Candidates who offered clear practical performance ideas for the Chorus to communicate these attitudes to the audience fared better than those who recognised their changing attitudes but had few directorial strategies for communicating these to an audience, using vocal, facial and physical expression,

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 – especially in relation to the Chorus in the case of **Question 6b** – 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 slice’ 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 question attracted too few responses to allow for meaningful comment.
- (b) Although more candidates answered on this option, there were still a relatively few responses to this text.

While there were a couple of fairly inventive and comical responses to the question, these were outweighed by short responses that contained very limited ideas for comedy, and fairly unimaginative interpretations of Anna.

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 Anna, rushing on stage and immediately ‘falling over’. Or candidates suggested unsubtle generalised ‘comic’ 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 an inventive candidate when the relevant lines that identify when precisely these ‘actions’ occur is included, and its delivery explained. When Anna and Marya were described as ‘hitting each’, for example, some comedy was created where the candidate quoted the lines that accompanied the comic ‘spat’ and gave precise suggestions for where they hit each other (arms, legs, tummy, bottom) and also identified a comical ‘weapon of choice’ whether that was hands thumping or legs/feet kicking or grabbed items such as cushions, or dusters or fans with which to inflict (comical) suffering on each other.

Style, Genre, Content

There was some evidence of knowledge of the social context of the play in candidate’s answers and some reference to the political corruption which Gogol was intent on exposing within his contemporary society.

Most candidates made reference to the play’s comic style and a few to the need for creating amusing caricatures for the purpose of highlighting Gogol’s critical intentions.

Question 8

The Cherry Orchard

This play attracted few responses this series.

- (a) No candidate responses were seen to this design question.