



# **General Certificate in Secondary Education**

## **Drama 3241/W**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2007 examination - June series*

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## General

It is pleasing to be able to report that examiners have noted an improvement in the quality of answers.

Rubric infringements were fewer, but despite clear statements in the specification, the question paper and written reminders sent to centres, there were still examples of candidates choosing to write on set plays in Section B or attempting two answers on the same production.

Administration on the part of centres was generally efficient, although examiners were impeded by those that failed to include Centre Declaration Forms, attendance registers or authorising letters from AQA appended to the scripts of word-processed or scribe- assisted responses.

A significant number of candidates failed to fill in question numbers in the grid on the front of their answer booklets which made it difficult for examiners to know for certain which Section B question had been attempted when there was no number at the head of each question either. It is vitally important that candidates are encouraged to fill in the numbers of the questions attempted on the front of their answer booklet and to attach their Candidate Declaration Sheet and personal notes to the back.

## SECTION A: SET PLAYS

Section A with its set texts still appears to be popular with many candidates. The Part a) acting questions were the most popular, with very few candidates attempting Part b) design questions. Sadly, many of those who did attempt part b) responses were not always equipped with the sufficient amount of technical knowledge to do well.

When answering the acting questions, it is vital that candidates cover the whole scene in detail and during the answer make it very clear which part of the scene they are discussing. Too many candidates gave general suggestions for voice, movement and gesture which simply created a bland overview. A more coherent approach is when the scene is discussed from start to finish covering all acting aspects, rather than taking one aspect at a time. Weaker responses focussed simply on voice and offered unconvincing proposals for changes in pitch and or volume and failed to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a practical process that they had presumably undertaken themselves during the two years of their course.

It is worth mentioning, in the context of encouraging candidates to lead the reader through the selected scene, the importance of linking answers and justifications to specific moments by means of brief direct quotation or reference. Line and page numbers are of little help, particularly when the candidate has not identified the edition being used. Frequent repetition of the phrase 'on the next line I would...' does little to enable the examiner to visualise the proposed performance. Equally to be discouraged is the directorial approach adopted by a very small minority of candidates – the rubric clearly requires candidates to discuss how they would perform the role stated. Such candidates deprived themselves of the opportunity to share the immediacy of an actor's response that was an exciting feature of many of the best answers.

Finally, it must be stated that most centres are preparing candidates efficiently within the spirit of what is essentially a practical subject, and it is always clear which answers have been underpinned with sound knowledge gained through physical performance. Such answers are always a pleasure to read as it is possible to visualise the responses clearly.

### **Individual questions**

#### **Question 1: *The Caucasian Chalk Circle***

The answers were often very detailed and many charted Grusha's journey from adopting an aristocratic pose to her reverting to type at the end of the scene. The concern for Michael was well detailed and the folding of sheets and bed-making was often vividly described. The motivation was often clearly understood.

#### **Question 2: *Sepia and Song***

There were very few responses reported, and almost all focused on Mansfield. These were quite well handled and candidates seemed to enjoy giving suggestions for his dismissive attitude to Robertson. Suggestions for handling the overlapping conversations were interesting while the physical attitudes of Mansfield and Robertson during freezes were also well noted.

It was clear that many candidates were not aware that Ismay and Pirie (1907), while being on stage at the same time, were not actually in the same location or period as Robertson and Mansfield (1898) and that though their lines are sometimes juxtaposed neither pair addresses the other.

#### **Question 3: *The Crucible***

Examiners reported that this was a popular play in terms of numbers of responses. Strongest responses fully understood the context of the scene explaining what had just gone before with Mary Warren. The transition of attitude on Hale's entrance was strongly noted by these candidates. Unfortunately, quite a few answers chose to ignore the Hale section, finishing the response on Elizabeth's '... will never tear it free!'. These thus missed a significant aspect of the Proctors' relationship.

While the role of Elizabeth was handled more strongly (and usually more sensitively) than the role of John, with the best candidates giving a very clear set of suggestions to illustrate her fluctuating emotional responses, some candidates presented her as a weak, forlorn character, frightened by the thought of the court and whingeing at her husband. Candidates also tended to ignore her change of status during the scene as she implores John to go into Salem and shows her strength of character.

**Question 4: *Blue Remembered Hills***

Once again, this appears to have been the most popular choice, with the great majority of candidates opting to discuss the role of John. Candidates do seem to have been well prepared for this play and would seem to have enjoyed it. This was one instance where candidates referred to accent, although there were a few anomalies, for example asserting that the Forest of Dean is in Yorkshire. It is clear that many centres are using this play for their coursework component, and this is reflected in the depth of understanding displayed in some of the candidates' written responses here. Weaker candidates did stick rather too rigidly to stage directions, however, and could not say why 'John 'shifts from foot to foot' – merely that they would do it.

Willie was perhaps a little less effectively addressed with suggestions that he should stand around occasionally twiddling his fingers. More imaginative suggestions tended not to take into account the possibility that they might detract from the main action on stage.

The changes in mood and atmosphere after the euphoria of the beginning and the subsequent guilt to the confrontation between Peter and John and the excitement of the jam jars linked to the ridiculing of Donald were all often charted very clearly.

**Question 5: *Twelfth Night***

This play attracted a small number of responses and was, by some candidates, quite well handled. However, commonly, the difficulty of Viola's position as emissary from Orsino (delivering love messages to Olivia whilst having fallen for Orsino herself) was not fully recognised, and some candidates appeared to believe that Olivia was fully in favour of Orsino's romantic declarations. This is a scene offering much potential for an actor and its subtleties did not always seem to be appreciated.

**Question 6: *Billy Liar***

This is a popular play, and this year produced some very pleasing responses. The different emotional context of the selected scene (different, that is, from much of the rest of the play) was well understood by most candidates. Both Geoffrey and Alice attracted equal attention from the large number of candidates attempting this question. In particular, candidates were able to appreciate that at moments of this scene we are seeing a Geoffrey that is unlike his persona elsewhere in the play. His difficulty in maintaining concern for his wife for more than a brief time, and his subsequent realisation that he has upset her as the scene ends, was sensitively handled by many candidates. Weaker candidates were able to recognise the change in Geoffrey's attitude at the beginning but then soon moved him back into his aggressive and frustrated self. There were strong interpretations of Alice. She certainly had the candidates' sympathy and those who chose her role were able to empathise with her unhappiness and dilemma regarding her son's behaviour.

There was some confusion about the 'close' relationship between Geoffrey and Alice at the beginning of the scene which often displayed a lack of understanding of the period or the attitudes towards displays of affection at this time in this culture – particularly between this husband and wife.

Answers on question 6(b) tended to be on costume. There was some very good understanding of the period and of the similarity between Barbara and Alice. Descriptions were often detailed regarding colour and style. Cardigans and tweed skirts seemed to be the order of the day for Barbara, and Alice invariably wore an apron and often had an imitation pearl necklace to underline her status. Justification for the costume was often detailed and accurate.

Few candidates recognised that Rita appears at the end of the extract and so missed an opportunity to describe a costume that contrasted with those worn by Barbara and Alice.

### **Section B: Response to Live Productions seen during the course**

In this section, the acting questions were the most popular ones.

The choice of production is vital, particularly if the acting question is chosen. A production that is based purely on dance or is very static with the focus only on vocal skills will obviously present difficulties. Equally, a design question using a minimalist production is very likely to provide a weak answer. The guidance of the teacher here is crucial.

Notes taken into the exam can either help or hinder candidates. Often very detailed notes may end up being rewritten with very little focus given to the actual question being asked. The best notes use key words and are there to aid the memory and boost confidence rather than supply an entire answer. Here it must be stated that some candidates would have benefited from careful advice on choice of question and some direction on how to address the question as stated rather than addressing something that may have been set in previous years.

Examiners report that some candidates' notes appear to have been dictated by teachers given that all the points made over several productions in some centres were common to all candidates and used similar structure, phrasing and vocabulary. This resulted in these centres presenting many answers that were almost identical. Some candidates had clearly not understood the notes, other candidates merely copied them with linking sentences. Some candidates failed to make suitable use of the notes but simply just regurgitated them regardless of the question.

In Section B, the choice of question is vital. A number of candidates disadvantaged themselves by offering answers to one question that would have gained them higher marks had they chosen another. It cannot be stressed too highly that candidates must read the questions carefully before deciding on which to answer.

### **Question 7**

The best answers focussed on a wide and interesting range of productions, although the *Woman in Black* and *Blood Brothers* continue to be highly popular. The 'interaction' aspect of the question was well understood in the better responses. Elsewhere, focus was not always on just two performers, with some answers ranging widely over the production as a whole. Weaker candidates tended to let their answers drift into simple narrative or retelling of the plot.

**Question 8**

Acting was, again, far more popular than design. Occasionally, there were strong responses which were able to demonstrate a real understanding of what made performances interesting; again, these ranged over some unusual productions. Design responses were far fewer. A few candidates from one centre produced some very thoughtful responses to the design aspects of *The History Boys*.

A number of candidates apparently missed the word 'or' in the question and wrote about design and acting. However, many of these candidates did keep going back to the word 'interesting' and found it difficult to explain why they found it interesting. There were some very detailed descriptions of the setting for *Coram Boy* which took the reader through the details of the revolve and, often, vivid descriptions of a scene where boys drowned – including the use of a giant blue PVC cloth – which were graphic and made one wish that one had seen the production.

**Question 9**

Answers here were often attempted by candidates who had good levels of knowledge and understanding of their chosen skill. There were some good responses on the set and lighting for *Woman in Black* and costumes for *Blood Brothers*. The candidates did understand and use technical terms where necessary and were diligent in referring to 'appreciation'. The costume answers were very aware of style, period and social issues.

Weaker candidates tended, unfortunately, to ignore the question which required only one aspect of design to be the principal focus of the response. Many candidates wrote briefly about all the design areas listed in the question, with the result that no one area was given treatment in depth. This was perhaps the question which was answered least successfully and where some responses would have been more appropriate to Question 10.

**Question 10**

These answers often contained very enthusiastic responses in terms of the ways that the production moved or entertained, but many of the answers were rather generalised and vague. There was a tendency to fail to explain how in terms of performance, design or technical skills the relevant effect was created on stage. Some candidates fell into the trap of adopting a literary approach and discussed the emotional impact of the play rather than the way the production presented it. Only those who were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the practical skills involved in interpreting text as live performance were able to gain high marks.

Answers included strong responses to the production of *Journey's End* and the last scene from *Blood Brothers*.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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