

**AS LEVEL**

*Candidate Style Answers*

# **DRAMA AND THEATRE**

H459

For first teaching in 2016

## **Section B: Question 7 – 1984 with commentary**

Version 2



# INTRODUCTION

This resource has been produced by the A Level Drama and Theatre assessor team to offer teachers an insight into how the assessment objectives are applied.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

The sample assessment material for this answer and commentary can be found on the A Level Drama and Theatre web page and accessed via the following link:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/>



## Question 7 – 1984

- 7 Evaluate a live performance you have seen, explaining how closely the production reflected the conventions of that performance style of drama. At the start of your answer state the name, venue and date (month and year) of the live performance you have seen. [40]

### 1984 Headstrong Theatre Company, Month Year, Venue

There have been many interesting adaptations of George Orwell's dystopian novel and Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan's theatre remodel of 1984 is no exception. The original novel, which gives a haunting concept of a totalitarian world, is reshaped in this stunning production, which encapsulates the audience in a state of suspense throughout the whole uninterrupted and significant 101 minutes. The original novel is immediately referenced, with the opening a recorded audio of the futuristic appendix of the novel, played whilst a projection of Winston writing in his diary is shown. This direction choice suggests that the appendix is integral to the structuring of the play, and the idea that the party was abolished, whereas in the novel it is purposely put in the end, offering a whole different understanding.

The abstraction of time periods is deliberate in this production, with the beginning and end reflecting the future, sometime near 2050 or beyond, then the main era set in 1984. This social context is shown through the use of neutral, reserved costumes, which also reflects the uniformed, controlled manner of the Oceania state. These are not visually self expressive of the characters, so the audience are put in a position with a lack of awareness. The contrast between naturalistic and stylised acting works effectively to juxtapose the freedom we now have, with the restrained lives of those caught up in 1984, distancing the audience and giving a sense of alienation. Scenes which oppose this are those between Winston and Julia, reflecting how they are rebelling against Big Brother. The closeness between them contrasts with the uniform regularity of life under Big Brother's eye and emphasises how mechanistic real life has become.

The lighting contributes to this, with strobes creating disorientation, to aid the atmosphere of constant uncertainty, placing the audience on an equal mentality to the characters. Time is a recurring theme throughout which is important in 1984, with props symbolising this. One significant prop which effectively reflects the entrapment of Winston is the snowglobe. This gives the idea of lives being frozen and not being able to move forward, and subtly references a wider theme of voyeurism and the idea of looking in on another world.

Technology is dramatically forced upon the audience throughout the duration of the play, but it is a deliberate choice to put the audience in different positions, rather than just as onlookers. The set is reflective of this mass mediated culture, with a domineering screen giving the contrast of a live feed of what is happening on and off set, and also pre recorded messages from the party. This perpetual background coverage makes the modern audience, in an age of neoliberal capitalism think about their own experiences with technology and the ideas that this kind of control is still existent today.

The build up of atmosphere was essential to the creating of a tense piece of theatre, which Headstrong achieves beautifully. The lack of interval allows the piece to build and maintain ambiance and the unknown, putting the audience in a position of vulnerability, easily manipulating their emotions. The visual aspects add to this, with the frequent blackouts and use of backlighting to create shadows, playing on the notion of looking idea, putting the audience at unease, constantly forcing them to adjust. Aural elements also contribute successfully to building an atmosphere, with continual high pitched static sounds subconsciously making the audience feel uncomfortable.

The whole piece revolves around an idea reflective of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. The relationship created between the audience and the actors is an intimate one, heightened by the use of live feeds and lighting. A poignant moment is when the house lights are brought up, allowing the audience to be effectively a part of the play, addressed directly by O'Brien, giving the astonishing desired effect of willing and anticipation to urge Winston to say something. Emphasis on light and sound, another technique enforced by the practitioner, is used, especially sound and light which is piercing and hypnotising, assaulting the audiences senses. This stimulates an unconscious response from the audience, which is

strongly achieved through the use of violent and terrifying actions and images, prominent in the scene depicting the 2 minutes of hate, and the frightening ideas of subliminal messaging and brutal images of murder, accompanied with a low bass sound which pulverises the audience's feelings, making them question the way they view the world.

1984 leaves the audience with a lasting impression and makes them question their own society and lives, which in my opinion makes it an exceptional piece of theatre, well received by audiences who witnessed this adaptation of a controversial classic. There are implications that the party could still exist, having O'Brien sitting facing downstage whilst the final scene closes, suggesting that it could never be destroyed, making myself question how relevant the piece is today.

**Marks:**

**AO3 - 7**

**AO4 - 22**

## Commentary

There is a detailed knowledge and understanding of the story and its themes. These are discussed in relation to a modern audience and interpretation. There is a range of appropriate theatrical elements and conventions discussed. Some of these elements are explored in terms of their theatrical effect but there is a lack of consistency in this. The theatrical aims are not always made clear to the reader. How or why creative ideas were used is not analysed. It is not always clear how things were done on stage and the candidate needs at times to explain fully what was happening and why.

There is some development understanding of how ideas were communicated to an audience. The essay is clearly logical in its approach and structure and there are elements which are well developed in terms of technical discussion.

At times the evaluation is skilful and confident but ultimately this is not sustained.

## How the answer could be improved

There is a need for more specific reference to theatrical conventions and elements. A larger range of practical examples of what was seen is required, with a clearer explanation of how things were done and why they were done like this. A specific and focused understanding of the style of the performance is also required and although the candidate mentions Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty there is a lack of discussion in terms of how this links to the whole production. The candidate must not assume that the examiner has seen the performance and therefore must give enough detail to recreate what was seen in the mind of the examiner.



We'd like to know your view on the resources we produce. By clicking on the 'Like' or 'Dislike' button you can help us to ensure that our resources work for you. When the email template pops up please add additional comments if you wish and then just click 'Send'. Thank you.

Whether you already offer OCR qualifications, are new to OCR, or are considering switching from your current provider/awarding organisation, you can request more information by completing the Expression of Interest form which can be found here:

[www.ocr.org.uk/expression-of-interest](http://www.ocr.org.uk/expression-of-interest)

#### **OCR Resources:** *the small print*

OCR's resources are provided to support the delivery of OCR qualifications, but in no way constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by OCR. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions within these resources. We update our resources on a regular basis, so please check the OCR website to ensure you have the most up to date version.

This resource may be freely copied and distributed, as long as the OCR logo and this small print remain intact and OCR is acknowledged as the originator of this work.

OCR acknowledges the use of the following content:  
Square down and Square up: alexwhite/Shutterstock.com

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the accessibility of resources we offer to support delivery of our qualifications:  
[resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk](mailto:resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk)

#### **Looking for a resource?**

There is now a quick and easy search tool to help find **free** resources for your qualification:

[www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to-find-resources/](http://www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to-find-resources/)

[www.ocr.org.uk/alevelreform](http://www.ocr.org.uk/alevelreform)

OCR Customer Contact Centre

#### **General qualifications**

Telephone 01223 553998

Facsimile 01223 552627

Email [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk)

OCR is part of Cambridge Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge. *For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored.*

© **OCR 2016** Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registered office 1 Hills Road, Cambridge CB1 2EU. Registered company number 3484466. OCR is an exempt charity.

