

AS LEVEL

Exemplar Candidate Work

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H059

For first teaching in 2016

Exemplar 4:

AS Level portfolio for a performance
of *Metamorphosis*

Version 1



Introduction

This work has been produced by Drama students as part of their school curriculum time, studying practitioners and performing from a text. It offers teachers an insight into how the process can be recorded by students in their research report and portfolio for Process to performance (Component 01/02/03/04).

As these responses have not been through moderation, an indication of the level of each response has not been included. A version of this resource which provides an indication of the level of the response will be made available in addition to this version in due course.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of an endorsed approach to creating a research report or portfolio.



CANDIDATE EXEMPLAR WORK 4

SAMPLE ANSWER

Metamorphosis

To explore the social context of the *Metamorphosis* script, we worked on remaking the scene of Gregor's transformation as a modern interpretation. His 'metamorphosis' is that of becoming a beetle – rejected and socially 'repulsive'. Within modern society, mental illness is often looked on with a lack of knowledge; we interpreted this fearful transformation to someone experiencing such a disorder. This consisted of us bringing the characters into the modern day. In doing so, we made Mr and Mrs Samsa an unhappily married couple, 'Georgia' a young girl with the disease and the chief clerk as a concerned social worker. We were able to relate a lot of their traits into our adaptation, such as Mrs Samsa's obsessive concern and Mr Samsa's attitude to glaze over the problems. In our piece, we added a segment of what we thought would happen to our characters in 6 months' time - leading to a similar fate of Kafka's Gregor, as being taken away from the family (although to a facility rather than death). We wanted to maintain the original idea of what it is to not be 'normal' within our society, and show what can happen to individuals who suffer.

In exploring the work of a practitioner, we examined Berkoff's idea of 'total theatre' both within and outside of *Metamorphosis*. We focused firstly on taking simple morning tasks in mime, and adding layers of mime, narration and sound effects to make them effective. For example, when making tea, we added the noise of opening cupboard doors and adding liquid to the cups, while narrating what we were doing. This was mainly about finding the correct border between sharp, realistic precision and a grotesque, overdramatic version. Inside of the text, we focused mainly on the scene of the family eating breakfast, and when they first feed Gregor. We wanted each movement and noise we made to have a purpose; if we wanted the audience to squirm, we had to push to the point where it was uncomfortable for them to watch. This was done through making noises such as scraping the bowls and plates, crunching of foods and dramatised reactions to the taste. Audience members could feel each movement attacking their senses.

To explore characterisation in *Metamorphosis*, we looked in depth at 3 sections of the play. Firstly, we focused on Gregor's life before his transformation. This involved using a sagged and deflated posture, to reflect the pressure from his family and the lack of will he has to begin with. We then looked at how his body is transformed into that of a beetle. I used contortion of the body entirely; sharp angles, pointed toes and fingers, to strain the muscles as much as possible. This meant I knew I was being the most effective version of Gregor, as I began to understand the pain he experienced in his metamorphosis. There was a clear shift between the intensity of his character; to begin with, he displayed low Californian levels of tension to represent his tiredness, which then transformed to passionate in his frantic beetle body. These high levels were also shown in the facial expressions I used – in order to show his distress and pain, these were also twisted. To be the most effective, we drew on examples of real life insects, and used the way they manoeuvre as inspiration for Gregor. Using these methods meant I could understand his frustration and pain in his experience, in similar ways to what I felt by just experimenting it.

To explore *Metamorphosis* in more detail, we looked at how we could interpret different stage directions and scenes within the play, in particular the 'Ballet of the stools' mentioned in an argument between Mr and Mrs Samsa. I wanted to use this direction, almost as an interlude break between their heated discussion, to reflect on what the married couple's relationship may have been like before the incident with Gregor. Taking the term 'ballet' in a literal sense, my performance was made to be set to a piece of music – we chose a violin sequence, befitting of their daughter, Greta, and her aforementioned talent. This music made the performance have a higher emotional connection with the audience. I felt this scene is one of the only where Mrs Samsa feels she can up and defend herself against her husband, and wanted to reflect this in movement. This was done through a chair duet, where as Mr Samsa moved an aspect of Mrs Samsa, she did the same back, constructing a choreographed fight while sitting beside each other. I wanted the extremities of their relationship to be shown in each movement, whether they were breaking a personal boundary in how close they were or seeming unconnected on opposite sides of the stage.

To explore the variety of language used in *Metamorphosis*, we focused on Gregor's way of speech in comparison to the other characters in the play. It became clear on examining his dialogue, that his language is the most educated of the characters; he provokes emotion with his complex sentences, speaking only in first person. There is a link between his physical transformation and the change of his speech – as his metamorphosis deepens, his language becomes more eloquent and sophisticated. This is likely due to the fact that his character becomes non-conversational, as he has no interaction with the others. We wanted to explore the effect certain language has on the way a character is represented. Focusing on Gregor's monologue to Greta towards the end of the play, we re-wrote the scene using language we felt was more befitting of the moment. Though originally written as a way to show Gregor's last moments of humanity and strain to communicate with his family, I wanted to present it in a way that had audience members more conflicted. In my version, I included profanity and stuttering as a way of representing his pain at the time of speaking: I felt this made his character more relatable to the audience, as they can empathise more with his struggle.

I explored the way voice could be used for the characters in *Metamorphosis* through an interpretation of the overall play, condensed to the key scenes and moments. To have the opportunity for this, my performance used each actor to play a range of the characters in the play. When acting as Greta, I wanted her pitch to be high and low in volume, to show her timid attempt at talking back against her parents. For example, as she calls out 'Gregor' and 'clothes,' each word sounded as though a question, to reflect how she was unsure of what to say. However, when playing Mr Samsa, I wanted this to be a large contrast to the way Greta is presented. He spoke with loud volume, often targeted towards the audience in harsh, aggressive tones. This assured the audience of his sense of authority, and to perhaps even fear him the way that the other family characters do, with lines such as 'no son of mine.' In doing this, I could learn how to present the characters most effectively to the audience, so they understand the basic nature of each of them.

To explore the aspects of visual, aural and spatial conventions, we brought to life the opening scene of *Metamorphosis*. This was done focusing largely on Visual and Spatial, and how these could draw the audience in most effectively. I knew from watching an interpretation of the play that bringing the audience into the scene itself made them feel both more involved and attached to what was happening. We brought this to our piece by having upturned blocks and chairs with scattered crockery throughout, while the audience were led through and escorted to their seats. I wanted them to feel the divide between Gregor and the family, as he was hidden behind a sheet with just his shadow showing through behind Greta's robotic movements of playing the violin. Gregor's shadow added a sense of mystery to his being and transformation, and then shows how he broke free from his containment into the kitchen space, with his family the other side. It reflects the way Greta overshadows her brother in the eyes of the parents. By having the audience led from an open space, across the room to our corner of performance, watchers felt as though they have been brought into a sheltered space. This represents both the seclusion the Samsa family experience with Gregor's condition and the separation Gregor has from society.

In order to explore non-verbal communication in *Metamorphosis*, I wanted to focus on the way Gregor manoeuvred and came across to the audience. This was done through focusing on how the character would enter a room, and respond to questions from those watching. I wanted Gregor's immense pain and both physical and emotional torture to come across; this was done through the frantic movements and taut expression. Each move appeared strained and uncalculated. When entering the room, I scrambled across the space and hid behind chairs, to show the repulsive response I expected from the audience. Some watchers questioned how Gregor felt towards Greta – this is what caused a shift in the attitude I developed, becoming emotional and flinching as though physically hurt. My breathing was shallow, and each move was a flinch as though I was transforming before them. This meant that the audience saw the pain Gregor was suffering, and meant he was identifiable in performance.



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