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Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Q1 Level 2 – sample answer with commentary: Hamlet

Version 1

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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 here: http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242806-unit-h459-31-analysing-characters-for-performance-sample-assessment-material.pdf

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SECTION A QUESTION 1

How could the tension between TWO characters be communicated to an audience during the opening scenes of a performance? Justify your ideas with examples from the opening scenes from the performance text you have chosen for this question. **[15]**

At the start of your answer write the name of the performance text you have chosen. Choose 1 of the following:

Theme 1: Conflict

Hamlet – William Shakespeare

Black Watch – Gregory Burke

Necessary Targets – Eve Ensler

The Long and the Short and the Tall – Willis Hall

Oh What a Lovely War – Joan Littlewood

SAMPLE ANSWER

There are many tensions and conflicts in the opening scenes of Hamlet. Gertrude and Claudius both want Hamlet to stop mourning his father and accept their marriage and this causes conflict. They don't agree with his decision to leave Denmark and so this causes conflict. Their marriage causes conflict and tension because Hamlet believes that his mother has married too soon. Later there will be even more tension and conflict because Hamlet will find out that it is his uncle who has murdered his father. All of these tensions and conflicts are present in the opening scenes and show why there is tension between Hamlet and his Uncle.

It is important that an actor playing Hamlet shows these tensions between the two characters because the tensions will cause Hamlet to go mad and eventually seek revenge. In Act One Scene Five, Hamlet will learn from the ghost that his father was killed by Claudius. The tensions will set off a series of events in the play. So an actor playing Hamlet must show the tensions from the opening scene and make it clear that Hamlet does not like his Uncle Claudius. These tensions will be responsible for the deaths of many people, including innocent people.

The actor playing Hamlet also needs to show that it's not just Claudius that Hamlet has tensions with. Hamlet also dislikes his own mother and this needs to be shown in the opening scenes of the play whenever Gertrude tries to talk to her son.

At this point in the play, Hamlet is not ready to act upon his conflicts or tension. Hamlet is a man who likes to think about things for a long time before acting upon them. Therefore an actor needs to show that he is quite weak in contrast to Claudius. Claudius is a man who is prepared to kill to get his own way.

When Hamlet speaks in his soliloquy this is the first time we get to know how troubled he is by all of these conflicts and the audience should start to feel sympathy for this main character. This will make an audience feel involved in the play and make them start to side with Hamlet rather than Claudius. His soliloquy shows that Hamlet knows something is wrong and he is tense but he doesn't necessarily know the full extent of this tension so he should behave in a confused manner, perhaps pacing around the room as he speaks his words.

Hamlet's soliloquy at the end of Act One Scene Two has to show that he is a man who is struggling with the conflicts and his relationship with his uncle. He could speak quietly to show his troubled mind and keep walking all around the stage to show that he getting out of control slightly. By talking out loud, this can confirm how unstable is he becoming. His appearance could also show this.

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Later on in Act One Scene Five, Hamlet will see his father's ghost for himself. This will confirm in his mind that his uncle did kill his father. Hamlet should now seem even more angry towards Claudius. He could shout words to show his annoyance and shock. It is now that he will start to plot a plan which will enable him to take revenge upon Claudius for this murder. The audience will be interested to know whether his plan works and will want to keep watching to see whether Hamlet can overcome his conflicts with his uncle and achieve his revenge.

Level 2

Commentary

A limited discussion which focuses on analysis of the text rather than performance.

The candidate demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the storyline and the characters' feelings – in relation to the idea of tension and why there might be tension. However the candidate is analysing the text and the story and not interpreting the play in performance. There is little to support the questions in terms of knowledge and understanding of theatrical process and practice. There is an appropriate reference to voice and how this might demonstrate Hamlet's troubled state of mind but this lacks development. There is a lack of coherent argument or line of reasoning. Focus on the question is limited with reference to Gertrude as a third character and Act 1 Scene 5 which cannot be considered to be the opening of the play.

Improvements

There is a need to develop the structure of the answer and to re-focus on the question which refers to two characters within the opening scenes. A range of creative decisions must be discussed in relation to the question.

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