

**GCE A Level**

**Drama and Theatre**

H459

**OCR Report to Centres June 2018**

Version 2

## About this Examiner Report to Centres

This report on the 2018 Summer assessments aims to highlight:

- areas where students were more successful
- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice for future examinations

It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

The report also includes links and brief information on:

- A reminder of our **post-results services** including **reviews of results**
- Link to **grade boundaries**
- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programmer

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# H459/11-14 Practitioners in Practice

## 1. General Comments:

It has been a real pleasure for my team and I to encounter and moderate some highly original theatre and to see candidates enjoy experimenting with practitioners across the component. Practitioners in Practice was designed to be a component where students explore, experience and experiment with a strong focus on evidencing practical work. Centres that have focused their work around practical exploration are to be commended.

This report will offer the team's thoughts on the work we have moderated, for those of you who entered candidates for the June 2018 exam please make sure that you have downloaded your moderator's report as these have been written to support you in further teaching this component. Many of you will have had your attention drawn to the Practitioners in Practice Delivery Guide to support you delivering this component. The delivery guide is written to sit alongside the specification and to be used to guide you through the component – so please take a look.

### **Administration**

Centres are reminded to identify candidates before the devised performance saying the centre name and number and each candidate's name, number and role/s. It would be very helpful for centres to ensure that all candidates have some clearly recognisable feature to make them easily identifiable. Centres that gave each candidate a different colour t shirt, sash or badge helped the moderation process.

Centres are advised to position the camera close enough to the stage to allow the moderator to see the faces of candidates. The DVD | USB memory stick evidence of the performance is there to support the marks you have awarded so it would be wise to run a couple of quick test shots before you film to make sure the candidates can be viewed clearly. Positioning a camera, on a wide shot at the back of a full theatre can make it very difficult for candidates to be identified throughout the performance and therefore difficult for the marks awarded to be moderated successfully.

Centres should also keep in mind that, although this component is encouraging experimentation and free creative exploration, candidates should aim to wear appropriate clothing for the performance.

### **Section 1 - Research Reports**

Section 1 of this component should be predominantly practical - students in a space practically exploring practitioners and text. The Research Report then becomes evidence of that practical work.

From reading the Research Reports, it was felt that some centres had not spent the time exploring exercises on the two practitioners in the required detail before they applied what they had experienced to text. The exploration of a series of exercises on both practitioners is fundamental to this section and component and the most successful candidates clearly had opportunities to gain a working knowledge of practitioners' methods before applying them to the chosen text. (Page 9, 10 and 27 of the specification)

The Research Report was the area of the component that centres had the most difficulty with. A number of candidates wrote factually based essays rather than evidencing the practical work, they had explored on the two practitioners. The criteria shows that there are four key areas to cover, three focus on practical exploration and one more factually based research. The

Research Report is a document to evidence how the candidates have explored the two practitioners and worked on text, so we are looking to see how candidates have explored exercises on a practitioner rather than deliver paragraphs of factual information.

A number of centres missed evidencing the initial exercises on a practitioner completely and went straight onto exploring text. Page 9 of the specification says 'Learners should be able to participate in a series of practical exercises exploring their chosen practitioner'. This does not mean that the candidate writes about how Brecht used *gestus* and what Brecht thought about it, candidates should be evidencing how they explored *gestus*, what they thought about it and how this helped them to understand Brechtian practice.

### **Structuring Section 1 of Practitioners in Practice**

Below is a simple structure that can be followed when exploring Section 1 (this is for guidance, you are of course free to structure the component to best suit your students):

- Explore the first practitioner (for example Stanislavski) spend a number of weeks exploring and experimenting with a series of exercises from the system allowing students to evaluate and analyse as they go along.
- Students to write this up under the first heading 'Exploring Stanislavski and the System'.
- Work on the chosen text (for example *That Face* by Polly Stenham) and use exercises from the system to explore an extract/s.
- Write up this section of the Research Report under the heading 'Exploring Stanislavski with *That Face*'.
- Explore the second practitioner (for example Artaud) spend a number of weeks exploring and experimenting a series of exercises allowing students to evaluate and analyse as they go along.
- Write up this section of the Research Report under the heading 'Exploring Artaud'.

Some centres chose to then explore the same text with their second practitioner before starting to devise which gave candidates a wonderful insight into how different practitioners would explore the same text.

### **Practitioners**

A range of practitioners were chosen for this component with the most popular by far being Brecht, Artaud, Stanislavski, Berkoff and Frantic Assembly. As centres, you have a varied choice of the practitioners to choose from; the combination you choose should not only suit your students but allow candidates to achieve marks across the criteria.

A combination which proved highly successful was where centres chose a practitioner to work on with the text (Stanislavski | Brecht) and a practitioner to use for devising (Artaud | Berkoff) and then additionally a contemporary company (Frantic Assembly | DV8) to explore within the devising process. This allowed candidates to develop the skills to create a character combined with exploring movement and elements of physical theatre while creating a stylised setting or world for the piece.

Some of the most beautiful work was where candidates created truthful and believable characters (using Stanislavski | Michael Chekhov) and placed them in a stylised setting using Frantic Assembly or an epic structure using Brecht.

There were also a range of highly experimental Artaud style pieces, which were fascinating to watch.

It was felt that where centres chose two contemporary practitioners with a similar canon of work the experience candidates had and the opportunities for exploration were diminished. Within the Research Reports, there was evidence of confusion by candidates over the artistic and practical

approaches when companies were too similar. Similarly the choice of a devising company that rarely uses text left candidates struggling for material for their Research Reports (especially when using that company to explore a text of their choice).

Some centres included exercises from companies like DV8 or Gecko to support their initial practitioner choices to great effect.

Some practitioners have a wealth of practical exercises documented, with a canon of recognised work and in many cases candidates that explored these practitioners found the process of exploration more detailed and rewarding than those that struggled with locating exercises to use when exploring a less effectively documented practitioner.

At A level, there is an expectation that centres and candidates will practically explore the latest trends, thinking and exercises on a practitioner. It was obvious during the moderating process where centres have used outdated, poorly researched schemes of work / resource booklets. In some cases, candidates wrote about how they played a game in a 'Frantic' way when there is an expectation that an actual Frantic Assembly exercise is explored.

With Stanislavski, centres are advised to explore exercises from his later years, for example including the rehearsal technique Active Analysis.

For Artaud candidates would benefit from exploring the spiritual side of Artaudian theatre in addition to the darker aspects of cruel theatre.

Similarly there is an expectation that there is an in depth exploration of practitioners that is then evidenced in the Research Report.

In an age where a plethora of resources are posted on the internet in various groups and forums please take time to check the validity of schemes of work and resources as many I have seen are poorly researched and the exercises outlined ill fitted to the practitioners they are meant to endorse. To help OCR have provided some practitioner resource packs that will start you in the right direction and can be found at [OCR Practitioner Resources](#)

When exploring a practitioner it is important for candidates to also explore the heritage of that practitioner-, for example, a centre exploring Berkoff in their Research Reports outlined how they first explored Lecoq and the Seven Levels on Tension exercise as a way into Berkoff's practice. This kind of exploratory work is to be commended and is seen as a solid path to an in depth exploration.

For Design candidates, choosing practitioners such as Brecht or EG Craig during Section 1 gave them a clear style to design to and evidence within the portfolios.

## **Texts**

There was a refreshing range of classic and contemporary texts used and it was great to see centres and candidates taking a fresh approach to the choice of texts! Encouragingly, the number of female playwrights chosen seems to be on the rise and with so many wonderful plays by writers such as Polly Stenham, Lucy Prebble, Ella Hickson and Penelope Skinner this component offers centres a great opportunity to introduce modern female voices too candidates.

## **Evaluation and Analysis**

Centres are reminded that the Evaluation and Analysis mark is for both the Research Report and Portfolios. A number of centres had candidates evaluate and analyse throughout and have clear subheadings titled 'Evaluation of Frantic's Fluff exercise' or 'Evaluating my experience of Stanislavski's free body and imagination exercises' which is seen as good practice.

## **Section 2 The Portfolio**

If Section 1 is about exploring Section 2 is about creating and it is obvious from the Portfolios produced that candidates thoroughly enjoyed creating theatre. Some of the portfolios produced were simply stunning with centres embracing the scrap book style portfolio to great effect. Centres that used photographs, set diagrams, timelines, selected images of stimuli all were able to successfully evidence the devising journey they had been on. For Design candidates successful candidates included rig layouts, material chosen, gels experimented with colour, all allowing candidates to evidence the experimental and collaborative journey they have been on.

### **Filmed portfolios**

Centres that film portfolios need to ensure that every candidate has their own individual filmed portfolio although they can share group footage. Centres should include sections where the candidate is filmed talking, evaluating and analysing directly to camera as well as rehearsal footage. There was evidence of erratic filming perhaps the work filmed by candidates; a two minute 'steady hand' and 'slow camera move' demonstration for candidates would aid moderation immensely.

## **Section 3 Devised | Designed Performance**

We saw some truly experimental work, which is a credit to how centres embraced the component, and was testament to how centres and candidates had fully engaged in the process of exploring practitioners and creating theatre using the practitioners they have explored for inspiration. It was clear to see that the vast majority of candidates had enjoyed exploring practitioners and developing their own unique pieces of theatre, which was brilliant to see. The range of performances was immense, with the best being where candidates had used their practitioner's exercises as a foundation to the devising process and then as a springboard to creating theatre and ultimately going beyond it to create their own style.

The most successful candidates used one or both of their practitioners to mould and develop their devised performance, candidates then had a structure and a style to help them when devising. Where in the specification there is, reference 'the work of others' there is an expectation this will be the practitioners explored in Section 1 and 2.

Where Design candidates contributed to the performance, there was a real sense that Performance and Design candidates were working together to create a show, which resulted in some fantastic collaborative theatre.

Centres are also advised to bear in mind the performance abilities of their students when deciding on practitioners for Section 1.

Centres that fully integrated their practitioners in the performance in many cases picked up the Artistic Intention marks available in the higher bands.

It is hoped that this report helps centres to build on this foundation for subsequent years.

### **Ongoing Support**

As a team, we are committed to providing support for you when delivering Practitioners in Practice. In addition to this report, you should have received the report from your moderator with your results. If you have any questions, please email them into our subject advisor [drama@ocr.org.uk](mailto:drama@ocr.org.uk) and we will answer any questions you have.

**Helpful tips for your next cohort**

- Use subheadings throughout the Research Report and Portfolio linked to the assessment criteria.
- Choose contrasting practitioners that have readily available, up to date practical resources.
- When exploring a practitioner go into real depth.
- Document the evidence as you go along.
- Create scrapbook style portfolios.
- For candidates who are less confident in writing down their devising journey film them working, experimenting, analysing and evaluating their journey.
- Ident your students before the performance.
- Do a test-filming run before the performance.

## H459/21-22 Exploring and Performing Texts

### Administration

The introduction of a new specification is always a challenge for centres, and examiners reported how pleased they were with the way centres had been able to meet the variety of requirements. Useful feedback has been received, which will lead to some amendments in the type of paperwork required.

Most centres met the deadline of seven days for sending the examiner the required documentation. The items required are as follows.

- The concept pro forma for each candidate as a hard copy. Electronic versions are not acceptable. The pro forma must be signed by the candidate and centre confirming that the work is that of the individual candidate alone.
- The running order. This must have candidate names and candidate numbers and be organised in order of performances.
- Details of the centre such as location, availability of parking, and any ID required.
- The time the centre wishes the examination to start.

It is essential that the seven-day deadline is met to ensure parity for candidates and to give examiners sufficient time to mark the concept pro formas and to prepare their paperwork for the marking of the performances.

Arrangements for the examiner were generally good. Most centres were able to provide a good-sized desk and a lamp, and ensured their audience was not overlooking the examiner. An examiner may ask a centre to move part of the audience if it is felt they are too close.

Examiners will remain at their desk during the examination, but a room should be made available for their use if they need a break when they may write up notes.

There will be occasions where last minute illness, or someone leaving the course shortly before the performance, leaves the group needing a non-examined person to step in. This must always be approved by OCR in advance, and evidence of this approval should be given to the examiner prior to the performance taking place. Apart from this, the only time a non-examined candidate may be used is if a particular section requires a sleeping partner and it is impossible or unreasonable to use one of the other candidates. This should be rare. Apart from these two examples, the use of non-examined candidates should not occur.

There is no discussion with candidates regarding their performance, although most examiners will want to greet them and perhaps say a few words of supportive encouragement.

It is a requirement that the centre provide an audience for performances. The specification gives details of the nature of audiences permitted. Some audiences, where the entry required more than one performance group, were made up of the actual examination class, taking it in turns to perform and to watch their peers. Some centres also had other classes watching from younger years or potential GCE students. Many centres had invited candidates' parents and friends to watch. Peer audiences were very well-behaved and supportive, as were the invited audiences. A significant number of centres asked for a twilight or evening performance to ensure a quiet environment and to enable parents and relatives to attend. A small number also asked for a Saturday examination. These are permissible, but if a twilight, evening or weekend examination is requested, centres should make it clear when they complete and submit their VAF forms.

A requirement of the specification is for the performance to be filmed and then chaptered if there is more than one group being examined and placed on a DVD or memory stick in a format that can be easily viewed on a DVD player or computer. The DVD or memory stick should then be sent to the examiner as soon as possible. Most centres were able to do this within two or three days. Candidates must introduce themselves before their performance.

It is important that the camera is located so that it captures all of the area in which candidates are performing, whilst avoiding also filming the head and shoulders of the examiner. Almost all centres were able to use a performance space that was quiet and without interruption.

### Concept Pro Formas

There were some very good examples, where candidates had kept to the focus of the three questions, been brief and succinct and used examples from their own practice, the whole text and moments from their performance to illustrate the points made.

There were also some very long answers – a number exceeded 3000 words, double the recommended 1500 words in total for the three questions. Such lengthy answers did not accrue any more marks than a candidate concisely responding to the three questions in the recommended 1500 words.

Some candidates had chosen to highlight the key areas of each question but then wrote well outside those key areas or just ignored them altogether.

The following notes are provided to aid clarification of the demands:

Responses to **Question 1)** should focus on:

- The demands of the **whole** play – the style, the setting, the characters, the action, the use of language, the period etc.
- How this has been performed in the past and how others may have performed it for a present day audience (this latter aspect was often completely ignored).
- Examples should quote understanding based on practical work on the whole text.

This could include the work done in studying the whole text before selecting the extracts.

**In other words, what does the candidate know and understand about performing the play that has been selected, researched studied and practised?**

Responses to this first question should neither refer to nor need mention, unless specifically relevant, the role played by the candidate, the extract(s)/sections chosen, nor the way they are to be performed in the examination.

Responses to **Question 2)** should focus on:

- having acquired that knowledge and understanding of the whole play through study, research and practice, in what ways does the candidate intend to project the intentions of the whole play to the audience through the extract(s)/sections being presented?
- How does the candidate's performance encapsulate, take into account, demonstrate, conclude, prefigure, explain and expose the whole play? This could be through character(s) and interactions, action, tension, dialogue, setting, costume etc.

For example, in playing the opening scene in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the three daughters their father and assorted husbands, courtiers and attendants, must give the audience a notion of the characters that are to unfold to us later in the play.

Responses to **Question 3)** should focus on:

- The role the candidate is to play in the selected extract{s}.

Moments, lines of dialogue, actions should be used to explain those "most important characteristics".

This is not a blow-by-blow narration of what the cast as a whole do or say in the extract nor is it an analysis of all the characters in the piece.

In fact, unless the comment relates specifically to the role played, there need not be any mention of characters other than the one played by the candidate.

There should be reference made to the ways in which the candidate has approached these characteristics practically in rehearsal and perhaps comment on intention behind the choices they have made, for example, in movement, speech, positioning, costume etc.

Thus, the intention of the **Concept Pro Forma** is to demonstrate understanding of the whole text and focus down on what and why selections have been made and the individual response the candidate is making, during the examined performance extract.

Great care had been taken by most candidates over settings and effects, although many candidates did not refer to this in their concept pro formas. Decisions on setting, lighting and sound added to the atmosphere of what was seen.

The quality of language on some of the submissions was weak and unedited. Candidates are allowed to review their submission before committing it to print and they should check for incorrect spelling (particularly of playwrights!), inaccurate grammar, incomplete sentences, absent capital letters and ensure that sense is organised into paragraphs. A large number of candidates, submitted three solid blocks of text in response to the three questions.

Some candidates used words and terminology when it is clear that it is not understood. Centres are advised to encourage candidates only to use reference to practitioners, techniques and terminology when they are sure of the meaning and can relate it in some way to the work they plan or the character(s) they are playing. Too often, theatre practitioners were referred to as if seasoning in a dish. 'We use Brecht here and then give it some Artaudian theatre'; 'We added a touch of Stanislavski', were just two of many purposeless comments.

If a play is not funny, it is not automatically a tragedy. Similarly, a comedy is not all belly laughs. Comedy and Tragedy are dramatic structures within which playwrights make their plays and there are other types of structures.

### **Text choices**

The majority of texts used were suitable and ranged widely from Euripides to Brecht, Priestley, Wilde, Genet and Fo together with a number of very successful contemporary pieces.

The selection of texts was varied and overall suited the candidates' age and level of maturity. Centres should remember that although the text management service may approve a text that does not mean it is approving the performance of extract material. A few centres selected extracts that were contrary to the requirements described on page 69 of the specification. Such centres seem to have confused what is allowed to be studied, with what cannot be included in a performance.

A good example is Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, with its dark suicidal content and in sections very explicit expletives. It is possible to choose an extract full of expletives and this is not appropriate; however, some examiners saw very sensitively chosen extracts that had just the occasional expletive, where candidates had been able to bring out the full power of the text and made good use of ensemble movement and choral speech. Centres are urged to read pages the specification to ensure that appropriate extracts are chosen.

Examiners reported some very interesting performances.

*A minimally staged, physical theatre version of 'Wind in the Willows'*

*A very funny, technically and physically effective version of Berkoff's 'Greek'*

*A version of 'Animal Farm' performed in a large cage-like structure*

*Marat Sade brought to life in true musical theatre style with challenging physicality and characterisation, enhanced by lighting, sound and set, and having a strong impact on the audience*

## **Performances**

Most of the work seen had been adequately rehearsed. In only one centre was there hesitation over words and cues, although there were a few more candidates only just secure with lines, betrayed by a lack of sense or phrasing in the dialogue resulting in wooden acting.

On the other hand, there were some quite professional standard performances, in terms of the timing, particularly in comic pieces. Similarly, the use of costume, props, lighting and sound all were used to enhance performances and, in most instances, did so, not only to the benefit of the candidates but also enhancing the audience's understanding.

Performance memory was outstanding and there were very few examples of candidates not projecting sufficiently. Most groups provided energy and attack, and a thoughtful use of space. Characterisation was almost always strong, and good understanding of the texts was invariably demonstrated. It was good to see candidates using their skills to the full, especially those with skills in dance and physical theatre; and also, those with skills in musical theatre.

Further, in terms of finish and polish, centres should encourage candidates to take notice of the protocols associated with the presentation of Drama. For example, there are conventions associated with acknowledging applause. To collapse in a heap of relief, laughter and shrieks in front of the audience devalues the work presented.

Whilst there were positive outcomes for performances during the day, by far the most effective were those just after school or in the evening with audiences that brought some distance and sense of moment to the event. Whilst accepting that some centres might have challenges that are difficult to overcome when selecting a time for their examination, the weakest were those where a single group was performing for staff and the examiner, which seemed hardly a step beyond the rehearsal process, and didn't really meet the requirement for there to be an audience.

A number of performances attempted to emulate company styles by introducing movement in place of dialogue to make manifest the meaning of the moment. Whilst this is quite acceptable, centres must emphasise to candidates that this takes every bit as much time to rehearse as learning the words and making them make sense. Some of the movement sections witnessed were no more than pre-GCSE exercises, strung together with meaningless blank expressions. This added little to the performance. When movement and physical theatre were used well it led to some memorable performances.

Conversely, there were some very sedentary static pieces, with little thought given to the blocking; sitting-down acting can be interesting, but not when everyone is sitting down all the time. That is not to say that candidates must be on-the-go all the time, but movement and dialogue can go comfortably together and often help to enhance the audience's understanding of sub-text and characterisation, more easily. Too often, actors went into neutral whilst on stage, but not directly involved in the ongoing dialogue, forgetting that the audience is still there and still potentially looking at them: hands behind backs or clasped in front, relaxed posture, loss of eye contact, all betray that the actor has switched off until their next line.

The artistic intentions for the extracts involved a variety of practitioners' influences and were often clear to see – mainly from Stanislavski, Frantic Assembly, Godber & Brecht; less common but still significant influences could be seen in some candidates' work from Berkoff, Artaud and the Verbatim Theatre genre.

There were some interesting uses of less usual staging: in-the-round, thrust and traverse. Also, some good use of appropriate music, film, projection, lighting effects and set and prop items to add to the atmosphere and theatricality of the performances.

A very good number of excellent, engaging and enthusiastic performances, with the texts clearly having been wisely adapted and developed in a coherent fashion in all cases. Occasionally adaptations to shorter texts resulted in a version of the whole play being performed and these were also coherent and successful.

A small number of centres chose musical theatre. This was very successful, although candidates must understand that if they are to sing, their singing skills will be treated like any other vocal skill and considered as a drama technique.

Most performances kept to the time limit set in the specification. Centres are reminded that pieces should not exceed the maximum recommended and that examiners have the right to stop a performance that exceeds the maximum by a significant amount. Pieces that are too long and too short have a self-penalising effect on candidates. Too long and it is difficult for candidates to sustain and they are not showing anything new; too short, and their exposure is insufficient to demonstrate a breadth of skills. No penalties were applied for pieces that exceeded or failed to reach the maximum and minimum times.

## Design

There were very few candidates offering design. It was good to see that it had not been chosen as a soft option – which it isn't – and in many cases had been chosen because the candidate had aspirations to take it up in higher education or in a career. In one example, where costume and make-up were offered, it had been well-thought through with a video submission to supplement the work in performance that demonstrates outcome and intention.

A weaker example offering Lighting and Sound was not strong. There was no evidence beyond what was seen in the performance. The candidate did operate the lights, but given what was available in the rig, using floodlights was hardly the most creative approach.

There should be an audit trail from the point where discussion starts on an extract and the style the group wants, through to a brief for the designer and frequent communication with group members as to how the response to the brief is working. There could be evidence of planning and for lighting and sound, good evidence of the way the brief will be interpreted.

The best candidates were able to demonstrate some original ideas; the way that such ideas then developed into a brief; research into possible ways of meeting the brief; consideration of what worked and what didn't; the final practical challenges and how they were overcome. In the same way that the actors show a journey through the development and presentation of their character, learn their lines, plot their moves, and interact with other characters and their set, so the designer must show the journey they have undertaken to arrive at a final outcome. There are no marks for supporting material, but it plays an essential part in helping the examiner understand fully the demand and the thoughts of the candidate in demonstrating skills.

The design option must be as demanding as and comparable to the acting option, and so the choice of a text with little design demand does not allow a candidate to demonstrate design skills to a high standard.

## General

The list that follows provides a few examples of the texts used by centres. Providing this list is in no way recommending any of these plays, but rather is an indication of the breadth of selection.

<b>Name of text</b>	<b>Playwright</b>
Wind in the Willows	Alan Bennett
Greek	Steven Berkoff
Agamemnon	Steven Berkoff
Metamorphosis	Steven Berkoff
London Road	Alecky Blythe
The Good Person of Setzuan	Bertolt Brecht
Fen	Caryl Churchill
Love and Information	Caryl Churchill
Jane Eyre	Adapted by Sally Cookson
Attempts on her Life	Martin Crimp

<b>Name of text</b>	<b>Playwright</b>
Medea	Euripides
The Trojan Women	Euripides
Can't Pay, Won't Pay	Dario Fo
The Maids	Jean Genet
Bouncers	John Godber
Shakers	John Godber
Animal Farm by George Orwell,	adapted by Peter Hall
Girls	Theresa Ikoko
4.48 Psychosis	Sarah Kane
My Mother Said I Never Should	Charlotte Keatley
Roberto Zucco	Bernard Marie Koltès
Yerma and Blood Wedding	Lorca
A View from the Bridge	Arthur Miller
Fugee	Abi Morgan
An Inspector Calls	J B Priestley
As You Like It	Shakespeare
The Good Doctor	Neil Simon
Pornography	Simon Stephens
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime	Haddon/Stephens
Education, Education, Education	The Wardrobe Ensemble
Marat Sade	Peter Weiss
Ladies Down Under	Amanda Whittington
The Importance of Being Earnest	Oscar Wilde

## H459/31 Analysing Performance

Centre Report for H459/31 June 2018

This component within the qualification requires the candidate to write three essays within two and fifteen minutes. This has proved to be demanding in terms of balancing the requirements of the question and knowledge of the text with theatrical imagination, interpretation and understanding. There is a need for centres to perhaps spend more time studying the texts within this area of the qualification in order to engage with the nuances of the script and the theme in more depth and with more understanding. There were examples where what was written was in contradiction to the action required by either the text or the stage directions. Whilst it is not necessary in all texts to follow the stage directions, completely some elements are necessary for the meaning of the text to come across. This might suggest that a more practical approach to delivery is required with candidates working on the required extracts from the point of view of a director, actor or designer.

The majority of candidates were able to attempt all of the questions although some candidates misjudged the time needed to answer the three questions and some answers were therefore shorter than others. However, it was clear that other candidates had considered how to use the time effectively and produced essays of appropriate length.

All essays seen were started with an introduction and ended with a conclusion whilst this is not a requirement of the specification and mark scheme at this level there is a requirement for clarity and structure to the work, which these are considered to be part of. Those candidates however, who did more than address the question and set the argument wasted too much time discussing Brecht or Stanislavski or the background of the playwright before starting to write the essay and there were some examples of candidates writing over a page on background information which was not supportive of their argument within the essay. An introduction at this level should introduce the text and define the question in relation to the text and the candidate's approach. There is no requirement within the mark scheme for the learner to explore the social, political and cultural aspects or context of the text and although knowledge and understanding of this should be given when it impacts on the elements of the question being answered. For example the setting of *Necessary Targets* in Bosnia or *Black Watch* in Iraq.

Most essays were seen with some structure which followed a line of development and the structure of the work made sense with candidates moving through the text and performance in chronological order of scenes or events, which would appear to be the most appropriate way to approach questions. Where candidates did not approach the work in this manner they often were unsure as to what they were saying and lost the focus of their argument. Structure of the argument and the essay is considered to be important and is vital in establishing a clear discussion or analysis.

Some candidates answered Question 7 first and it would appear that this is the question which candidates feel more confident with. There did not appear to be any specific advantage or disadvantage in terms of the outcome for candidates. The questions can be answered in any order as long as the candidates makes it clear what question they are answering. There were one or two examples of question numbers not being given but only one or two examples of candidates not following the rubric of the question paper. For example – one candidate was seen to answer the wrong question for the set text they had studied and some candidates went on to discuss aspects of a question, which were not required. This was particularly noticeable for Question 5 where the question specifically stated that one aspect of design should be discussed. There were a number of scripts, which were considered to be difficult to read, and although there has been an increase in atypical scripts provided by centres for candidates who need to type

their work - there are still some candidates, which would clearly benefit from this facility in the future. Those candidates who were given this opportunity benefitted and a number of strong scripts were seen which were atypical and which earned high marks in the mark scheme. There were many examples of issues with spelling, punctuation and grammar, which whilst not marked as part of the mark scheme can clearly have an impact on the clarity of the essay and the argument being presented. It is a little disappointing that candidates at this level are not able to spell specific technical terms which are required within their discussion for example proscenium arch and traverse staging.

In preparation for the exam it was clear that many centres had looked carefully at the AS level paper and considered the questions. The questions at AS level are different in structure and demand although approached from the same theatrical and practical focus. The outcome was that some candidates overcomplicated the question they were answering by making reference to the AS question for that text as well as the question for the A Level. Some arguments became very confused and convoluted – not helping the candidate to produce a clear structured argument.

There were lots of examples of candidates writing well about the plays and communicating good knowledge of situations, themes, issues, contexts, characters and relationships. However, often this type of articulate answer lacked adequate reference to practical ideas embedded in the drama itself.

There were a number of responses seen by examiners where the candidates wrote all they knew about the play before providing a practical. Some spent just too long setting the scene with the text and then ran out of adequate time to write about theatrical elements. Some spent too long matching the text to the question and again ran out of valuable time. Stronger candidates were able to communicate good knowledge and understanding of their play within the practical examples and suggestions. Weaker candidates described and provided narrative based answers.

Throughout the responses, there were a lot of rehearsal-based answers. This was not required although credit was given to ideas, which would impact on the performance as required by the question. There were some irrelevant rehearsal type answers, which did not engage with the question.

### **Section A Question 1**

Candidates on the whole were able to identify appropriate moments within the text to discuss conflict and there was a clear understanding of proxemics.

Good answers were given which discussed and explored the inner conflict within a role and how this then manifested itself within the performance and the character's use of space to demonstrate that inner conflict. However many of the discussions of ideas lacked depth and sophistication and as a result were not able to develop a line of reasoning which went very far in terms of theatrical interpretation.

Examiners were able to credit where proxemics affected other elements of staging or performance if the connections were made but ideas, which moved away from a discussion of spatial relations, could not be awarded marks.

Clearly the focus of the question must be on how the performer or performers used the space on stage in relation to other characters in order to show the conflict which is within a specific moment of the text. Questions at this level have a double focus and the candidates must be able to discuss these in relation to each other so in this case how the actor uses the stage to demonstrate their relationship with another actor. On the whole, this was dealt with well although there were some examples where candidates discussed an actor's use of space in relation to set or props, which might be effective if this, then related specifically to another character within that space.

There is a need for candidates to provide competent ideas, which most learners are able to do but to learn how to analyse those ideas further and develop them in terms of detailed reference to techniques and conventions.

### Section A Question 2

This question proved to be more difficult for candidates with the focus on props. Some candidates were able to discuss their overall staging design but a large number did not appear to have a clear picture of what they would do in terms of the design concept for the text and this narrowed down the discussion on props. It would be appropriate for candidates to have a style of performance and have thought through their staging design for their interpretation of the text. This would reflect good preparation for the exam. There is then a need for the candidate to discuss a range of props, which might be used, and how these might then relate to conflict. Some learners were able to identify props that would be appropriate and were then able to say how this prop would be used to enhance the atmosphere of conflict at times this was a more surrealist approach particularly in *O What A Lovely War*. It was not enough simply to say that a gun would be used but the candidate would be expected to detail that gun and say how it would be used. This would reflect the discussion between director and designer within the theatrical process, which is what the essay needs to do.

There was some overlap between props and set and examiners were able to give credit for answers where the ideas given were reflective of how the prop was used or how the element of set was used as a prop. For example – projections were referred to and if interaction with that projection was argued then it might be considered as a prop. Equally, if a large map or a chess board is used on the stage floor then that might be considered as a prop if it was used directly within the action of a scene. The expectation was that discussion of the creative use of particular props would centre around the scene under discussion and this was adhered to in all cases seen.

A strong answer for this question would describe the prop in detail and how it would be used in detail reflecting an understanding of the importance of props as part of the design of a production.

At times, the choice of scripts made by the learners clearly affected the outcome achieved. Some texts and some specific scenes lent themselves more to the discussion required to the question and this is also relevant for all questions. Interpretation and choosing the right question is perhaps an area to be developed in delivery of the qualification.

### Section A Question 3

Most answers seen dealt with the quote provided within the question appropriately and took this as only a part of the question with the focus being on power and status and how this is shown within a performance. There were some strong answers given which dealt with King Lear and his daughters and the changes in power and status with close reference to a range of performance skills used by the actor. Equally more sophisticated answers were seen where this was also backed up with reference to the use of set and props to convey status for example the use of a throne and use of higher levels by Lear.

Weaker answers were seen where status manifested itself physically through position on stage and the use of a certain props for example the stick in the case of Bernada in *The House of Bernada Alba*. These ideas whilst appropriate required further development to go beyond competent on the mark scheme.

Candidates must explore their ideas with confidence and detailed understanding of the impact of theatrical techniques and ideas.

Perhaps the weakest answers seen for this question were on *Caucasian Chalk Circle* where candidates found it difficult to identify appropriate scenes to discuss. However, there were some very strong answers, which focused on the Governor and his wife rather than on Grusha. Clearly

as the protagonist within the play, Grusha is a significant character but answers do not need to specifically focus on her and when studying the text, candidates should be encouraged to consider all characters with equal depth and understanding.

It was clear that candidates understood how power and status is shown and many candidates were able to discuss the nuances of both power and status either as one or separate traits of personality. On the other hand, some answers were seen where there was a lack of focus on this power and status within the family situation with no reference to relationships or position within the family. The question requires reference to the fact that we are looking at the interpretation of a family within a theatrical performance.

#### **Section A Question 4**

It would seem that most candidates discussed scenes from the opening of the play. Many candidates focused on *A Day In The Death of Joe Egg* although some did not discuss Bri's opening monologue at all. This has some good examples of changes in pace and action which were discussed by some in an effective and clear manner highlighting the changes in pace which Bri might use to convey his distracted thoughts and style as a teacher.

Some candidates were drawn into a discussion about the role of women in the 1960's and there was some confusion as to whether or not this was a positive and effective period for women's lib.

Some candidates focused on the discussion of the relationship between Bri and Sheila, which is appropriate, but there is more to the discussion as well. Examiners felt that the complexity of the characters and their relationship was superficial and that answers relied on stereotypical response to the roles. This was reflected in a lack of engagement with the complexity of the relationships seen and it would appear that a more in depth response/study of the text is required.

Reference was made by most candidates to the delivery of lines and action, the contrast between the speed of Bri and Sheila reflecting the state of their relationship and of their own thoughts, use of pause and stillness in contrast to movement, movement around the space and interaction between the two characters. Stronger answers dealt with more subtle ideas behind the pace and action of the scene although some candidates were focused on the effect of Joe's disability on the relationship and this often led to some naïve ideas about how Sheila and Bri dealt with this as a family.

#### **Section A Question 5**

The question required candidates to discuss one staging element although there is a need for this to come from an overall stage design concept which must be referenced by way of an introduction to the single element chosen. Some candidates did not explore their overall concept before discussing the use of a specific element and some candidates were not able to focus on one element as required by the question.

Where candidates mentioned more than one element, examiners focused on the strongest element discussed to ensure that credit was given for the best ideas produced by the learner within the essay and not just the first element mentioned. This is clearly stated in the mark scheme and was adhered to by examiners.

Some candidates found it difficult to separate out a single design aspect from how they envisaged the whole scene being presented. Again credit was given for relevant ideas and where there was a significant link between elements with the one element interacting or affecting the other, credit may have been given. For example, candidates provided some competent and well-developed responses to the question in relation to *Frankenstein* but forgot to focus on one element of stage design.

This may have reflected the fact that their ideas were generated by a performance seen rather than their own interpretation of the work. Examiners felt that candidates were relying on design

material from existing performances of the text particularly for *Frankenstein* and *Oh What A Lovely War*. Whilst these might influence decisions made simply copying work already seen did not provide strong answers which reflected understanding or theatrical knowledge on a first hand basis.

At times candidates forgot to focus on the creation of mood and atmosphere or forgot to state this clearly in their answers. It would be useful for candidates to be able to identify the point they are making in relation to the question before providing the ideas or practical interpretation.

Stronger more confident answers identified the mood or atmosphere they were trying to achieve through the use of the design element rather than simply discussion or describing what would be seen.

Many answers focused on the use of lighting and yet there is clearly a need for candidates to be prepared with more knowledge of lighting if they are likely to do this. Only a few candidates were able to refer to specific lights, gels or lighting techniques beyond the use of a general wash, spotlight or use of strobe lighting. It is competent to say that a red light might reflect danger but to move beyond this - a more detailed knowledge and understanding is required which might refer to intensity, direction, hue, spillage of the light or focus of the light.

Most candidates chose to refer to lighting or sound rather than aspects of costume or set design. Few candidates made reference to the context of the play and how this might affect design. There was reference to Brecht in terms of his approach to design and some references to naturalism, which put the design in context, but candidates must remember that this is not an essay on practitioners.

### **Section A Question 6**

This was a popular question particularly for those that had studied *Frankenstein*, *Love of A Nightingale* and *Othello*. Some of these discussions were detailed and sophisticated in dealing with the nuances of voice in relation to pace, pitch, volume, emphasis, use of pauses. Some candidates however simply said that the character would use an angry voice but did not give any practical suggestion as to how this might be conveyed. Other candidates were able to discuss how this would be achieved in detail with reference to a range of vocal skills. It was clear that how use of voice could convey relationships was understood by candidates and the question was successful for most.

### **Section B Question 7**

Answers given by candidates were seen which covered the full range of the mark scheme with some detailed and evaluative answers being given which reflected perceptive understanding and theatrical analysis. A number of productions were seen by candidates including *Things I Know To Be True*, *Metamorphosis*, *King Lear*, *Frankenstein* and *The Little Match Girl*. There were also examples of work where candidates were simply reviewing the performance and some where, candidates were quoting reviews. Unfortunately, in these examples, there was often a lack of analysis and where the candidates do not describe, analyse and evaluate what they have seen in detail and with understanding, it is difficult to award marks beyond limited or basic in terms of the mark scheme.

Candidates are required to reflect on what they have seen in live performance. This is clearly stated in the specification. There were some examples of candidates stating that they watched the performance on Digital Theatre. For the purposes of assessment, this is acceptable but responses were better when candidates had seen a live performance. To achieve high marks within this essay, candidates need to choose a performance which provides them with the opportunity to clearly describe what they saw or experienced and then to analyse why it was done this way. In other words, what did the techniques and conventions used bring to the experience of the audience.

It was clear that some candidates had been involved in effective class discussion regarding this and this supported their work and understanding of what they saw. In order to credit points made, the examiner must be able to picture the moment or techniques seen by the candidate. If they can see this clearly then they are able to award the learner's understanding more effectively. In preparation for the exam, it is necessary for candidates to understand this and to be able to clearly explain what they saw before analysing in detail and demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of performance work.

There were many examples of essays, which focused on the themes of the play. This was not a requirement of the question but was a requirement for the AS paper which had clearly been used as preparation for the A Level exam. Whilst this year this is understandable, it does suggest that some essays might have been pre-prepared as the candidates were answering a different question. In some instances, this did give a framework for the essay but in some cases, it complicated the issue and rather than talking about how things were done, candidates were more involved in why things were done. Whilst a positive approach was taken by all examiners and ideas credited where there was an understanding of how things were done and why – centres are reminded that moving forward centres should use the A Level paper as exemplar material.

## H459/41-48 Deconstructing Texts for Performance.

### 1. General Comments:

The first session of H459 components 41 to 48 saw no entries for 48 *Woza Albert!* The other seven components had a wide ranging entry, with *Cloud Nine* the least popular and *The Crucible* the most.

Though clearly linked in each component through the same text, the two questions were marked discretely, each worth 30 marks. Candidates who clearly spent considerably more time on one rather than both equally did not help themselves.

While other components deal with performance and recording processes, 41-48 deal only with the role of the director in a production. Examiners looked for any aspect of the director's function, including an overall dream of what a show would look like, the aim of conveying meaning and/or a message to an audience, staging, blocking, levels, set design, lighting, sound, effects, costume, props, stage furniture, genre and contexts. It was not expected that voice or gesture would be sufficient to address either question; nor that every single aspect of a director's brief would be fully covered.

Many candidates raised the issues of budgets that a director might have or wish for. This was a relevant aspect of the directorial vision, as the reality of financing has to be addressed, though imaginary limitless resources were accepted as part of the vision.

Over the two years' preparation and using the format of the Sample Assessment Material provided in advance, centres had time to prepare written work on directing, directorial vision and how direction dovetails with performing and design elements of performance.

It was therefore to be expected that a number of centres had prepared candidates with generalised directorial responses, without knowing the wording of the actual questions. The formulaic or pre-prepared response is likely to be a feature of the exam in the years ahead, and while it is to a small extent understandable, it does limit candidates' creativity and originality.

During marking it was evident that a few centres had prepared candidates to the point of all of them working on precisely the same directorial vision, local setting and political interpretation. Centres should not offer candidates ready-made directorial ideas, but help them work towards finding, exploring and presenting their own.

Some candidates spent much of their time discussing current political issues and concerns, rather than applying them directly to the text and their directorial vision for it. In some cases, candidates had insufficient time, therefore, to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of theatrical processes, the director's artistic choices and how the text has been constructed and may be performed.

Many responses opened both questions with identical paragraphs. Q1 asking about an extract and Q2 about the whole play invited a different approach for each question, particularly as Q1 did not ask specifically about a contemporary production, while Q2 did. The Mark Schemes

stated that material credited in Q1 could not be credited again in Q2, though there was a certain amount of natural overlap in text, contexts, directorial approaches and design elements.

The questions were similar across all seven components and required treatment to deal with each aspect. Q1 asked for an explanation as a director, bringing the characters to life and annotating the given extract from the play to support the directorial work. The marks available were not notionally divided into different sections. The responses were marked as a whole in each case.

Strong responses gave their marked annotations labels such as voice, movement, intention, tone which would help both the director to direct and the actor(s) to understand and interpret. Where candidates correctly identified the positioning and status of the extract within the play, they usually made a strong argument for their directorial vision overall. If Examiners could picture the scene being described by the candidate, then it was a big step on the road to a higher level.

There were few differences between those who wrote well beyond the first page in the answer book and marked a few annotations on the script, and those who wrote little (usually confined to the first answer book page) with extensive and detailed annotations clearly explaining their directorial thinking and how actors could indeed bring their characters to life.

There was no right and wrong on this. Written explanation plus supporting annotations addressed the question. On the Level Descriptors, there are four strands for each level and not all were expected to be dealt with in full in Q1, where the focus was more likely to be on performance skills to bring characters to life than relevant contexts. Some candidates responded to Q1 by way of literary analysis rather than as a performance to be seen on a stage.

The Mark Schemes made clear in every component that original but well-focused answers and implicit as well as explicit responses to questions would be rewarded.

As the annotations needed to support the writing, Examiners looked for connections and parallels between the two. Where candidates referred to specific styles and/or rehearsal techniques, they did not always use the annotations to explain and amplify what those techniques would look like on a stage.

Q2 invited candidates to imagine a contemporary performance with explanation and justification for staging in a way that would integrate the different settings. This went beyond mere transitions between scenes. Examiners recognised that some texts are relatively short (*Stockholm*) compared to others (*Sweeney Todd*, which is also the only musical). Q2 did not require cover of every single scene and/or setting, but was addressed when candidates selected scenes and sections they felt were important to demonstrate their directorial vision.

While a handful of candidates ignored all mention of the contemporary command of Q2, Examiners reported a wide range of ideas for producing a contemporary production, most involving the latest technology and many influenced by current and political issues, such as Brexit, the *hashtagMeToo* movement and US President Trump to frame their productions. In a minority of responses, it was a big stretch to make a play fit their chosen political point, such as *Antigone/Trump* or *Antigone/The Nazis'* views on disability, and sometimes sight of the original play was a little lost.

Video projections, immersive effects, Artificial Intelligence, holograms and pre-recordings featured widely. From the horror-melodrama of *Sweeney Todd* and the surrealistic absurdism of *The Visit* to the nerve shredding tensions and already near contemporary nature of *Stockholm*, most candidates grasped that the genre, style and feel of their play was an essential starting point.

The types of staging were equally inventive and varied – from proscenium arches to in-the-round and from promenade to traverse and site specific. Provided the integrity of the text was kept, there was almost no limit to the effectiveness of ideas candidates came up with. Stages of wood, metal grids, carpet, broken tiles, a graveyard, a chessboard and a stage that was actually the audience were among the suggestions. Numbers of candidates utilised ceilings to hang things and people from, often in clever if occasionally impractical ways.

It was equally valid to suggest a traditional, naturalistic production of a play, done as intended by the playwright, but discussing how it would relate to a contemporary audience. Over-reliance on the given stage directions was often seen in some responses. The question demanded justification of the ideas and where that was forthcoming, candidates addressed the task.

There was a sense in a minority of responses that candidates had not actually studied the whole play, but were relying on the Q1 extract to prompt them to an answer for Q2.

With the learning from the other components and their practical work in preparing for this exam, there was an expectation that many would have drawn inspiration and ideas from the work of practitioners; some they had seen, some they had actually studied.

Brecht and Stanislavski featured frequently, though it was rarely enough to simply state that candidates would use, say 'gestus', 'alienation' or 'spass' in a scene or in a rehearsal, without some explanation of what that meant in terms of the play itself. There was also a drawing on the work of Artaud, Boal, Lecoq, Meisner, Grotowski, Katie Mitchell, Complicite, Punchdrunk, Rambert, DV8, Kneehigh and, of course, Frantic Assembly whose influence went well beyond Stockholm.

Examiners welcomed the way many candidates absorbed specific ideas from practitioners (both in rehearsal and in performance) and plays they'd seen (*Curious Incident* was especially influential), considered them, developed them and built up their own directorial visions. The idea of audience immersion was commonly discussed. Inspiration from wider literature, film and video games was frequently helpful in expanding candidates' ideas and viewpoints.

Examiners also reported among the stronger responses a pleasing, comprehensive, fluent use and understanding of theatrical and technical terms showing that the language of drama and theatre had informed their learning and was integral to their development of ideas. Where technical language was vague or not fully understood, lower levels were often the outcome.

Proxemics was a much used word, largely accurately with semiotics also popular, though some candidates did not quite grasp the subtleties that can flow from a range of signs on stage. Not fully understood terms did not generally contribute to effective responses. Neither did a vague statement such as, 'I want a proscenium arch so people can see things.'

The handwriting of a small minority of candidates presented something of a challenge for Examiners and it was noted that several Candidates opted to type their work, though most of the

annotations needed in Q1 were handwritten. Centres may wish to give thought in future sessions to advising candidates on handwriting or word processing.

The scanning process of scripts meant that the colour coding and highlighting of particular parts of the text in Q1 that had been done by some candidates was only visible as black and white. In future sessions this may be resolved, but in the meantime, centres may wish to avoid colours on written submissions.

## 2. Comments on Individual Questions:

### **Component 41 *Antigone***

It was not required to refer to Sophocles' version but many candidates did and used it effectively to draw comparisons with the Anouilh one, demonstrating wider knowledge and understanding of how the performance text was constructed and can be performed and debating some of the contextual angles.

Some of the references, such as to the 1971 Stanford Prison experiment, the Nazis and the ending of the Vietnam War informed plausible interpretations; others simply stretched the point through lack of both knowledge and understanding and often at the expense of the play text. According to Anouilh, it is to be staged without undue historical or geographical implications, so that is an argument in favour of some very experimental ideas.

Q1. Context was often more limited than the other strands of the Level Descriptors with more focus on character description, which was to be expected in a question asking about a specific extract and bearing in mind the comments above about the question being marked holistically.

The rising tension between Antigone and Creon, the flow of their arguments and the emotions and psychology underpinning their attitudes gives a director the potential for staging a gripping scene. This was acknowledged in the higher level responses.

Higher marked candidates also demonstrated an appreciation of the stylistic writing of the dialogue, the lengthy, declamatory monologue passages, the influences from Greek theatre and how they would impact on a director advising actors how to bring the characters to life and how an audience might respond to the extract.

Q2. Justification of ideas for production was essential, and occasionally the original contemporary idea was the big point for candidates who presented little or no justification that was related to production ideas, the text itself or appropriate contexts. Where candidates explored ideas and applied some critical judgement to their likely appeal to a modern audience, they fared better.

In the light of the present movement and campaigns on gender equality and the treatment and opportunities for women, there was some discussion along the lines of 'what if?' Supposing Antigone was a man trying to bury his brother? Or what if Creon was a woman trying to hold on to her authority? Or how would it sit if Polynices had been murdered because he or she was disabled or of a different faith? These formed a valid debate about a contemporary production, a socio-political vision.

### **Component 42 *Cloud Nine***

The existence, achievements and failings of the British Empire were sometimes understood; the existence of Empire itself was generally not commented upon. The uniqueness of the gap between the Acts was also not much referred to as a dramatic device.

A number of candidates had clearly studied Churchill's place in the pantheon of postmodern British artists and used some of the genre's fingerprints (fractured time, historical collage) with relation to this text to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that helped frame better responses to both questions.

Brecht was cited frequently as the inspiration for both Churchill and candidates' realisations for an audience today. The grasp of how and what Brecht believed in a long life was variable. Better responses engaged with specifics such as multi-roling, actors demonstrating their parts, a set of strong messages and constantly reminding the audience they are watching a play.

Q1. The Brecht influence was obvious in this question, where all that has happened in the previous act is relevant and the alienation of audience from involvement with characters was palpable. If real Brechtian demonstrating of acting was employed, then bringing characters to life didn't take on the obvious meaning.

There was often debate about how the park setting could be achieved, with one suggesting it be staged in an actual park, which was as valid as most other site specific suggestions. Annotations were particularly focused on acting concerns, with less on directorial perspectives, but were generally effective when the positioning of the extract and the roles and status of the characters was appreciated..

Q2. Some candidates chose to ignore the role reversals that Caryl Churchill laid down for the play, while others repeated her suggestions as their own by way of making it relevant for today. The same and opposite gender sexual encounters were largely ignored, though stronger responses acknowledged how far views have changed since the play was written and what, therefore, would or would not appeal to an audience today.

There was wide variation in how to stage the African setting in colonial days, with less strong candidates recreating what Churchill outlined in her script. Few had researched what it would have been like for the white man and the black man, the man and the woman, the adult and the child to live unequally side by side in Victorian days of Act One.

### **Component 43 *Earthquakes in London***

Many candidates made suggestions for current popular music to replace the songs written into the text as a means of appealing to a contemporary audience. A small number proposed appropriate older classic pop songs, including the Zager and Evans' 1969 hit, *In the Year 2525*.

The text suggests the play should use as much set, props and costume as possible on an overflowing stage. Candidates who rather forgot this missed some of the point of both extract and the full play. The notion of nearly, but not quite, descending into chaos was a big directorial clue for actors and director alike.

Q1. The extract from the end of Act 1 reveals a great deal of information about the characters, particularly Peter and Freya and their unlikely friendship that helps a director to shape both the direction of the characters and the layering of the message that the audience might feel as they

go into the interval. It is full of helpful stage directions, which most candidates picked up and used. The higher level approach was to recognise how small gestures, minor props and body language can say as much as the actual words.

The ever-present theme of excess on top of family, politics, loyalty and the environment is clear in the extract. The higher level responses discussed the themes in the extract as they are shown through the characters' words and copious physicality.

Q2. Justification of ideas for production was essential, and as this play is not very old, though seems more so to the candidates, the original contemporary idea was the usually measured in terms of application of technology. Where candidates explored ideas and applied some critical judgement to their updating ideas and likely appeal to a modern audience, they fared better.

The fast flow of movement between scenes was very much a feature of this play and any production needs to reflect that. Blackouts were rarely suggested; instead, candidates saw the benefits of lighting to switch attention across the performance area(s) seamlessly.

The prologues that open the separate acts were an opportunity to engage the audience, advance the plot and extend the characterisation gladly taken by many confident candidates in their grasp of the whole play.

Effective use of design elements frequently supported potent directorial visions for both questions, particularly on the socio-political front.

#### **Component 44 *Stockholm***

This is not a play to be taken at face value, as it is rich in layers of psychological complexity. The central theme of the supposed perfect couple and the surprising twist as to who is the abuser in the toxic relationship was understood across the board. The play still feels relevant so the ideas for making it suitable for a contemporary audience were rarely too far fetched.

The use of the language and swear words was commented on by some candidates, many of whom felt it was unnecessarily shocking. The actual cooking on stage was discussed by a few and what effect the smell of that would have on an audience. Some suggested it be done by video projection of hands, utensils and kitchen worktop while the actors mimed the actions.

The captor/captive relationship embodied in a symbolic web and the fluttering moth were generally understood. The more perceptive responses probed this syndrome at least a little. The use of Frantic Assembly techniques was as expected, particularly in the annotations, but there was little focus on the choreographic, physical theatre aspects.

Q1. There was an understandable focus on the characters in the extract, with a sense of bringing them to life through a range of acting skills and a number of contextual references to current political gender issues. The playwright's intentions were frequently discussed and the annotations often supported a debate.

The extract shows a finely balanced set of moments the couple share in the now and dancing around poisonous 'retro-jealousy' and how both are near the edge; anything could and does upset their domestic equilibrium. Their proxemics, their gestures and facial expressions had to be highlighted throughout and the annotations needed to reflect the written discussion.

Q2. One immediate challenge common to all plays requiring flashbacks is how to keep the audience up to speed with the then and the now. Higher level responses recognised the issue and offered directorial solutions.

Justification of ideas for a production was essential, and as this play is not very old, though seems more so to the candidates, the original contemporary idea was the usually measured in terms of how a toxic, abusive relationship with all the complications of love (especially Stockholm Syndrome love) would be accepted by a modern audience.

Design elements were often called in to support the discussion, with particular focus on symbols for the destructive, cyclical and caged-in nature of the relationship.

The language throughout the play is fast, overlapping in part, some directly addressed, short and sweeps the events along in a filmic way that is already familiar to audiences. It is therefore perhaps the shock, the unexpected male/female twist that is one significant factor for a director and actors.

### **Component 45 *Sweeney Todd***

The notes in the printed play script talk of Grand Guignol, macabre, melodrama, revenge, obsession and power. The possible styles for a production are many and candidates suggested several of them from straight gothic horror to melodrama. Some referenced *Titus Andronicus* as a production style model.

Several candidates devoted part of their time and thinking on music, dramatic sound effects, pre-recordings and extra live music. This generally ignored the music and underscoring of dialogue that runs through much of the text. Others wanted to replace Sondheim's songs with something more contemporary, which raised the issue of how far can a text be deconstructed while retaining some semblance of its original intentions?

Most candidates ignored the singing aspect of great swathes of the text, which was fair enough, but a reasoned discussion was to be had about how far songs/lyrics enhance characters, performance and audience awareness.

Candidates who used accurate terminology and technical detail to describe the emotional journey of the characters addressed the questions more fully. The rather vague use of some terms, such as 'I used proxemics' with little else explained or 'they would not break up the 4<sup>th</sup> wall', showed some learning but without knowledge.

Fluent, confident answers offered a sense that candidates had in depth knowledge of the whole musical and particularly of the characters' journey. There were some very confident contemporary visions, with imaginative set pieces, e.g. a 21st century computerised barber's chair, or where the socio-political aspects of the context to the musical, often resulting from research candidates had done on Sondheim, were related to those of today, including poverty and justice, revenge, murder and corruption of authority figures. Often use of technical language was assured, with candidates explaining their use, for example, of split level staging, soundscapes to evoke the London atmosphere, the use of the cyclorama to create mood or projections of the London skyline. However, most candidates wished to retain some of the Victorian 'feel' of the piece and this was often justified due to the stylised nature of the musical and through very good explanations of costume, atmospheric lighting and use of haze machines to replicate London fog.

Q1. Most responses picked up on the alleged maternal instinct within Mrs Lovett (a disguise of her true feelings for Todd?) and Tobias's natural yearning for a mother himself. Stronger responses appreciated the irony in the outward show masking her true dark heart and evil intention to save Todd from discovery, almost at any price.

Some of the more perceptive candidates recognised that while attention and the emotional shifts are focused on Todd, Lovett, Beadle and the Judge, in fact Tobias is a key role, interacting with other characters and being the eventual undoing of Todd.

The moment when Mrs Lovett makes the mistake of pulling out Pirelli's money purse in front of the boy is a key one and must be marked so that the audience realise that the villains will eventually be caught out, and Tobias is more than a juvenile simpleton. Higher level candidates found a way of highlighting it.

There was often discussion about exaggeration of voice, gesture and physicality to fit a melodramatic style and to bring characters to life. More perceptive responses reflected that such grand movement needs occasional moments of calm, quiet, reflection and subtlety by way of contrast. There was also discussion about costume and props.

Q2. Surprisingly few candidates focused on the sections involving the chorus, particularly as asylum inmates and escapees, but when they did, they identified the dramatic potential in integrating scenes and advancing the dark humour.

Staging was particularly imaginative in this play. Revolves were most common, but the promenade performance was often described in a very workman-like fashion.

Humour underpins much of the play – it doesn't take itself too seriously – yet there are moral lessons to be learned, there are wrongs to be righted and there is psychological depth to the characters that more perceptive candidates identified and explored.

Justification of ideas for production was essential, but not always present. Where candidates explored ideas, related them specifically to the text and applied some critical judgement to their likely appeal to a modern audience, they fared better.

### **Component 46 *The Crucible***

Several candidates referenced *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Hunger Games* as material which helped inform their ideas for relating to a contemporary audience, though Donald Trump's America was by far the most frequently cited precursor to an oppressive regime in which persecution, vengeance and unfair death could be meted out.

There was some lack of contextual discussion in either question, and often McCarthyism or the Red Scare was mentioned but was neither explained nor justified sufficiently to demonstrate how this play arose from it. Contextual understanding is key in this text. Good responses described costuming, the impact of the events and the characters being caught up in them and the socio-political aims that Miller wanted from his allegory.

The tendency for some candidates to tackle Q1 as a literary analysis more than performance blueprint was particularly pronounced in this play, where perhaps Miller's instructions and comments made that more likely.

Arthur Miller's notes that this play is 'not history' offered an insight into directorial interpretations, but most candidates interpreted the play as history, nonetheless.

Q1. The extract is a key part in the play when Proctor is making peace with the pregnant Elizabeth and standing firm on a path leading to his certain death. Bearing in mind the state of their relationship as tensions mounted earlier in the play, this is a touching yet strangely unsettling moment. The closeness of the couple physically, the way they address each other speaks volumes of long marriage and love that transcends enormous pressures. Stronger responses reflected that.

The directorial and acting challenge is to make his soul searching and evaluation of the price he and Elizabeth will pay to keep his conscience clear in a way that is credible and sustained. Those responses that recognised the psychological impact that the acting needed usually wrote into the upper levels.

The description of the death of Giles should be matter of fact yet deeply horrific to bring home to Proctor and the audience the ghastliness of the previous executions and of his own, now but a few minutes away.

Q2. Where candidates struggled to grasp what 'staying true to Miller's intentions' of Salem at that time, the puritan lifestyle and theocratic society actually meant, they found it difficult to articulate their own vision. Where candidates had really studied the context of both the play and 1950s USA, they were better able to express a directorial vision that did justice to the text and was made relevant to an audience today.

A number of responses placed their contemporary version about two or three years hence. Brexit had happened, terrorism was rampant and there were a variety of government clampdowns. Several claimed that 'people don't get hanged today', perhaps unaware of the fact that in many parts of the world they do. The punishment for heresy and the equivalent of witchcraft instead of death was total isolation from life (ie the digital world).

Fluent, confident answers demonstrated in depth knowledge of the whole play and particularly of the characters' emotional journey(s). There were some very confident contemporary visions, with imaginative settings e.g. a minimally staged version using projections of relevant images to set each scene or where the socio-political aspects of the context to the play, often resulting from research on Miller's reasons for writing the play, were related to those of today; for example family and race, betrayal, scapegoating and corruption of authority figures.

There were many cases of assured use of technical language with candidates explaining, for example, in-the-round staging to give the audience a more immersive experience, soundscapes to evoke the rural atmosphere, the use of lighting and projections to create mood. Most responses chose to retain some of the puritan 'feel' of the piece and this was often justified due to the strong religious aspect to the play and the characters' relationship with their God. Some excellent responses were seen in explanations of costume, atmospheric lighting and special effects in the courtroom scenes with Abigail and the girls.

### **Component 47 *The Visit***

The themes of this 'macabre parable' – justice and revenge, greed, corruption, temptation, fate and retribution – were readily identified by candidates. A parable is a form of lesson, an analogy that people understand in order to reinforce their learning. It is a warning, a keen observation on life in communities of people with long memories and natural greed.

Those who focused on its absurd theatre attributes and the surrealism that runs through it usually devised a production that did justice to them. Candidates who understood the humour and how to stage it, generally achieved higher levels.

A few linked Ill's death with either Greek theatre and/or German Expressionism's aspect of the fallen character facing inevitable death through his own shortcomings. Some made much of the false and failing body parts enjoyed by the ageing, wealthy, powerful Claire. Like Everyman, all will desert Ill at the end.

Q1. Almost all candidates wrote about the ridiculous pomposity of the Mayor and the motives of Claire Zachanassian, blatantly obvious despite her own ludicrous speeches. The relationship between the pair is the key and those who focused on that, incorporating the few given stage directions, wrote successfully.

To bring these characters to life requires straight faces along with the usual acting skills and a sense of the overall direction of the text while these characters and their real story is introduced.

The circus of characters who accompany Claire and are seen in the extract present many comic opportunities, which were seized by some candidates. This is situational comedy, physical comedy and a juxtaposition of names, ideas and roles that are instantly surreal.

Q2. Descriptions of the settings in a run down, faded-glory town were usually full and graphic - decay and rust with relish - for most candidates. There was a number of technological ideas to make it more suitable for a contemporary audience, as well as re-siting the whole play to another country (UK, Trump's USA, India). Some came up with the idea of setting it in Mafia heyday Chicago. While new ideas are welcome, the essence of the play is the Teutonic flavour and mindsets of the characters.

The solutions to the two big staging problems – the panther and the speeding trains close by – were varied and some ingenious. Videos, back projections, wind effects, a hologram of the beast, an invisible animal, a shaking theatre that responded to trains hurtling through and one idea where a lone narrator was the train and the panther with a sardonic way of describing his/her role.

There are specific props and a number of levels required, which most responses got to grips with. The death of Ill was more of a challenge for many candidates, as they often didn't know whether to stage it as tense, ritualistic ceremony, or straight comedy. Some opted for a combination of several styles.

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