



GCSE **Drama**

8261/W Component 1 Understanding Drama

Report on the Examination

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Summary of overall performance of the current series

The vast majority of centres have clearly worked very hard to prepare students for the demands of the paper. Examiners reported seeing many thoughtful scripts that conveyed an understanding of how plays, characters, relationships and moments can be brought in life through the use of both performance and design skills.

The vast majority of students attempted all questions on the paper, suggesting a clear and concerted focus on appropriate management of time. This also meant that most students tailored the length of their answers to reflect the number of available marks.

A significant number of students began with Section C, many of these students then went on to complete the whole paper in reverse. This approach did impact the performance of some students, for whom beginning with the lower value questions gives them an opportunity to engage with the Section B extract and process ideas for the larger value questions. This year there were fewer students who jumped between sections and did all questions out of order, which suggested that students felt more comfortable moving through the paper, potentially due to more mock or timed practice being built into teaching time and schemes of work. There were however also numerous examples of students writing half an answer and then returning to it later which led to repetition and a lack of coherence.

The majority of centres had prepared students to write about *Blood Brothers*, although *The Crucible* and *Noughts and Crosses* remained popular choices. The popularity of the other texts in order were; *Things I Know to be True*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *A Taste of Honey* and *Romeo and Juliet*. A very small number of students had been prepared to write about *The Empress* and *The Great Wave*, although we are hopeful that more centres may decide to teach these important and exciting new texts. Most students appeared to have a secure knowledge of their set text as demonstrated through an understanding of the significance of the printed extract and the character and relationships explored.

Unsurprisingly there continued to be a marked preference for studying digital/streamed performances in Section C. For some students this appeared to impact their ability to fully engage with the production and led to responses that lacked a sense of personal engagement or an understanding about how meaning had been conveyed as part of a theatrical performance. This sense of disengagement was furthered when an entire cohort of students had been prepared to write about the same few brief moments from a performance. This narrowing of focus led to a lack of appreciation of the impact of the performance as a whole.

There were some wonderful responses written about recorded production which brimmed with enthusiasm. This was often when the piece had been watched in its entirety in a single session with the whole class acting as an engaged and responsive audience, rather watching fragments, or sending students away to watch alone.

A summary of students' performance in Section A

This section tests students' knowledge and understanding of theatre terminology, roles and responsibilities, stage positioning and configurations through four multiple choice questions. Most students attempted to answer all the questions in this section and did so with accuracy. Although due to the approach taken to attempt all questions in reverse order, some students ran out of time and did not complete this section. This is problematic as Section A is intended to be the most accessible section of the exam.

The questions that were most frequently incorrectly answered were Q.1 and Q.4 which related to the stage management team keeping the prompt copy and the advantages of the traverse stage.

Many students wrote out their answers, some in full sentences, which is unnecessary. A simple ‘letter response’ (A, B, C, D) is all that is required, and this will also help students save time.

A summary of students’ performance in Section B Question .1

This four-mark question tests students’ knowledge and understanding of the play’s original context, from the perspective of a designer. The most effective answers were concise, with a clear focus on precise description that reflected the context of the play and the unique demands of the extract.

Centres are reminded that the question asks students to ‘describe’ and does not require them to ‘explain’. Unsuccessful answers gave limited description of a design, and the rest of the answer was made up of a lengthy justification of choices.

Some students only provided a diagram. Centres are reminded that whilst diagrams can be included, students must provide a description of their ideas written in full sentences.

For a few of the texts students’ ideas directly contradicted information provided in the text and stage directions.

5.1

Many successful answers were seen which acknowledged the Puritan context through reference to the condition, style and materials of varied features of the set. Most students referenced Betty’s bed, but some struggled to identify other appropriate items of furniture which may be present in the room such as a prayer stool, a chest and chair.

Other students took the approach of listing specific items, but not addressing how a sense of the room could be conveyed through design through the suggestion of the narrow window, the exposed room rafters or the door opening onto the landing and the stairway. Those who did not attempt to create a sense of the room rarely succeeded in conveying a sense that they had described a complete design.

A considerable number of students began by describing the window and the burnt down candle but then their answer lost focus, and they began to describe lighting effects that may help to create a sense of the early morning light.

Some students had been influenced by set designs that they had seen in live or streamed performances. Some ideas that these productions inspired were not fully reflective of the naturalistic style or the original context.

Centres are reminded that Miller provides a comprehensive description of the set at the beginning of each act, whilst students are not credited if they simply copy this information, it can be used as a valid source of inspiration for ideas.

6.1

Successful designs acknowledged that in the extract Mrs Johnstone is working as a cleaner in a new job that is very important to her. This led to appropriate designs that reflected her desire to appear as competent and professional as possible with the limited resources available to her.

Too many answers, as with previous series, were influenced by stereotypical and incorrect assumptions about what it means to be working class. In many answers, assertions were made about all working-class people being dirty and smelly. Mrs Johnstone's costume was regularly described as being covered in stains and full of holes. There were also inappropriate suggestions that she was wearing clothes that were too small for her as she had outgrown them or shoes with no soles.

A number of answers wrongly identified the time period as 70s or 80s and this led to some inappropriate suggestions such as flares or leggings. The specific time period is always identified in the question and students should note this before they begin making design decisions.

7.1

Some lovely answers were seen filled with appropriate ideas. Students described jackets with gold buttons, neckties, britches and tricorn hats. There were also some highly innovative answers that found ways to weave in aspects of the influence of the location through choice of fabric or oriental silhouettes.

Some also used their design to acknowledge that the costume from the back needed to disguise the fact that the captain is a woman. They described how her hair was hidden in her cap or how the lapels on the jacket made her frame appeared wider.

Less successful answers did not acknowledge the captain was a woman. Some students appeared to have no idea how a 19th century captain might dress, which led to some design suggestions which were not reflective of period or appropriate for the context of the play.

8.1

This was the question that saw the most students providing descriptions that directly contradicted information that was provided in the script. Students should be encouraged to use the scripts they take into the exam to check if there is specific information provided by the playwright that is not part of the printed extract but which should inform their design.

Many students had not recognised that at this point in the scene Mark had already changed into Bob's dry blue shirt after being caught in the storm. Some students had Mark in a wet shirt, whilst others failed to recognise that they were wet at all.

Some students also made design decisions based on the incorrect assumption that Mark had already begun their transition, which made Fran and Bob's utter shock at his revelation implausible.

The most effective answers used their design to reflect Mark's experience of walking through an Australian winter rainstorm. Effective designs were also influenced by an understanding of the working-class status of the family.

9.1

Most students' designs reflected that Sephy had come straight from school. A large number of students simply stated she was wearing a school uniform and then made generalised comments about the condition, rather than identifying the individual items that might make up the uniform ie blazer, tie, shirt etc.

Some students referenced the term contemporary dystopian without appearing to have an understanding of what it means. However, some highly sophisticated answers were seen where students had combined futuristic materials with tribal African prints and symbols denoting her cross status. Some showed a further level of sophistication by acknowledging the narrative context of the extract, using their design to communicate Sephy's heightened emotional state after her confrontation with Callum with the suggestion of a loosened tie, unbuttoned shirt or rolled up sleeves.

A small, but not insignificant number designed entirely inappropriate costumes based on the incorrect assumption that, as the extract took place on the beach, Sephy had changed into beachwear. This further highlights the importance of ensuring students focus on where the extract comes in the play.

This question also saw some very appropriate and relevant descriptions of hairstyles and accessories, which further allowed the student to demonstrate their knowledge of the context of the play and helped to contribute to the sense that they had designed a complete costume.

10.1

Not enough answers were seen to draw comprehensive conclusions about students' performance in this question. Some very impressive answers suggested that students were well versed in the fashions of young women in late 16th century Verona. Knowledge of context was demonstrated through reference to appropriate terms such as French Hood, bodice and girdle as well as to authentic materials such as velvet, lace, fur and brocade.

Some students used their designs to acknowledge Juliet's heightened emotional state with dishevelled hair. Others referenced the location and how Juliet was in her private space and had not yet dressed and was barefoot and her hair was loose.

Those students who made the decision to design a nightdress often struggled to identify enough design decisions to provide more than 'a few precise details' and this was self-limiting.

11.1

Many of the answers written in response to this question demonstrated an insecure understanding of the character of Peter. A considerable number of students' answers were based on the incorrect assumption that, due to the working class setting of the play, that his costume should reflect his 'poverty'. This led to descriptions of torn and dirty clothing, which totally failed to acknowledge Peter's vanity and the pride he takes in his appearance as a flashy car salesman.

More successful answers provided precise design detail that reflected his confidence and late 1950s men's fashion including a single-breasted jacket, trilby, wingtip shoes and slick back hair.

Some answers lost focus and began to describe personal props, most notably his cigar, which are not creditable in a costume question. Most answers did not reference that he would be wearing an eye patch.

12.1

Not enough answers were seen to draw comprehensive conclusions about students' performance in this question, however most of those seen demonstrated an impressive level of research into traditional male Indian dress. Students wrote with confidence and precision about individual items of Abdul's costume including a sherwani jacket with Nehru collar, turban and Khussa shoes.

A few very sophisticated answers acknowledged the performative aspect of his costume which reflected his treatment by the Queen as an 'exotic pet', representing her romanticised image of India rather than a more authentic sense of his cherished cultural identity.

13.1

Not enough answers were seen to draw comprehensive conclusions about students' performance in this question. The most effective answers used the design to reflect Reiko's despair and frustration, along with ideas about the use of make-up to create bags under her eyes and her messy hair to not only suggest she has just got out of bed, but also make it clear she has lost interest in her appearance since Hanako's disappearance.

Other features of particularly successful answers included design ideas that reflected Japanese culture in the mid 1980s such as the use of ornately printed silk, mandarin collars, bare feet and graphic t-shirt designs.

Some students did struggle to find enough aspects of design to reference, just identifying that she was wearing pyjamas. Students should be encouraged to take a head to toe approach when answering a costume question considering hair, make up, footwear, accessories as well as the 'fabric, colour, fit and condition' of each item of clothing mentioned to ensure a comprehensive design is provided.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .2

This eight mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how to create effects through the employment of performance skills when delivering a specified line of dialogue. It is a requirement that it is written from the perspective of a performer – an increasing number of students wrote as though they were directing the character. This approach meant the student's response did not fully meet demands of the question.

Successful responses saw students referencing individual parts of the line, breaking it into two, three or four phrases, rather than writing about the line as a whole.

Many students appeared to have been taught to begin their answer with an introductory sentence where the whole line of dialogue is copied out. This is unnecessary and time consuming. It was useful when students began with a brief overview of the effects they hoped to achieve linked to the context of the line in relation to the extract.

Some students wrote about their vocal and physical skills separately, but examiners noted that the most successful responses were when students described the combined effect of physical and vocal skills, as

this enabled them to write in a more concise and focused way. There were also an increased number of students who only wrote about either physical or vocal skills. Some students began each sentence by identifying whether the skill they were writing about was vocal or physical ie ‘A physical skill that I would use’. This form of signposting is unnecessary and adds little to the answer.

Many also simply listed the same skills for each part of the line as though it were a tick list ie ‘I would have a high pitch, low volume, aggressive tone and quick pace’. This approach often felt very disjointed and prevented students from engaging with the text.

Many students were able to skilfully bring their ideas to life using an impressive range of dramatic terminology and adjectives and adverbs, so the examiner could see the stage action. Some responses lacked precision with no adverbs being used - students simply described characters walking or saying lines without any additional information. It was clear some students had been taught terms they did not understand. The terms that were most regularly misused were gait, pitch and tone. The phrase ‘loud pitch’ and ‘high tone’ were used regularly. Gait was often used to describe characters who were sat or still.

Sometimes vivid descriptions were provided, but the ideas suggested would not have created the identified effect/s. In other cases, the ideas suggested would have been entirely impossible or impractical to perform.

There were fewer responses this year where no effects were identified, although there was an increase in inappropriate effects being identified which showed a lack of understanding of the character, their motivations and the context of the extract.

5.2

As in previous years many responses were hampered by misconceptions about Hale’s character. Students regularly described him as aggressive and egotistical and many wrongly interpreted his interrogation of Abigail as a selfish power trip. They failed to understand that he is driven by a genuine desire to help the people of Salem by uncovering the truth.

Many answers referenced the stage direction ‘*grasping Abigail*’. Students should be reminded that it is not enough to simply repeat a stage direction without bringing it to life with further performance suggestions. Some students made this act overly violent and sadistic, suggesting that Hale gets pleasure from hurting Abigail physically rather than seeing it as an act driven by desperation.

Successful responses acknowledged the complexity of Hale’s motivations and there were lovely descriptions of his eyes flicking between Abigail and Betty to make it clear he wants the truth in order to free the young child from the devil’s grip.

Lots of students also identified a shift in the line which acknowledged the distress that he feels due to the danger Betty is and then captured his focused determination to encourage Abigail to confess.

6.2

Many answers were based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the relationship between Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons. Students described their close friendship and then wrongly interpreted this line as Mrs Johnstone’s way of comforting Mrs Lyons’ about her ongoing fertility issues. This led to

descriptions of physical interactions such as hugging and stroking that would not be appropriate. Others went the other way, and their ideas were based on Mrs Johnstone's intense fear of her employee which is not reflective of the friendly and jovial nature of their conversation at the beginning of the extract.

The most effective answers provided a detailed description of how a range of skills would be used to convey Mrs Johnstone's desperation to keep her job. This effect was placed in the wider context of the play with reference to the dire nature of her financial situation. The most sophisticated answers also provided ideas that explored her attitude towards her pregnancy which ranged from nonchalant to some excitement which showed an understanding that despite her struggles she loves her children deeply and she will love this one.

7.2

Some who wrote answers to this question did not recognise the captain was a woman, but besides from this oversight most students were able suggest some potentially appropriate effects, many of which focused on her fear or disbelief in response to Fogg's demands. They were then able to suggest some possible use of physical and vocal skills that might create these effects. As this was a line that could very easily be broken into four parts, many students did not reference the full line.

A few more comprehensive responses explored the captain's need to command respect and assert her authority in a male dominated industry showing an understanding of the context of the extract and the play.

8.2

There were a lot of highly sensitive and appropriate responses seen to this question, which showed an understanding of how this extract and, more importantly, line are the culmination of the years of struggle Mark has experienced coming to terms with who they really are. The most effective answers acknowledged how difficult Mark is finding revealing their true self to their parents as well as how they have accepted their truth and feel some level of peace after processing their trauma independently from their family.

Less secure answers were based on the assumptions that Mark is still unsure about his decision or that they are crippled with shame, even though earlier in the extract he says '*Not ashamed. I am done with feeling that*'. This is a good example of why it is important for students to read the whole extract before beginning to answer questions, to ensure the ideas that they offer are fully appropriate for that moment. Mark's character gives lots of clues in the lead up to line about how he is feeling, most notably '*angry*' and '*embarrassed*'. The most successful answers clearly attempted to reflect this conflicted state through their ideas.

9.2

Some of the approaches to this question were simplistic and ideas felt generic with students reverting to the use of stereotypical displays of anger such as balled fists and gritted teeth. These ideas had some validity but failed to recognise how complex and emotionally charged Sephy and Callum's interaction is at this moment. Generally, in question 2 the focus on a single effect ie anger limits a students' ability to fully demonstrate their understanding of how drama is performed.

The most effective answers put their ideas in the context of the fight they have had and their wider relationship history, both of which fuel Sephy's sense of betrayal.

There were some lovely descriptions to suggest that her anger is masking her deep hurt. These included voice breaks, the removal of eye contact, stumbling over words and the rough and quick brushing away of tears.

10.2

Few responses were seen, but those given understood Juliet's frustration towards the Nurse and often her attempts to hide these feelings to not upset the older woman. Fewer responses acknowledged how exciting this moment might feel for Juliet, as she stands on the cusp of a life changing moment. Again, students should be encouraged to consider a range of possible effects in any given line.

Juliet's interaction with the Nurse was often described very effectively through the use of physical touch, eye contact and proxemics communicating the conflicting emotions she feels towards her at this highly tense moment.

11.2

As seen in answers to 11.1, many students did not seem to understand the character of Peter and his relationship with Helen.

Most effects identified were related to negative interpretations of his character and it is clear that most students see him as highly dislikeable and 'creepy'. Whilst there are certainly unsavoury and unlikeable aspects of his character including his arrogance and belittling of Helen, there is another side to him, which only a handful of students recognised. These students suggested ideas to show a more gentle and humorous side to his interaction with Helen which reflected that he does feel affection for her.

12.2

The few answers seen demonstrated a clear understanding of Abdul's precarious position within the Royal household and his desperation for acceptance and assurance about his status. Many students wrote with sensitivity about his pride and his desire to secure his father's approval with news of his elevation before he dies.

Excellent answers found ways to communicate the complex relationship between Abdul and Victoria with him taking on the dual roles of teacher and obedient servant. There were lovely descriptions of his frustration bubbling up, only to be repressed to ensure he remains appropriately respectful.

A handful of students made inappropriate suggestions about the level of physical intimacy between the pair which demonstrated a lack of understanding of the moment and their relationship.

13.2

Very few answers were seen, those that were demonstrated an understanding of how the years of uncertainty and worry since Hanako's disappearance have taken their toll on her sister.

Less effective answers focused exclusively on her grief, without taking into consideration her guilt, the way in which she has used the search as an excuse to stop living and the complexity of her relationship with her mother.

A handful of students wrote about the wrong line which was similar to the line in the question– ‘*I can’t. This is what I am meant to do*’. Students should be urged to carefully check that they are focused on the specified line before they begin their answer to avoid writing uncreditable responses.

A summary of students’ performance in Section B Question .3

This twelve mark question tests students’ knowledge and understanding of the use of performance space and interaction. Answers need to be focused on showing something specific to the audience, as defined by the question and need to be written from a performer’s perspective. A considerable number of students wrote as though they were directing the actors, and this often led to a further loss of focus as they began to describe the performance of the second actor.

Centres are reminded that interaction should include verbal skills. Many responses just focused on physical and, in some cases, just on the use of stage space. There was a considerable number of responses which focused solely on where characters were stood and where they moved to. These references to stage positions were also often not made relevant to the specific focus of the question. The use of terms such as stage left and stage right can be very useful, but simply referring to where a character is standing is unlikely to be able to convey the specified effect or idea. Students should be encouraged to think about a range of ways characters can use stage space and interact with each other including the use of eye contact, response to the delivery of specific lines and touch, or the lack of it.

The term proxemics featured frequently in answers, but it was often misused. Many students talked about increasing proximity as characters moved towards each other. Some described characters decreasing proximity, but without describing how they moved towards each other and how this helped communicate an idea.

The most effective responses focused on three or four key lines from throughout the shaded extract. They then took the examiner through the journey of the shaded extract making frequent references to the focus of the question.

Less successful responses involved a generalised description of how the character might be performed throughout the whole of the shaded extract without reference to specific moments or lines. Others only described a single line or selected quotes from the beginning or end or selected inappropriate quotes that did not allow them to meet the specific demands of the question. Students should be encouraged to identify the quotes they are going to write about before they begin to answer the question.

5.3

This question elicited some excellent answers, the most successful of which acknowledged why Hale is so determined to get the truth. They then described and explained a series of interactions and use of stage space that reflected Hale’s increased sense of determination and the naturalistic style of the play.

Like 5.2, less successful answers were often based upon misconceptions about Hale’s cruelty and the enjoyment he experiences from threatening a young woman. Whilst a certain level of physical interaction and even intimidation is appropriate in this scene, some students’ ideas were inappropriate such as

pulling Abigail by her hair or throwing her to the ground and kicking her. Many justified this level of violence by discussing women's low status in puritan society, but these types of ideas demonstrated a lack of understanding of Hale's morality and decency which is at the very heart of his character.

Excellent answers demonstrated an awareness of the variety of techniques and approaches he uses in an attempt to get to the truth which showed an understanding of Hale's intelligence and measured approach towards his investigations. Meaningful references were made to Hale's awareness of Betty in the bed and the other characters watching on. Students should be encouraged to think about the whole stage picture when crafting ideas for Question .3 including the position of key items of furniture and the presence of other characters.

6.3

Most answers were focused on showing Mrs Johnstone's fear. The most successful ones referenced a range of different reactions and emotions that come under the umbrella of fear including initial shock, a moment of realisation, processing, panic, horror, and then some sense of relief. These students were able to take us through the emotional journey that Mrs Johnstone goes through during the shaded extract. Less sophisticated answers simply repeated the phrase 'this shows her fear' after each idea suggested.

A considerable number of students offered ideas that contradicted the text. Most notably many had Mrs Johnstone knocking the shoes off the table as soon as Mrs Lyons puts them down. Others seemed confused about when the shoes were removed and had Mrs Johnstone still staring at them in horror long after Mrs Lyons has removed them.

Too often, discussion about Mrs Johnstone's fear led to extensive, lengthy and irrelevant discussions about the significance of superstition in the play as a whole. This was often further developed by students focusing on class and contrasting the women's reaction to the shoes. This often led to uncredible descriptions of Mrs Lyons' disbelief and amusement. When students began to write about superstition in the context of class they almost always lost focus on showing fear.

7.3

The most effective approach to answering this question began by students identifying moments where the Captain's reaction changed, for example starting by showing how firm her rejection is, the voicing of her genuine concerns about the dangers of the journey, her reaction to his promise that he will pay '*whatever the outcome*' and her taking of the money. As with all successful .3 answers there was a sense that students who focused on the variety of responses took us through the shaded extract.

Less successful answers did not acknowledge the demand to show changing responses. Others only identified a single change in response when the money is offered, some of these students only then discussed the offer and the taking of the money, ignoring the rest of the extract.

Many students continued to refer to the Captain as a man, which suggested they had an insecure knowledge of the scene and the character and had not read the extract closely before attempting to answer the questions.

8.3

There were some very thoughtful and sensitive answers seen in response to this question, which acknowledged the depth of Mark's anger, as motivated by their feelings of rejection and the difficulty they experience navigating this tense and emotionally charged interaction. As with 8.2, the most successful answers acknowledged how significant this conversation is for Mark and how long they have been prepared to share their news. This highlights the importance of the students' understanding the journey of characters and suggesting ideas that reflect this journey appropriately.

Less successful answers mistook his anger for hatred, and they often described Mark as very aggressive, cold and cruel as though they are intentionally trying to hurt Fran. This occasionally led to inappropriate suggestions that Mark would be violent towards her. More effective answers recognised that Mark is desperately trying to explain how they feel and that their anger is in fact a build-up of frustration and disappointment.

9.3

This question was generally answered well with most students focusing clearly on finding appropriate ways to communicate Sephy's anger. As with 6.3, the more effective answers acknowledged that an emotion can embrace a spectrum of reactions and responses. There were a considerable number of students who suggested that because Sephy was angry, she would shout every line directly into Callum's face. This approach limited students as inevitably their responses became repetitive, it also demonstrated a lack of understanding of the connection between the young friends and the complexities of the situation they find themselves in.

More successful responses found opportunities to show light and shade in the shaded extract which demonstrated an excellent understanding of how drama is performed and brought Sephy's multi-faceted character to life. These answers often focused on showing her sense of hurt and betrayal as well as exploring the impact of years of guilt upon her. Overall, these answers were underpinned by understanding of how much Callum and their relationship means to Sephy.

10.3

Most of the answers seen suggested ideas that effectively showed Juliet's impatience. Successful answers acknowledged the many ways Juliet experiences, controls and processes this uncomfortable emotion particularly through her physical interaction with the Nurse and her attempts to use affection to get her to share her news.

Unsurprisingly, many described Juliet pacing around the stage but rarely were precise details provided about her movement. Students did not consider where she was pacing, her proximity to the Nurse and how she was pacing ie frantically or nervously. In many responses more focus could also have been given to Juliet's reactions to the Nurse's evasion and how this further fuels her impatience. It is a perfectly valid approach to quote a line from another character as long as the focus remains on showing how you would react to that line.

A handful of students did not fully acknowledge the focus of the question and much of the answer was spent exploring Juliet's relationship with the Nurse, this often touched upon impatience, but not enough for the answer to be considered to have a good degree of relevance to the brief.

11.3

Most of the responses focused on showing Peter's relationship with Helen. Partly because of this focus on the relationship, more students in this question wrote unnecessarily about the other actor's performance. Because of Peter's desire to get Jo out of the way at the start of the shaded extract, many began their answer with ideas that showed their fractured relationship, and this was rarely linked to Helen and Peter's relationship.

As with 11.2, most of the interpretations of their relationship were very negative with suggestions that it is abusive and that Helen is submissive to Peter, something that is clearly contradicted in the text. There are certainly negative aspects of their relationship explored within the shaded extract such as his arrogant belief that she '*won't find anything better*' and his unromantic marriage proposal, but successful answers showed a more balanced view of their relationship. These responses suggested ideas that showed his attempts to show affection towards her and his progressive lack of concern about their age difference.

12.2

The most successful answers clearly acknowledged that the focus of the question was Abdul's growing frustration. These responses charted the build-up of his feelings through the choice of appropriate lines from throughout the shaded extract and how his frustration is fuelled by the Queen's behaviour and attitude towards his questioning.

Many students treated the response as a private discussion without recognising the idea that they are on show at a very public engagement. There were some, however, who wrote very skilfully about how they might communicate his growing frustration in a subtle way which shows Abdul's understanding of the importance of appearing deferent and respectable.

13.3

Quite a few of the small number of responses seen began with a lengthy description of set, sometimes including a diagram. Detail about set is only ever going to be relevant in a .3 answer if it directly impacts the way in which the performer will use the space and even then the detail is best if it is integrated into the main body of the answer.

As with other .3 answers, some students simply repeated stage directions '*She holds and holds her*' and '*touches her head*' without explaining how they might bring this moment of stage action to life using their performance skills. There was also a tendency to focus exclusively on the final lines of the extract as they potentially offered the greatest opportunity for physical interaction. To meet the demands of the question students must choose lines from throughout the shaded extract.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .4

These twenty mark question test students' knowledge and understanding of how performance skills might be used to interpret the character in the extract and the play as a whole.

The most effective responses offered precise and detailed performance ideas for both the extract and then for significant and well-chosen moments from the play as a whole. There were many different, but valid approaches taken to answering this question. Some students paired descriptions of the delivery of

a line from the extract with a description of a key line from another scene. Others wrote about the extract and then turned their attention to the play as a whole. Some wrote about key moments, including the extract in chronological order. Although this allowed the student to chart the journey of the character throughout the play effectively, this often meant not enough attention was given to the extract and in a few cases the extract was not referenced at all. In a considerable number of responses, ideas for the extract were provided and there were brief references to how these related to moments from the play, but these were not supported with performance ideas.

There was an increase in the number of answers which made no reference to lines from the extract or the play as a whole. These were made up of generalised assertions about the use of performance skills such as '*she always smiles*' or '*he shouts throughout the play*'. These ideas were rarely appropriate and this approach did not allow students to effectively demonstrate their knowledge of the play.

It was also clear that many students did not fully understand what interpreting a character means as they suggested ideas that were not calculated to bring a character to life for an audience.

Many of the .4 answers seen lacked a clear sense of interpretation or contained inappropriate or insecure interpretations. Some did not focus on interpretation at all and instead became an exploration of how a key idea such as discrimination or class might be communicated or how a performance style or mood might be established.

5.4

Some excellent answers were seen in response to *The Crucible* with students writing insightfully about the many aspects of Abigail's character.

The most effective answers recognised the performative nature of her behaviour in the extract and found innovative and appropriate ways to show she is feigning innocence in a bid to escape punishment. These answers also often acknowledged her cunning and quick thinking as upon Tituba's entrance she suddenly blames her in a desperate attempt to deflect from her own actions.

Some students offered rather simplistic interpretations of this young girl, casting her as an evil villain or a seductive temptress. More appropriate responses recognised her vulnerability as an orphan who watched her parents being murdered. Increasingly students are also recognising the disturbing power imbalance at the heart of her inappropriate relationship with Proctor. Many rightly recognised her as a victim and this helped explain her confusion and desperation to reignite their toxic relationship.

Most students referenced her duologue with Proctor and placed it in the context of the extract by using it to explain why she was in the forest and why she is so desperate not to reveal the truth. Others wrote about her threatening her friends earlier in Act One or challenging Danforth in Act Three to contrast her contrived meekness in the extract with her true strength and confidence.

Many answers contained considerable amounts of repetitive contextual information about the inferior status of women in puritan society which often added little. Some students however, skilfully weaved relevant context into their answers which helped to explain how Abigail's feelings of helplessness and her lack of voice fuel her desire to be seen and respected.

6.4

The quality of responses to this question varied greatly. There were many insightful answers which demonstrated a secure and appropriate interpretation of Mrs Lyons. These answers recognised the complexity of her character, her deep grief about her childlessness and her short-lived joy when Mrs Johnstone gives her Edward. They then went on to suggest ways of conveying her increasing levels of defensiveness and paranoia as she realises that she can never escape what she has done. Others reverted to casting her as the villain from the very beginning, describing her as cold and cruel with no attempt to explore how her decision to take Edward destroys her life.

Many students also described her as crazy, particularly in her final confrontation with Mrs Johnstone. Students should be encouraged to describe Mrs Lyons' issues with mental health in a more appropriate and sensitive way. This might also help them develop a more nuanced interpretation of her character.

Some students only focused on ways they might convey her status and class, and this was often addressed through sweeping and vague statements such as '*I would talk in a posh way*' and '*I would always be on a higher level than Mrs Johnstone*'. A considerable number of students suggested that her sense of social superiority would lead to her lack of interest in her conversation with Mrs Johnstone in the extract, or lead to her looking down at Mrs Johnstone and treating her with obvious disdain. Those who focused exclusively on class often spent far too long explaining Russell's political agenda and providing an overview of the wider issues being explored in the play. This approach of focusing on what the characters represents thematically often prevented students from conveying a comprehensive interpretation.

There were common misunderstandings of Mrs Lyons' actions in the extract with many wrongly assuming that she is already manipulating Mrs Johnstone to get her to give her a child. This led to the suggestion that she is pretending to be upset about not having a baby and that as soon as she finds out Mrs Johnstone is superstitious, she plans to use this against her.

7.4

This question was generally answered successfully with most students providing an appropriate interpretation of Fogg. Overall students' descriptions of performance ideas for moments from beyond the extract were more appropriate than those offered for the extract, possibly because many students' knowledge of the scene was not secure. Most students did not acknowledge that at this moment Fogg has no idea about Passepartout's whereabouts. Some did not explore his reaction to the Captain being a woman because they had not registered this. Students did, however, suggest appropriate ideas that would convey Fogg's determination and lack of fear in the face of danger. General lack of understanding and knowledge of the moment demonstrated by so many students does highlight the importance of exploring all scenes comprehensively in preparation for the exam.

Many examples provided from the play demonstrated a much more secure interpretation which addressed his growth as a character due to his adventures and romantic relationship with Mrs Aouda.

Some interpretations were less complex, focusing on his more stereotypical traits as an English gentleman with impeccable manners and an unwavering stiff upper lip. Despite the style of the piece, students should be encouraged to explore the multifaceted nature of the central characters.

8.4

Most students answering this question recognised the extract as a pivotal moment in the life of Fran as for the first time she has been caught off guard and been shocked by what one of her children has told her. The most successful responses recognised how much this has shaken her and how her cruelty and aggression is fuelled by her feelings of helplessness as for once she isn't in control.

Many of the less successful answers provided simplistic and highly negative interpretations of her character based on the incorrect assumption that she doesn't love her children. She has undoubtedly adopted a tough love approach to parenting, but at the heart of all of her actions, however misguided, is a desire to protect her children.

Insightful answers often chose moments from the rest of the play that were focused on Fran's relationship with her other children. These moments either offered an opportunity to contrast her harsh treatment of Mark with her unwavering support of Ben, even when he commits a crime, or showing how she is potentially even crueller to Pip. Very few chose to explore her relationship with Bob, and this is a shame because their duologues, which examine the complexity of long term relationships, show a very different side to Fran. The responses that did explore her role as wife, as well as mother, felt richer and more mature, as the interpretation were more complex and comprehensive.

9.4

Some very thoughtful answers were seen in response to this question. The most successful responses charted how Callum is shaped by the tragedies he witnesses as his family falls apart. Many focused on his political radicalisation, comparing his innocent naivety in the extract to his rage at the social injustice he experiences as the play progresses. Some students were very judgemental about his decision to join the militia, with some going as far as branding him 'evil' and deserving of execution. These sorts of comments showed a lack of understanding of how honourable his final actions are and how they demonstrate his loyalty and devotion to Sephy and their unborn child.

Most responses simply focused on his relationship with Sephy and often referenced the opening beach scene, the bombing scene, the kidnapping scene, and their final moments together. Whilst this is a valid approach, those who also explored his relationship with his family often demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of both the play and Callum as a character. There were some very sensitive and appropriate ideas describing how interactions with Lynette might be performed to show his love and affection for her. There were also examples which explored the negative influence of both his father and his brother and his increasingly fractured relationship with his mother.

Most students did not explain how they might perform Callum's brief direct address at the start and the end of the extract. Students should be encouraged to think about referencing lines from direct address if they appear in the printed extract, as they are often truthful and revealing and present many exciting opportunities for an actor to interpret a character.

10.4

Few responses to this answer were seen, but the most successful recognised the Nurse as a complex character. There were some insightful responses that explored her cunning, intelligence, pragmatism and devotion to Juliet. Weaker answers tended to provide a surface interpretation or no interpretation at

all with the only ideas relating to her being a source of comedy. Whilst there is no doubt that she is often played for laughs due to her melodrama and bawdy comments, there is far more to her.

A students' ability to demonstrate their understanding of her complexity was often dependent on their choice of moments. Too many only referred to her earlier appearances before the tragedy begins to unfold. Later scenes offer many more opportunities to show different aspects of her character, most notably her pragmatic advice to Juliet to marry Parris after Romeo's banishment and her genuine pain and grief when she discovers Juliet's body.

11.4

For students answering on *A Taste of Honey* this was often their strongest response as it was underpinned by a comprehensive knowledge of Helen and her journey through the play. Despite the fact that the extract focuses on her relationship with Peter, most of the answers focused on the exploration of her relationship with Jo and how this changes as Jo herself prepares to become a mother.

Some points about her feelings towards Peter were confused and it is clear that some students' ability to answer questions in this section were hampered by a lack of understanding of the dynamics in Peter and Helen's relationship. More successful answers acknowledged the importance that Helen places on having a relationship with a man and how this validates her and how she prioritises this over caring for Jo.

Unsurprisingly, many of the interpretations offered of Helen were negative, focusing on her inadequacies as a mother. More sensitive answers recognised the lack of malice in her behaviour. They also celebrated her strength as a survivor and understood the challenges she has faced that have emotionally damaged her and impacted her ability to show affection for her daughter.

Many of the most effective answers explored her decision to stand up to Peter and start prioritising Jo, which leads to the breakdown of their relationship. They also suggested performance ideas for the later scenes where she tries to show support for Jo during her final stages of pregnancy.

12.4

The handful of responses seen recognised the complexities of the relationship between Abdul and Victoria and her intense enjoyment of his company. The most successful answers acknowledged that Victoria at times is disconcerted by their interactions as she saw him as 'exotic pet', servant, companion and teacher. Whilst she enjoys the intimate informality between them, she is also triggered by the idea that he would dare question her word.

Most answers focused on charting the development of their relationship from her initial rejection to her unwavering devotion. Students identified the strength and confidence she demonstrated as she brushed off criticisms and braved gossip to keep Abdul by her side. These points were often best illustrated with reference to performance ideas for scenes between the Queen and Lady Sarah.

A hallmark of excellent responses was often a demonstration of understanding of her role as Empress of a country she had never visited. Students referenced moments where she demonstrated a genuine passion for learning about Indian culture, but did not shy away from exploring how ignorant and unfeeling she could be about the suffering caused by the British colonising so many countries.

13.4

The few students answering this question appeared to have a fairly secure knowledge of the character of Etsuko. They suggested appropriate ideas for the extract that demonstrated an understanding of the regret that she feels due to her conflict with Hanako before she disappeared and her increasing frustration with Reiko as she watches her throw her life away.

A few students described her as ‘weak’, partly due to her age. This assumption did not take into the account the immense amounts of strength and determination she demonstrates in her quest to find Hanako. The most successful answers provided examples of Etsuko standing up to figures of authority such as Jiro in order to find the truth. They also acknowledged her as deserving of great respect and sympathy as a working single mother, whose daughters are the centre of her world and who is devastated when Hanako disappears. Some insightful students ended their responses by recognising the greatest tragedy of the play is that Etsuko dies before she is able to be reunited with her beloved daughter.

A summary of students’ performance in Section B Question .5

There were not enough responses seen to draw conclusions about the performance of students when writing about specific texts. Set remained the most popular design skill to write about followed by costume and lighting. Very few students wrote from the perspective of a sound designer and at the time of writing this report, no students chose to write about puppet design.

Many answers only focused on the extract, with no ideas provided for the play as a whole. Most answers lacked focus on the idea of using design ‘to support the action’. Students need to be providing examples of how the design might be used at specific moments in both the extract and the play as a whole. Very few students supported their answers with diagrams. Whilst this is not a requirement, a clear and well labelled diagram can be a concise and effective way to bring a design to life.

It was apparent that many students attempting these .5 questions had limited understanding of what a design skill was. To achieve an excellent band mark an extensive range of skills must be referenced. Students attempting .5 questions should be looking to both the specification and the mark scheme to help them identify specific design skills they can reference when describing and explaining their ideas.

It was clear that many students who attempted the set design question had prepared a description of a composite set, but they had not developed ideas about how this set could be used or adapted in specific scenes. This was most notable in responses to 7.5 where students described a tea-stained backdrop which took the form of a world map. The students then described how a model boat would be moved across the map as Fogg’s journey continued, but there was no explanation of how the set might be adapted to represent the dock or any other location referenced in the play.

There were increasing numbers of set designs described that had been heavily influenced by productions students had seen. This was most commonly seen in answers on *The Crucible*, *Noughts and Crosses* and *Things I Know to Be True*. Some of these designs were not reflective of the original context or style. Many students who had drawn inspiration from other designers struggled to explain these designs as they had no sense of ownership of the ideas and therefore no practical understanding of how they could support the action in performance.

A few wonderful and detailed .5 set answers were seen where students clearly had a real passion for design and had conducted extensive research into the context of the play. They thought carefully about how this context might be communicated in performance through the use of an extensive range of skills.

There were several highly appropriate costume designs offered, particularly for *The Crucible*, where students were able to draw upon their extensive knowledge of appropriate fabrics and key terminology, demonstrating an understanding of the context of the extract and the play as a whole. Many responses only described one costume for the extract. Centres are reminded that it is a requirement that at least two of the characters' costumes are described. Some students chose to only design for one character throughout the play. This is a valid approach, but can be self-limiting if a very similar or the same costume with small adaptations is worn throughout the play.

Lighting answers often lacked an understanding of how lights can be used to support the action by conveying ideas or creating mood and atmosphere. Most only focused on the use of colour to reflect the characters' feelings, with no consideration of the style of the play. There was also rarely any reference to the use of intensity, positioning, angles, focus or types of lanterns used.

A summary of students' performance in Section C

This section of the paper tests students' knowledge and understanding of the work of theatre makers in a live performance setting.

There are three questions in this section; one question is focused on the evaluation and analysis of performers, and two questions focus on the work of a designer. Students only answer one question in this section. As in the previous series, the most popular question was the one which focuses on performers. There was however a significant number of students prepared to write about design.

The majority of students wrote about productions that were available on DVD or streaming sites. The most popular digital productions were: *Billy Elliot: The Musical*, *A Monster Calls*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Peter Pan*, *Jane Eyre*, *Treasure Island*, *Everyone's Talking about Jamie*, *A Small Island*, *Yerma*, *Frankenstein* and *Medea*. In some cases, watching recorded performances appeared to impact the level of engagement, possibly due to the way in which students experienced the performance. Centres are urged to try to find ways to recreate watching live theatre, ideally on a big screen in a darkened room as part of an audience all responding to the piece for the first time. Most importantly, if possible, students should be offered the opportunity to watch an Act all the way through without interruption. These measures will help create a sense of occasion and increase levels of focus and appreciation.

Some students struggled to introduce the production when they had watched a recorded performance. At times this led to confused and lengthy introductions where they gave details both of when the production was originally staged, and when they saw the production. Several answers were seen where the title of the production was not given and it was unclear what production had been seen.

Popular live productions included *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *Woman in Black*, *The Play That Goes Wrong*, *Peter Pan Goes Wrong*, *Kinky Boots*, *The Life of Pi*, *Animal Farm*, *Hamilton* and *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*.

Whether live or recorded, excellent answers brought moments to life through vivid detail and description and then went on to analyse these moments in relation to the focus of the question, before offering an evaluative comment to define its relative success.

In some responses it was clear that students had only seen brief clips of the production and so were unable to understand and capture the significance of the moment in their response. It was clear many centres, whether watching live or recorded productions, guided students to focus on a very narrow range of brief moments as chosen by the teacher. This restrictive focus hampered students' ability to formulate and communicate their own response to the production. This approach often seemed to involve students pre-learning chunks of description which made it difficult for them to craft answers that met the demands of the question. As per the specification, students should be prepared to 'discuss a variety of aspects' of any production seen.

Many answers were unbalanced, and it was not unusual to see students achieving excellent AO3 marks, but limited or reasonable AO4 marks. This was often due to the inclusion of very long and detailed descriptions, with evaluation and analysis only being offered at the end of each moment. At times these summative comments also felt pre-learnt, which was unhelpful as they encouraged students to ignore the demands of the question. In contrast some students provided extensive analysis and evaluation of very brief descriptions of skills. This hampered the students' ability to allow us to see the stage action and made the answer unsupported and undeveloped.

Some students had clearly been taught to include quotes from reviews or interviewers with members of the cast or the production team. These were rarely relevant to the question and added little.

The trend continued for students to offer suggestions about how a performance might be improved. Whilst it is valid for students to offer critical evaluation, extensive explanations of how they might perform the role better are not relevant or creditable.

Fewer students began the exam by answering Section C answer, but a significant number of those who did would describe one or two moments, then stop and write about additional moments at the end of the paper. It was noted that when the student returned to Section C after completing other questions, they had often lost focus on the question and the response felt disjointed. In a few papers, students spent almost the whole exam writing Section C. Whichever order the paper is attempted students need to be disciplined with their time management.

Very few rubric infringements were seen, but a handful of students did answer Section B and C on the same text. An increasing number of students wrote responses to Section C questions as though they were being asked to explain how they would bring a character to life as a performer or how they might use costume design to communicate key ideas. As these answers made no reference to live theatre no marks could be awarded.

14

This question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how one or more performers used their performance skills to 'bring their characters to life'. The most effective responses vividly described a series of appropriately chosen moments and weaved meaningful and focused analysis and evaluation throughout this description.

There were some exceptional answers to this question, which were underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of what it means to create a character in performance. These responses demonstrated that students had fully explored and understood the characters they were writing about. This highlights the importance of the study of the play that is being written about. However, centres must be mindful to keep exploration of the text focused on the practical process of taking the text from play to stage. Some centres had clearly taught texts in a very theoretical way which lead to English style analysis and the inclusion of irrelevant information about the wider social cultural context of the piece or the playwright's intentions. This was most commonly seen in responses focusing on *Billy Elliot* and *A Small Island*, where points about character were often placed in the context of unnecessary and irrelevant historical information.

Some students chose to focus on a series of key moments throughout the production to chart how a character or characters had developed. Whilst the question did not require a focus on change, this proved to be a very successful approach, providing a framework for meaningful evaluation and analysis and this approach often prevented repetition.

Some students writing about *Woman in Black*, *The Play That Goes Wrong* or *Peter Pan Goes Wrong* struggled to effectively answer the question. Their responses were often confused as they could not find ways to explain the duality of the performances with an actor playing an actor playing a role. Centres are urged to consider whether their choice of production will allow their students to access all possible questions. They must also ensure that if they do choose a production which includes metatheatre, that students feel confident and equipped to write about this technique clearly.

There were a considerable number of students whose answers did not refer to the idea of 'bringing a character to life'. Most of these focused on the creation of an audience response. This was most often seen when students were writing about productions such as *One Man, Two Guvvners* where the creation of a comedic response is central to the success of the production.

There was an increase in the number of students being prepared to write about musicals. Musicals represent a perfectly valid choice for Section C and they often appear to achieve very high levels of engagement and appreciation. Centres however need to ensure that the production chosen allows the students to talk about a range of performance skills as identified in the specification. Any production must have spoken dialogue.

There was a combination of approaches taken in terms of the number of actors discussed and there was no approach that was more successful than the other. Some chose to write about one actor, others the same two actors interacting with each other throughout and some wrote about lots of different actors in different moments. It is important to note that there is no requirement for students to focus on actors equally if one or more is mentioned, balance is not an expectation or a marker of a successful answer.

15

This thirty-two mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how costume design could be used to communicate key ideas. This question was answered by the fewest students, possibly because there was no optionality built into it. The most effective responses often focused on the non-naturalistic use of costume in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Animal Farm*. These productions particularly the latter, gave the opportunity to explore how complex ideas such as the abuse of power could be communicated through design. In answers on *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, successful answers tended to focus on the communication

of style and character and relationship. What all successful responses had in common was an understanding of the function and importance of costume design within the play as a whole. They also often referenced the designer's name and had a clear understanding of their aims as realised through their design, demonstrated through the description of a range of design skills such as the use of colour, fabric, and ornamentation, as well as a wide range of aspects of costume such as footwear, accessories and hair and make-up.

Those who wrote about more naturalistic design often struggled to explain how the designs communicated key ideas. In some cases, either no evaluation or analysis of design was offered or there was a disconnect between the design described and key idea identified.

16

This thirty-two mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how lighting or sound designers create memorable moments. Due to the optionality built into the question, this proved to be the more popular design question. A few students misread the question and wrote about the combined impact of both design elements. Students should be reminded that even when a choice is offered answers will only ever focus on one design skill.

The majority of answers were focused on *Women in Black*, although some excellent answers were seen exploring the work of the designers of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *The Life of Pi*. Successful answers understood how a design element could be skilfully employed to create a memorable moment through:

- the communication of a key moment from the story
- the creation of a mood or location
- the triggering of an intense audience response.

Less effective answers did not appear to understand what a memorable moment might be so often just provided some description of the use of design with vague or non-existent evaluation and analysis.

Examiners reported that the most successful lighting responses were informed by students' working and practical understanding of lighting design. Some students wrote in detail about a variety of aspects of design including the choice of lanterns, use of gauzes and projections, gels and filters. They were also filled with the appropriate and accurate use of design terminology. Less successful answers often only focused on a single aspect of lighting design such as the use of colour and intensity. Others described the use of lighting in a highly generalised way without reference to any specific moments.

There were a number of students who had clearly intended to write about set and they often began writing about lighting, but increasingly their focus wavered and was lost as they began to describe set design.

Centres are reminded that due to the number of possible design skills that students can write about, not all skills will be referenced in the Section C questions.

Fewer sound design responses were seen and overall the quality of these responses were poorer. Often a sound would be identified but no detail would be provided about how this sound was created and whether it was diegetic or non-diegetic. Students who are being prepared to answer sound design questions must learn to accurately use appropriate terminology such as speaker, directional sound, amplification and underscoring.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.