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GCSE

**DRAMA**

8261/W: Understanding Drama  
Report on the Examination

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### Summary of the overall performance of the current series

It was encouraging that, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, the vast majority of centres had been able to prepare students thoroughly for the demands of this exam. Examiners reported seeing many thoughtful, mature, and highly engaging responses that conveyed genuine knowledge and understanding of how Drama functions in performance and this is to the credit of the students and those who taught and supported them.

It was clear, due to the challenges of the past two years, some centres had struggled to cover the whole course. This resulted in some students doing much better in Section B than in Section C, or vice versa. It also appeared that some centres had not fully explored the set text, choosing to focus predominantly, and in some cases it seemed exclusively, on the pre-released material. This led to insecure knowledge of the characters and their journey within the play. Some students did not appear to understand the significance of the extract they were writing about and in some cases where it came in the play. This particularly impacted students' performances in Questions 4 and 5. Even though the material was pre-released students should have had the opportunity to explore the entirety of their set text.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of centres prepared students to write about digital or streamed performances, which did not appear to impact the level of students' engagement. Students' appreciation and enjoyment of these performances – even if they did not fully engage with the demands of the question – was apparent in most Section C answers seen, across the ability range. Many centres had introduced their students to a range of appropriate and stimulating work cultivating both insight and passion for 'live' performance.

Examiners also noted that, in comparison to 2019, a significant number of students began their response by answering the question from Section C. There was a new trend of completing the whole paper in reverse, this did appear to impact the performance of some students, for whom beginning with the lower value questions allows them to engage with the extract and formulate ideas for the larger value questions.

There was also a significant number of students who jumped between sections, completing answers in seemingly random order. This led to some more confused responses and crossed-out answers, as students struggled to switch between the demands of the different sections.

The vast majority of students had been prepared to write about *Blood Brothers*, although *The Crucible* and *Noughts & Crosses* remained popular. Understandably the new texts featured less prominently, the popularity of these plays in order was *Around The World In 80 Days*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *A Taste Of Honey* and *Romeo And Juliet*.

### **A summary of students' performance in Section A**

This section of the paper tests students' knowledge and understanding of theatre terminology, roles and responsibilities, stage positioning and configurations through four multiple choice questions. It was pleasing to note that most students attempted to answer all the questions in this section and did so with accuracy. Although due to the approach taken by several centres to attempt all questions in reverse order, some students appeared to run out of time and did not get to this section, because they had left it until last. This is potentially problematic as this is intended to be the most accessible section.

The most common errors made by students were confusion between a proscenium arch, thrust and an end-on stage configuration and the role of the playwright and the director.

Centres are also reminded that students do not need to write out the response associated with the correct answer and that a simple 'letter response' (A, B, C, D) is all that is required, and will help students save time. Many students wrote the letter and the whole answer and some centres appeared to have taught students to convert their answers into a full sentence, which is unnecessary.

### **A summary of students' performance in Section B Question 1**

This 4-mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of the play's original context, from the perspective of a designer. Examiners noted that successful responses to these questions were short and concise, with a strong emphasis on specific design details. Successful responses, whilst concise, were crucially packed with information which was directly linked to both the context of the play and the specific focus of the extract.

A significant number of students wrote far more than they needed to and, simultaneously, did not fully connect with the demand of the question. Less successful responses tended to focus too heavily on unnecessary context or provide a superfluous explanation for decisions. The question asks students to 'describe' and does not ask students to 'explain'.

Many students provided lengthy explanatory paragraphs which delved into the play's socio-economic or historical context. Many of these introductory paragraphs appeared to have been prepared by centres and pre-learnt and were unconnected to the demands of the question and the extract and as such often did not support the students' response.

Other centres had taught pupils to use Question 1 as an opportunity to explain what is happening in the extract, without connecting this information to their specific designs.

A handful of centres had prepared their students to only provide a labelled diagram, centres are reminded that whilst diagrams can be included, students should provide a description of their ideas written in full sentences.

#### **5.1**

There were many *Crucible* answers which evidenced a comprehensive understanding of 17th century Puritan life as demonstrated by the clothing they wore. Students used a range of appropriate terms to describe a possible costume for Proctor including breeches and jerkin. They also described authentic materials such as leather, coarse linen and wool.

Some however did not take the context of the extract into consideration and they had Proctor's face and hands covered in mud, despite the fact he has already washed, or they had him wearing a hat, which is not appropriate considering he has been inside for a considerable amount of time. There were also lots of answers that made reference to Proctor's lowly status and poverty, with no recognition of his importance as a respected land-owning farmer.

Some responses did not recognise the 17th century context at all, so Proctor was subsequently dressed in jeans, t-shirts and in some cases wellington boots.

### **6.1**

In *Blood Brothers*, the majority of the answers focused on conveying Mrs Lyons' wealth and status. This resulted in numerous appropriate descriptions of her wearing delicate pearl necklaces and cashmere twinsets. However, some students were confused about what might be perceived as appropriate for a middle-class middle age woman in the 1970s. These students described 4-inch red stilettos, heavy make-up, white ankle socks and leather gloves as an indication of her wealth and status.

In some responses, costume was used more symbolically with her wearing green to represent her jealousy or ruby earrings to represent the bloodshed her earlier decisions will cause, whilst this can be a valid approach these answers must still demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the original context of the play.

There was often some confusion about the period with students wrongly identifying the extract as taking place in the 1960s or 1980s. Centres are reminded that the period when the scene takes place will be referenced in the question and students should be directed to read the question carefully before crafting their response.

### **7.1**

Most students successfully identified that the extract took place on the deck of a steamship, although there were a few that assumed that they were inside the boat. Students should be encouraged to use the information at the start of each scene to establish the location, even if the opening of the scene is not included in the extract.

There were some wonderfully detailed descriptions of how the set might be used to establish a steamboat in the late 19th century and included appropriate features like deckchairs, lifebuoys and brass railings. Not all the responses fully reflected the period and some described what could be understood as a modern deck.

Most adopted a naturalistic approach, rather than exploring using props and set pieces, such as suitcases, in a more flexible way, however this is perfectly valid. Lots of responses referenced the use of a world map somewhere on the stage, so acknowledging that this scene is part of a wider journey.

This was the response that saw many students referencing other design elements, for which they were not credited, such as lighting and sound used to create a sense of the boat moving through the waves.

**8.1**

Generally, answers to this question were confused, with most responses not acknowledging that Bob has just returned from his anniversary meal out. Most students had dressed him in gardening gear, with some explaining that, as he loves his garden, he always wears gardening gear.

Those who did acknowledge the context of the extract took into consideration the warm climate and this was reflected in the choice of materials. The most successful answers also considered that he was returning from the meal so his tie might be loosened, or his shirt be slightly creased. Some suggested that he might have changed into slippers, but this would not be possible as he has walked into the house to be confronted by Ben and there would be no opportunity for this change to have happened, which is another example of students not fully considering what has happened before the printed extract begins.

**9.1**

There were many very clear and appropriate descriptions of Sephy's costume in *Noughts & Crosses*. A diverse range of valid approaches were taken with some students describing traditional African-inspired garments, others focusing on the use of expensive fabrics to show her high status, and some focusing on casual clothing, including designer brands to reflect her youth or using costume in a more representational way as a means to highlight key themes. The key to successful answers, regardless of approach, was providing 'precise details throughout'. Many students dressed Sephy in a purple dress, as the colour signifies royalty, but gave no details about the cut, the style, the length or fabric. Others dressed her using monochrome colours to comment on the racial inequality but did not identify specific items of clothing.

The best answers not only gave a highly detailed description of all aspects of the costume, but also acknowledged that the scene was taking place on a beach, which was reflected for example, in her bare feet or sandals. There were also some insightful ideas provided about how her pregnancy might be reflected in the choice of costume.

**10.1**

There were very few responses. The most effective responses provided a 'head-to-toe' description of an appropriate costume for the Nurse, considering garments, fabrics, colours and the condition that reflected the context of the extract, her role and reflected late 16th century Verona.

There were also a few misconceptions about the Nurse's position, with students assuming that she acted as a cook or a cleaner within the family home.

**11.1**

Most of the answers reflected knowledge of the poorer living conditions in the flat. Many drew on the information provided in the text describing the flat, but this often meant that the answer wasn't made fully relevant to the extract.

The most effective answers provided period specific detail, referencing material and patterns that were reflective of popular furnishings in the 1950s. Less effective answers described a 'slovenly flat', that appeared to be fairly modern.

## **A summary of students' performance in Question 2**

This 8-mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how to communicate meaning through vocal and physical performance skills, in relation to the delivery of a specific line of dialogue taken from the printed extract.

Successful responses saw students write an appropriate amount which considered the whole line of dialogue and its composite parts separately, normally breaking it into two or three phrases. Many students appeared to have been taught to begin their answer with an introductory sentence where the whole line of dialogue is written, this is unnecessary and time consuming.

Some students considered their vocal skills and then their physical skills (or vice versa) separately, and this is a valid approach. However, examiners noted that the most successful responses were where students considered physical and vocal skills in combination, which enabled them to write about their chosen created effects in more detail and with greater sophistication. The most effective responses placed the line in the context of the moment and considered what it was in response to, and then worked logically through the line with focus on a wide range of relevant and appropriate physical and vocal performance skills. Many students were able to skilfully bring their ideas to life using an impressive range of dramatic terminology, adjectives and adverbs, so the examiner could visualise the stage action. However, sometimes vivid descriptions were provided, but the ideas suggested were not appropriate to either the role or the context of the extract. In some cases, very detailed performance ideas were offered with no reference being made to the effects to be created.

Less successful responses spoke generally about using a single vocal or physical skill throughout the whole line, often without quoting the dialogue. Others listed lots of skills, but the skills described did not have the potential to create the effect identified, highlighting that these students did not understand how effects could be created in performance.

It was clear that some students had been taught a wide range of terms that they did not understand, the most misused terms were gait, pitch and tone. The phrase 'loud pitch' and 'high tone' were used regularly. Gait was often used to describe characters who were seated or still.

### **5.2**

Many students wrote very insightfully about how they would perform the role of Proctor to show the complexity of his feelings as he is forced to justify his actions to Hale. The most sophisticated answers considered the argument that Hale had interrupted, in which Proctor had been confronted again with his affair and the guilt this would have triggered. These effective responses also often acknowledged that Elizabeth was in the room and how this might also shape Proctor's delivery of the line.

Others wrote about Proctor being very aggressive or conversely cowering in fear, as Hale has a much higher social status; these responses showed limited understanding of his character, context and the extract. Many again were based on the misconception of John Proctor being poor and of low status.

**6.2**

Many Blood Brothers' responses effectively captured the light-hearted playfulness of Mrs Lyons as she teases Edward. Many effects were appropriate including her affection, her joy in sharing a moment like this with her son and her excitement at the thought of her son getting a girlfriend. Some students also interpreted the line as hysterical, controlling and driven by paranoia, which demonstrated a lack of understanding of how the extract unfolds and how the mood later shifts, once the locket is open. Many students also believed that Mrs Lyons secretly already knew what was in the locket and she wanted to see it to confirm her worst fears.

Some wrongly described her trying to grab the locket when Edward has already given it to her earlier in the extract. This suggested that many were not reading the whole extract before attempting to answer the question.

Many answers included lengthy explanations about the importance of the locket in the play as a whole, which was unnecessary.

**7.2**

Many of the responses to this question were confused and showed a lack of understanding of Fix's intentions in this scene. Some had him as angry and aggressive, fuelled by their previous fight, others included descriptions of ways to include slapstick comedy moments, such as Fix falling over, neither of which considered the context of the extract and Fix's need to get Passepartout on side.

Many of these answers highlighted that although students are only being asked to write about the performance of a single line, the effects identified need to reflect not only what has just happened, but the character's journey through the play and their intentions at that moment.

**8.2**

The most successful answers acknowledged the complexity of the relationship between the characters on stage and considered who Bob would direct each part of the line to. Most students identified anger as an effect, but some highly mature and insightful answers went beyond that exploring Bob's sense of disappointment and betrayal and his conflicted feeling towards both Fran and Ben.

Some described him as overtly aggressive and violent, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the character.

**9.2**

Most students were able to identify Sephy's regret, disillusionment, and sorrow. Some very sensitive answers contextualised the effects in terms of the journey the couple had been on and their shared experiences of discrimination.

There were beautiful descriptions of how torn she feels and how her newfound realism is forcing her to confront the hopelessness of their situation. Others wrongly identified this line as being Sephy's way of rejecting Callum, as she no longer loves him.

Many students described Sephy pointing at herself on the word 'cross' and Callum on the word 'nought', to highlight their separation, which is a very valid suggestion, but few explained how she



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might point. To access the top band students, need to be referencing a range of appropriate adverbs so the examiner can understand the nature and intention behind the performance idea. The reference to pointing itself does not create a clear effect.

## 10.2

The few responses seen were generally detailed and appropriate and showed an understanding of both the context of the extract and the character.

More students dealt with the line as a whole than was seen for other texts and in some cases, this approach hampered their ability to include precise detail

## 11.2

There were several sensitive and mature responses to this question, which acknowledged the complex relationship between Helen and Jo and how this line could be performed to capture that complexity.

The most successful answers acknowledged Helen's shift in intentions and emotions through the line and they considered each part of the line in turn.

### **A summary of students' performance in Question 3**

This 12-mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how to create a particular effect for an audience, as defined by the question, via the use of performance space and the physical and vocal interaction with another character. Examiners noted there had been an improvement in the number of students crafting answers that acknowledged the focus of the question [feelings, emotions, growing anger etc].

Centres are reminded that interaction can include verbal skills, many responses just focused on physical and in some cases just on the use of the space. There was an increase in the number of responses which just included reference to where each character was on the stage and where they moved to, often without reference to how they moved. The use of drama specific terms such as stage left and stage right can be very useful in Question 3 responses, but simply referring to where a character is standing is unlikely to be able to convey an effect.

The term proxemics was used in many responses, but it was often misused. Students spoke about moving towards another character and increasing proximity. Many students also appeared not to understand how proxemics could be used to create effects, stating how turning your back and rushing away from someone could indicate your desire to be close to someone.

Examiners noted that more effective responses would take into account both characters' motivation and describe the interaction, with a clear focus on the role being performed, with vivid detail. These responses considered how eye contact, response to the delivery of specific lines and touch, or the lack of it, could also hint at the dynamics of the particular relationship.

Most effective responses considered the full shaded extract, as printed, often focusing on three or four key lines from throughout the extract. Less successful responses involved a generalised description of how the character might be performed throughout the whole of the shaded extract or

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spent the majority of the answer focusing on the other character. Some responses considered the whole extract and the lines referenced did not appear in the shaded part of the extract at all.

### 5.3

This question elicited some excellent answers, the most successful of which acknowledged the complexity of Proctor's emotions at this moment in the play; his guilt, pride, defensiveness and desire to protect his name and how these informed his response to Hale.

Another aspect of many excellent answers was an awareness of the opportunities that the set may present to the actor, there were many meaningful references to the use of the table, acting as a barrier between the men, the use of chairs and how the dynamic changed as they stood or sat. Proctor was described as moving towards the fireplace to seek comfort and refuge from Hale's questions or looking towards the open door willing Hale to leave.

Less successful answers were often based upon misconceptions about how the characters feel about one another, with assertions that Proctor hates Hale or that Hale believes Proctor to be a witch. Many also described Proctor as being overly aggressive and/or rude to Hale, which demonstrated a lack of understanding of Puritan social mores.

### 6.3

Most answers were very clearly focused on Mrs Lyons' emotions. The most successful answers took the examiner through the range of emotions Mrs Lyons experienced as she goes from playfully teasing Edward about his 'girlfriend' to the shock and horror of seeing the photo.

Quite a large number ignored the first lines and began when the locket was open; whilst it is not a requirement that absolutely every line is discussed, those answers that did not acknowledge the shift in her emotional state throughout the shaded extract were generally less successful. To be an excellent response, students do need to find ways to take the examiner through the whole shaded extract logically, rather than zooming in on a short moment from the shaded extract.

### 7.3

Very few of the responses seen focused on the full brief of the question. Many focused on the idea of 'desperation', without also focusing on what Fix is desperate to achieve i.e. convincing Passetartout.

Those who did acknowledge the brief struggled to suggest appropriate performance ideas to show Fix's intentions, as in question 7.2 many answers focused on how comedy might be created through the use of slapstick.

### 8.3

Many excellent answers to this question were seen, the most effective of which focused not just on Bob's anger, but his 'growing' anger and how his interaction with Ben and his use of stage space might communicate this build-up. These excellent answers often used their knowledge of the characters and their relationships to inform how this anger might be communicated, they spoke of his sense of disbelief or rejection and his feelings of guilt that he had not brought Ben into line earlier.

Less successful answers had him filled with uncontrolled rage from the very beginning and often focused on rather superficial ways that an actor might show anger such as ‘getting in his face’, ‘speaking through gritted teeth’ and ‘frowning his eyebrows’. Whilst these are all potentially appropriate ideas, these more superficial answers did not demonstrate an understanding of either context or character.

### **9.3**

This question was answered successfully by most students, who were able to effectively identify and communicate Sephy’s feelings at this point in the play.

The most effective answers acknowledge the importance of the location i.e. the beach and how this might shape the nature of the interaction between the characters. They described Sephy looking out to sea or playing nervously with the sand with her feet.

Less effective answers did not acknowledge the complexity of her emotions, many choosing to just focus on her love for Callum, without considering the pressured nature of the moment or her pregnancy.

### **10.3**

Only a few answers were seen, and they were mostly effective. Some mistook the Nurse’s declamatory and exaggerated declarations of grief as evidence that she was only pretending to be distressed. This showed a lack of understanding of the role the Nurse has played in the lives of the Capulets and the genuine love and affection she feels for the family and hence the sense of loss she would have felt about Tybalt’s death.

### **11.3**

Most students focused on the idea of showing Helen’s excitement and were able to make detailed and appropriate suggestions about how this excitement might be shown. There were some lovely ideas about her use of a mirror and the wedding clothes.

As with all Question 3s, talking about the use of stage space and discussing the possible opportunities that set and props provide is very useful.

## **A summary of students’ performance in Question 4**

These twenty-mark questions test students’ knowledge and understanding of how performance skills might be deployed both in this extract and in the play as a whole. Students are asked to focus on a specified character in Question .4.

The most effective responses were well balanced, offering precise and appropriate performance ideas for the extract and key moments from the play as a whole. There were many different, but equally valid approaches taken to structuring responses. Some students chose to write about a section from the extract and then compare this to the performance of a key section from somewhere else in the play. Others wrote about the extract and then turned their attention to the play as a whole. Regardless of approach what is key to success in this question is well chosen moments that allow the student to describe ideas specifically calculated to interpret character both

in the extract and the play as a whole. These ideas are then brought to life through reference to an extensive range of vocal and physical skills.

Less successful responses to these questions tended to only focus on the printed extract and make no reference to the play as a whole or made generalised assertions about the use of performance skills, without referencing specific moments or lines. This year there was also an increase in responses where several key moments from the play were referenced and ideas provided for how they might be performed, but no ideas were provided for the extract. These answers appeared pre-prepared, with students identifying the possible character that they may be asked to write about in light of the pre-release material

A considerable number of responses seen showed that students did not have a secure understanding of the character and so were unable to reference a comprehensive or appropriate interpretation. These responses either included descriptions of the use of skills without any reference to what these performance ideas might convey or they were related to the creation of tension or comedy, rather than interpretation.

#### **5.4**

Some of the very best Question 4 answers were seen in response to *The Crucible*. Students wrote insightfully about Hale's journey and how he is changed and shaped by his experiences in Salem. They were then able to place the extract in the context of his character arc in a skilful way.

Some common misconceptions were seen in many students' answers, several of which focused on the idea that at the beginning of the play he is pompous, power hungry and arrogant. In some answers, there was also a lack of understanding about what is happening in the extract.

Some wrongly assumed that Hale is visiting the Proctors to intimidate them as he believes they are witches, others believed that at this moment he is already beginning to have doubts about the court and the girls' testimony.

#### **6.4**

Considering Edward's importance in the play as a whole, a surprising number of students presented very insecure and at times inaccurate interpretations of Edward. Most focused on how 'posh' he was and this formed the basis of their whole, rather simplistic, interpretation. Others described him as 'cruel' and 'unfeeling' and suggested that he was laughing at his mother's distress and then compared this to the moment that he returned home from university and 'mocked' Mickey after he lost his job. This showed a lack of understanding of how his privileged and sheltered upbringing has shielded him from some of the harsh realities of life.

Central to other students' interpretation was the idea he was 'stupid' or 'ignorant' because he had fallen for Mrs Lyons' lies and had not yet realised that Mickey was his brother.

The best answers recognised that Edward was deeply concerned and confused by Mrs Lyons' behaviour and genuinely cares for her. They also acknowledged this extract as a way of exploring and communicating Edward's fierce loyalty to the Johnstone family. This was accompanied with reference to well-chosen moments from the rest of the play to show this interpretation and how Edward changes and develops as a character. These moments included the moment the locket was given to him, the time he is hit by Mrs Lyons and when he is forced to move away as Mrs

Lyons is ill. These moments were then brought to vivid life through reference to how an extensive range of performance skills could be used.

#### **7.4**

Many of the answers involved a retelling of the narrative explaining what Passepartout does to assist Fogg during the journey and factual references to his life before he took his job with Fogg, with little or no reference to an interpretation of his character. Although there may be a temptation to see the characters in this play as less complex than in the other texts, they do change and develop and have clear motivations and intentions, and it is still possible to formulate a comprehensive interpretation of the characters.

More successful answers acknowledged that this extract demonstrated his loyalty and devotion to Fogg, whilst comparing this to moments where he has been naïve and manipulated by Fix. This approach allowed students to address different aspects of his character and so demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of his character.

#### **8.4**

There were many excellent answers to this question that recognised that whilst Ben appeared vulnerable and filled with remorse his overriding motivation was to enlist his parents' help to avoid punishment. Some highly insightful responses used descriptions of a range of skills to hint at his insecurity due to his working-class roots, which also fuelled his twisted sense of entitlement that he was justified in his actions.

Some less successful and more superficial answers focused solely on showing he was under the influence of drugs.

Many of the answers referred to well-chosen moments from the rest of the play, which explored his very different relationships with his parents. Some students wrote very insightfully about how they might perform the early scenes in Act One where Ben is shown to take advantage of his mother's affection or his attempts to impress his father and gain his approval through expensive gifts and his new European sports car.

#### **9.4**

Generally, this question was answered well as most students recognised the significance of the extract in Callum's journey as a whole and the development of his relationship with Sephy. Students wrote in very insightful ways about how Callum has matured and been shaped by his experiences of discrimination and how this motivated his decision to take part in violent protest.

Many successfully compared this scene to the opening scene on the beach to show how Callum has lost his youthful optimism and, in his heart, now knows they can never be together.

#### **10.4**

The few answers that were seen in response to this question were well structured and focused on showing an appropriate interpretation of Juliet through a range of both vocal and physical skills. Most focused on Juliet's youth and her love for Romeo, although many did not acknowledge the depth of her character, her strength and courage, and her passion and determination. Most of the

other moments referenced focused on her interactions with Romeo, although some highly effective answers referred to moments where she stood up to her parents, showing her bravery.

#### **11.4**

Most answers focused on the complex and tense nature of Jo's relationship with Helen and placed this extract into the context of the history of their dysfunctional relationship and how Jo's reactions have been informed by years of neglect and disappointment.

The most effective answers compared this scene to the performance of other key moments which allowed students to explore how this relationship informs Jo's relationship with men and her negativity and lack of self-confidence.

### **A summary of students' performance in Question 5**

There was an increase in the number of students choosing to answer Question 5. Set and costume remained the most popular design skills to write about followed by lighting; very few sound and puppet design answers were seen.

Many answers only focused on the extract, with no ideas provided for the play as a whole. Many also did not focus on the idea of using design to support the action and the suggested designs did not acknowledge this key requirement of the question.

When writing about set the most effective answers acknowledged the genre and style and the requirements for transitions between locations. For example, those writing about Blood Brothers described the use of a composite set and then smaller items being trucked on. Students also wrote in a very skilled and intelligent way about the epic presentational style of Noughts & Crosses and the playwright's instruction that there should be minimal props/no clutter and considered this when explaining how they would represent the beach and other key locations.

There were many 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. A large number of responses seen only described one costume, centres are reminded that it is a requirement that at least two of the characters' costume designs must be described.

Lighting answers often lacked an understanding of the style of the play, many only focused on the symbolic use of colour to reflect the characters' feelings, with no consideration of type of lantern, intensity, positioning, angles or focus.

### **A summary of students' performance in Section C**

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

There are three questions in this section; one question was focused on the evaluation and analysis of performers, and two questions were focused on the work of a designer. Students must only answer one question in this section. As in the previous series, the most popular choice remained Question 12, which focuses on performers. There was however an increase in students being

prepared to write about design and there were some highly insightful and critical responses seen, particularly focusing on lighting and set design.

The majority of students wrote about productions that were available on DVD or streaming sites. The most popular digital productions referred to in this section were: *Billy Elliot: The Musical*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *Peter Pan*, *Treasure Island*, *Everyone's Talking About Jamie*, *Macbeth*, *Small Island* and *Medea*. Watching recorded performances did not impact the level of enjoyment and critical appreciation communicated in students' responses. There were some outstanding answers produced, which captured how and why a student had been engaged by a performance, often on a deeply personal level and these were a joy to read.

Some students, however, did begin to evaluate the work as though it were a film. They referred to the audience as 'viewers' and discussed camera angles. There were also a small number who discussed watching and rewatching the same scene over and over and how their opinions changed over time. In some of these cases, it appeared that the students had not watched the whole production and had just been shown brief clip/s of the recorded production. There was a sense that many had experienced watching these productions alone and this may have hampered their ability to consider the impact the production had on an audience.

Popular live productions included *Woman in Black*, *A Monster Calls*, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* and *A Curious Incident of the Dog In The Night-Time*.

Whether live or recorded performances were used, excellent answers were able to capture a scene or sections from the production and brought the moments to life through vivid detail and description before going on to analyse the impact in line with the appropriate focus of the question, and then offering an evaluative comment to define its relative success.

Many answers lacked this balance and it was not unusual to see students achieving excellent A03 marks, but limited or only middle-range A04 marks. Examiners thought this was because students had pre-learnt descriptions of moments of action and were then unable to make the detail provided relevant to the focus of the question through meaningful analysis and evaluation.

Centres are reminded it is a requirement for students to identify what has been seen, where and when, at the start of their response. Several responses were seen, where the title of the production was not given and it was unclear what production had been seen.

Examiners noticed that a significant number of students had attempted a question in this section at the start of their written exam; this was not thought to be any more or less successful than had they responded to the paper in its printed sequence. However, there was an increase in the number of pupils who began their answer and then stopped completing the other sections and then returned to Section C. This appears to be related to concerns about time and completing all the questions. Students would often talk about one or two moments, then stop and then write about additional moments at the end of the paper, time permitting. However, it was noted that when this approach was taken when the student did return they had often lost focus on the question and the response felt disjointed.

A few students wrote about the same text as they had studied for Section B, this was seen most often with *Things I Know to Be True*. This is a rubric infringement and students were only given credit for the section which achieved the highest number of marks.

There were a higher number of students who did not attempt the question at all, a few noted on their scripts that they had not seen any performances. Some responses were seen where students had wrongly understood Section C as an extension of Section B, where they identified a production seen and then went on to explain how they would have performed specific moments, with no description, analysis or evaluation of the performers' use of vocal and physical skills to create a dramatic effect. It is likely that these infringements were the unfortunate consequence of the disruptions and lost learning of the past two years. It is to be hoped that with the resumption of normal lessons, teachers will be able to ensure that these student misunderstandings are not evident in the next exam series.

## 12

This question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how performers used their vocal and physical skills to create a dramatic effect for the audience. The most effective responses focused on a number of key 'moments' and brought them to life for the examiner through the use of vivid description and accurate use of drama terminology.

Some centres had prepared students to write about single short lines in multiple scenes. These were often written about without any narrative context and sometimes without the actor/character being identified, subsequently the answers felt disjointed. Some examiners noticed that centres prepared all students to focus on the same moments/lines and they were taught pre-prepared analytical and evaluative comments. This almost always hampered students' ability to address the focus of the question and to capture their response to live theatre. Centres are reminded that the qualification requires that students study the complete play/performance seen, rather than looking at only a few cherry-picked moments.

Effective analysis and evaluation went beyond a simple judgement and offered a more developed response which stated the success but also offered a qualification of the success. The most effective responses could identify what dramatic effect had been created. Most students recognised that a dramatic effect could refer to many different things, including the creation of comedy, tension or the conveyance of key themes and ideas and/or the exploration of relationships and characters and/or situations which might create effects. Weaker answers tended to finish paragraphs with a reference to the idea that a dramatic effect had been created, but they were unable to qualify what this was.

## 13

This 32-mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how a single design skill was used to create a suitable mood and/or atmosphere for the audience.

This question allowed students to decide which design skill to write about, but some students misread the question and wrote about multiple design skills. When this happened the whole response was marked, but only points about one of the design skills could be credited. This was the design skill that was written about most effectively and so achieved the highest mark.

There were not many responses to this question, but they were often of a high standard and referred to a wide range of aspects of the design skill focused upon. Lighting answers focusing on *The Woman In Black* were often very critical and insightful and focused on the use of colour, angle, intensity, gobos and gauzes to create a very specific mood and/or atmosphere.



*The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time* also proved to be very popular. In the most effective answers on this production, students were able to articulate how and why the design created mood and/or atmosphere often by allowing the audience an insight into Christopher's emotional state.

Less effective responses to this question were narrative or relied solely on an aesthetic description of the design, without analysing or evaluating how the design skill created mood and/or atmosphere.

#### **14**

This 32-mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how set design was used to communicate time and/or place for the audience.

Very few responses were seen, but the most effective answers demonstrated some practical experience of set design and considered the flexibility of the set, its construction the materials used, and the colours and textures. Rather than just describing the set seen on stage, successful responses would consider how the material used and their condition would help to communicate time and/or place.

A small number of students focused on productions in which abstract or non-naturalistic set design was used, in some of these answers students appeared confused about the time and/or place the production was set in and this hindered their ability to answer the question. Some students appeared to write pre-prepared responses about the set, which made little or no reference to the communication of time or place.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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