
GCSE DRAMA

8261/X Texts in practice
Report on the Examination

8261/X
June 2023

Version: 1.0

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2023 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.
AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Introduction

Component 3 is externally assessed by a visiting examiner. The 2023 visiting window ran from 16th January to 31st May. In some cases, where a visit was not possible for logistical reasons, centres posted their work to their allocated examiner.

The Assessment Objective being assessed is AO2: Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions in live performance.

Students must prepare two extracts from the same play. Centres have a free choice of text; however, it must meet the requirements outlined in the specification. Students must prepare two separate extracts, from the same play. Performance students should not play more than one role per extract, unless it is the playwright's intention eg multi rolling in Teachers.

Students can choose to perform monologues, duologues, or group pieces, and again centres are reminded to check the requirements, such as minimum timings, in the specification.

Identification of all performance and design students before the start of each extract should be included on the recording that is made at the visit. Both extracts are assessed independently and must have a clear start and finish.

Examiners reported seeing work this series that covered a wide range of performance repertoire. They saw some confident, skilled and engaging performance work as well as some less successful student responses.

Overall, centres have shown a very good understanding of the requirements of this component.

Administration: Paperwork and Submission of Work

Most centres completed administrative tasks as required and this is greatly appreciated.

Examiners reported that most centres had approved Play Approval Forms available in time for the examiner to suitably prepare. Copies of the extracts being performed should be sent to the examiner along with the completed Play Approval Form, and only if an examiner specifically requests it should a complete text be sent. This will only be requested where the choice of text is less known, and the examiner may be unfamiliar with it.

It was supportive of the examination process when centres provided clear programme notes so an examiner could identify students as part of their preparation for watching the performance work. It was helpful when programme notes clearly identified the play and extract for each student and included the student number and name. When students were photographed in costume it was very helpful, as opposed to using school photographs from several years ago.

For centres that sent work postally, when it was sent with all the required paperwork in an organised and clear to follow way, it was supportive of the examination process which examiners reported as being greatly appreciated.

In some cases, examiners reported a delay in receiving the recording of the exam performances, and centres are reminded these should be sent to their examiner within 10 working days of the visit.

It is suggested that if a centre is unsure of any of the administrative procedures, they should check with their NEA adviser in plenty of time before their scheduled visit.

Examiners valued the warm welcome they received by staff in centres, and the preparation centres had undertaken in order to present work for the examination in an appropriate way.

Statements of Dramatic Intention

The purpose of the statement of dramatic intention is to provide students with the opportunity to communicate their creative ideas and for examiners to be able to watch the performance in the context a student intends.

Examiners reported again this series seeing a range of statements, from those with very brief and non-specific intentions, to clear, fully relevant and detailed dramatic intentions.

It is important that students have studied their chosen play text as a whole and then selected appropriate extracts for performance. Where this is, or is not, the case it is often clear in the statements students write.

More successful statements of dramatic intention demonstrated a thorough appreciation of the text. They included appropriate intentions and stated how they could be realised in performance, for example stating how specific physical or vocal performance skills, or use of colour in design skills, would be used in order to achieve their intentions.

Less successful statements were often very brief or only gave very general intentions, for example, 'I will show the audience my character'. Such responses were of limited value.

More focused and perceptive intentions were the result of a practical appreciation of the text and a full awareness of the factors that make up the wider context.

It is the quality of the intentions, and not the number of words written that examiners reported as having the most value.

Filming Performances

The points mentioned below covering recordings should be considered and centres are reminded of the requirements for recordings published by AQA on the GCSE Drama section of the website.

It is worth reminding centres that before the piece is filmed, students are required to identify themselves by name and student number, stating their chosen specialism, the title of the play and their role.

Centres also need to ensure close-ups of students' design skills are recorded as part of this identification process, in addition to being captured during the performance itself.

The performances should be filmed by one camera ideally from a single position. The camera should, as closely as possible, provide the same perspective as the audience.

Centres are reminded that USB's should be password protected, with the designated password given by AQA. Some examiners reported this series that centres had used their own password.

Performance Extracts

Choice of Text

Most examiners reported the choice of both text and extract played a significant role in the achievement of students. Examiners reported that the level of success of a student response was in most cases linked to the selection of a text that is suitable for the student/s.

Examiners reported seeing a wide range of texts being performed. Some texts appeared to be very popular and were seen a lot and others were less well-known. It was the level to which a student could comprehend and interpret the text, rather than how popular it was, that related to their level of success.

In successful responses, students were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the texts in their performance or design work. Where students had a limited understanding of the wider context of the play, they were less able to communicate themes, ideas, and stylistic qualities in their response.

A proper understanding of the style, genre, themes and overall creative intentions of the text was an underpinning quality of the more successful responses. It is also important to consider the role/s a student will play. Students need to understand the character/s they are playing and be able to use a range of performance skills to portray the character/s effectively. The impact of this is also applicable to design students.

In some cases, examiners reported that solemn or challenging themes were not performed with sensitivity and students should consider their proficiencies in terms of their ability to communicate particular styles, such as comedy or tragedy, effectively.

In a small number of cases, examiners reported that centres had made minor changes to the lines in a text, with the intention to update points of reference. Centres are reminded the texts should be performed as they are, in keeping with the playwrights intentions. Where students are performing from texts and do not appear to understand the historical or cultural references adequately, they should aim to understand them and not simply change them to be able to communicate the text effectively in performance.

Examiners reported that successful performances were seen across monologues, duologues and group performances.

Examiners reported the most popular texts seen this series included:

Find Me, 4.48 Psychosis, Too Much Punch for Judy, Five Kinds of Silence, Bouncers, Teachers, Daisy Pulls it Off, Macbeth, Girls Like That, The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband, Blood Brothers, DNA, The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Be My Baby, Dumb Waiter, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, A Taste of Honey, Cagedbirds, Chatroom, Woman in Black, Blackout and The Pillow man.

Choice of Extract

Examiners reported that the organisation in terms of group size did not directly impact on the success of a response and that all approaches are acceptable. In some centres all students performed monologues, some centres organised all students into either duologues or groups, and in other centres there was a mix of monologues, duologues, and group work.

In a small number of cases, examiners reported that centres had selected the same extracts, or the same text for all students. In this instance, it was often the case that the selected text was more accessible to some students than others. However, in other cases the selected text had been thoroughly explored and provided students with a good underpinning appreciation of the features to be realised in performance.

The timing requirements were mostly met this series. There were however several instances when the extract was significantly longer than required and in several cases, this was self-limiting, as some students were unable to sustain their focus and/or their role throughout.

Centres should check the relevant section of the specification if they are unsure of group size and timing requirements. Extracts generally supported all students to have significant moments within them. Centres should be reminded that the use of non-assessed students is prohibited, unless pre-approved by AQA.

Facilitating the Exam

Centres are thanked for their hard work in facilitating the exam visit. Examiners reported that in the majority of cases the examination had been organised effectively in order to support students and to facilitate the requirements of the examination.

Examiners reported that in most centres the examination had been supported with an appropriate sense of occasion, however where this was not the case, it often led to students performing in non-performance spaces, or without sufficient preparation time.

Most centres had a small audience of the students' peers. It was noted that having a supportive audience added to the sense of occasion and gave students the responses their performance work deserved. Examiners reported that in a small number of cases, students asked for there to be no audience, as they were feeling anxious about performing in front of others.

Performance Skill - Performer

Examiners reported that the most popular role seen this series was that of performer.

In successful responses students demonstrated a good understanding of the text and students were familiar and confident with their lines. Work was well rehearsed, performed with confidence and was engaging to watch and themes and ideas were effectively communicated.

Examiners reported seeing physical, vocal, and interpretative skills that ranged from limited to excellent. In most cases students were sufficiently prepared, and the work was adequately rehearsed.

Successful performances appeared appropriately refined and developed, for example, students had a good appreciation of the given circumstances and could apply performance skills to interpret and perform a character as appropriate to the demands of the extract and in keeping with the wider context of the play as a whole. They were consciously able to use the performance space and, where appropriate, interact with other performers, in a way that was in keeping with the playwrights intentions.

In less successful responses students often appeared less comfortable in a performance space and in some cases were hesitant in the delivery of their performance due to being uncertain of their lines or blocking.

In some cases, lines were simply learnt and repeated without any real effort or ability to realise the character or communicate the creative intentions of the text. In some cases, students required prompts and some students used their script in performance. Where this was the case, it was self-limiting.

Performance Skill – Costume Design

Examiners reported seeing costume design responses this series that ranged from very simple and basic to more effective and fully realised designs.

Successful designs took the wider context of the play into account, including the period, the style and the setting, and helped communicate information and establish a character.

Examiners reported some very effective designs that were able to provide the audience with information about the character, such as their age or occupation and that considered factors such as using colour to communicate, for example, a symbolic idea. Successful designs were also able to show relevant information about a character's circumstances within the extract and supported the telling of their story. Fully realised designs made a valuable contribution to the performance, and considered such factors as how the actor would move in or use the costume.

Less successful designs were often very limited and basic and appeared to simply take an instant design approach, without considering alternatives. The resulting costume in some cases was inappropriate for the character or play.

Performance Skill – Lighting Design

Examiners reported seeing a relatively small number of lighting design responses this series. It is appreciated that the facility for a centre to support lighting design students will depend on the availability of appropriate resources. Where lighting design was offered as a skill, it was usually where the student had an interest and experience in stage lighting.

In more successful responses, there was a sense of the designer understanding how lighting could be used to contribute to the realisation of relevant creative intentions, in keeping with the extract and the play as a whole.

Successful design responses considered the key tools a lighting designer can use such as colour, direction, movement, and intensity.

Successful design responses showed how lighting can react with the text and use different states that link to the action and mood of the extract being performed.

Less successful responses demonstrated basic lighting ideas. In some cases, these included very basic lighting changes, for example blackouts between sections.

Performance Skill – Sound Design

Examiners reported seeing a small number of sound design responses this series.

The most successful responses included design ideas and choices that created a sense of time and place as appropriate to the extract and created an appropriate atmosphere.

Again, this series examiners noted that where sound design students had developed and refined their ideas by working in collaboration with students in other design or performance roles, the designs were more integrated and organic and supported the realisation of creative intentions.

Less successful responses were basic in their ideas, for example examiners reported that some designs did not go beyond playing music or a sound effect in one or two sections of the extract. In these responses the use of sound often appeared to be superficial.

It was important that the choice of extract facilitated sufficient opportunity for sound design, so students could access the full range of marks available.

Performance Skill – Set Design

Examiners reported seeing a relatively small number of set design responses this series and these ranged from very simple and basic to more effective and suitably theatrical designs.

More successful set design responses were usually from students that had genuine interest in production arts and therefore the response was more thought through and showed a good level of skill as well as being appropriate for the text. More successful responses demonstrated two designs, one for each extract, and the changes to the design were equally considered and supportive of the extracts being performed.

In less successful responses set design ideas were basic and, in several cases, simply involved rearranging readily available furniture such as chairs and tables. This type of response often had a last-minute feel and lacked appropriate design considerations. In less successful responses there was often a cursory change to the arrangement of the furniture for each of the designs.

Performance Skill – Puppet Design

Examiners reported seeing very few instances of puppet design this series. Where puppet design was seen, it was evident there was a clear interest in puppetry and an overall good appreciation of how they could be used effectively in performance. In successful responses, the puppet design was wholly appropriate for the extract and the play as a whole.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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