



GCSE
Drama

8261/X NEA: Texts in practice

Report on the Examination

8261
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Introduction

Component 3 is an externally assessed component. A visiting examiner will mark the work for all students.

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

The 2024 visiting window ran from mid-January to the end of May. In some cases, where a visit was not possible for logistical reasons, centres posted their work to their allocated examiner in agreement with AQA.

Students must prepare two extracts from the same play. Centres have a free choice of text but must meet the requirements outlined in the specification. Performance students should not play more than one role per extract unless it is the playwright's intention, eg multi-rolling in *Teechers*. Design students must complete two designs, one per extract.

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

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 texts and ranged from fully realised performances to less successful responses.

Again this series centres have demonstrated a very good understanding of the requirements of this component.

Centres are reminded that recordings of the exam work should be sent to their examiner within 10 working days of the visit taking place.

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.

Administration: Paperwork and Submission of Work

Again this series most centres were prepared and had approved Play Approval Forms available in plenty of time for the examiner to suitably prepare. Copies of the extracts being performed should be sent to the examiner along with the Play Approval Form. A complete text should only be sent if an examiner specifically requests it. 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 clearly. It was helpful when programme notes clearly identified the play and extract for each student and included the candidate number and full name.

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.

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.

Students must have studied their chosen play text in full, and then selected appropriate extracts for performance. Examiners reported again this series seeing a range of statements, from the very brief to clear, fully relevant and detailed dramatic intentions.

More successful statements of dramatic intention demonstrated a thorough appreciation of the text and included appropriate intentions and details of 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.

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.

Less successful intentions were too brief and vague to give a context for the work that was being performed.

The intentions should be realistic for the student to achieve and in keeping with the text.

Recording Performances

When recording the performance, the camera should show the work from the viewpoint of the audience and be in a fixed position. Centres should consider the distance from the performance space to the microphone.

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

For design students, centres are reminded that a close up of the design should be included on the recording.

Centres are reminded that USBs should be password protected, with the designated password given by AQA.

Choice of Extracts

Options such as choice of group performance, duologue or monologue did not directly impact on the success of a response and examiners reported that all approaches were able to access the full range of marks available.

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.

The timing requirements were mostly met this series with a small number of performances being under the minimum time. There were some instances when the extract was longer than required and, in some cases, this was self-limiting, as some students were unable to sustain their focus and/or their role throughout the performance.

In some cases, examiners reported that centres had selected the same extracts, or the same text for all students. In some cases, 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.

Centres are reminded to check the relevant section of the specification if they are unsure of group size and timing requirements. The extracts selected generally supported all students to have significant moments within them.

Centres should be reminded that the use of non-assessed students is prohibited, unless preapproved by AQA.

Choice of Text

The choice of both text and extract played an important role in the achievement of students. Examiners reported that the level of accomplishment was in most cases linked to the selection of a text and extract.

In successful responses students were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the text 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 to realise stylistic qualities in their response.

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

An understanding of the stylistic qualities and overall creative intentions of the text was an underpinning quality of more successful responses. It is also important to consider the role or roles a student will play. Students need to understand the character they are playing and be able to use a range of performance skills to interpret and realise the character effectively.

Where students are performing from texts and do not appear to understand the contextual references sufficiently, they should not simply change them to be able to communicate the text effectively in performance. Points of reference and the wider context of the play should be understood.

Centres are reminded the text should be performed in keeping with the playwrights' intentions.

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

Examiners reported the most popular texts seen this series included:

Teechers, DNA, Find Me, 4.48 Psychosis, , Five Kinds of Silence, Bouncers, Daisy Pulls it Off, Girls Like That, Blood Brothers, The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Be My Baby, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Woman in Black, Blackout and The Pillowman.

Facilitating the Exam

Visiting 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 an appropriate and supportive audience was present. 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 other than their teacher, as they were feeling anxious about performing in front of others.

Where examiners reported there was a lack of occasion it often led to students performing in non-performance spaces, or without sufficient preparation time.

Centres are thanked for their hard work in facilitating the exam and organising work appropriately.

Performance Skill – Performer

This series saw most students respond in the role of performer. Examiners saw a wide range of responses, from fully realised and engaging performances to those that were very limited and did not go beyond reading the script.

In more 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 dramatic intentions 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. In successful performances work was appropriately refined and fully 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.

In successful responses, performers were consciously able to use the performance space and, where appropriate, interact with other performers, in a way that was in keeping with the playwright's intentions.

In less successful responses, students appeared less at ease 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 interpret 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. More successful designs understood the wider context of the play and took account of this in the designs, for example the period, the style and the setting. Better designs helped communicate given circumstances and establish character.

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 contemplated on how the actor would move in or use the costume in line with the intentions of the extract.

Less successful designs were often very limited and basic and appeared to simply take items that could be used, without considering alternatives, and the costume in some cases was inappropriate for the character or play. Overall, these designs made only a very limited contribution to the performance.

Performance Skill – Lighting Design

Examiners reported seeing a range of lighting design responses this series.

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.

It is appreciated that the facility for a centre to support lighting design students will depend on the availability of appropriate resources.

Performance Skill – Sound Design

Again, this series saw a small number of sound design responses. More successful responses showed developed and refined ideas created by working in collaboration with students in other design or performance roles, the designs were more integrated and supported the realisation of relevant 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 again this series reported seeing only a small number of set design responses.

The set designs seen this series ranged from basic and rudimentary to more effective and suitably theatrical designs.

The most successful set design responses were fully appropriate for the text being performed and were usually from students that had real interest in production arts. Better responses were skilled and clearly thought through. More successful responses demonstrated two distinct designs, one for each extract, and both designs were equally considered and fully appropriate for the extracts being performed.

In less successful responses set designs were basic and often did not go beyond rearranging readily available furniture such as chairs and tables. Less successful responses lacked appropriate design considerations and were often a superficial change to the arrangement of the furniture for each of the designs.

Performance Skill – Puppet Design

The majority of examiners saw no puppet design this series and overall, only a very small number of students responded to this exam with puppet designs.

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.