



GENERAL COMMENTS

Students were presented with a wide choice of characters in the 2004 Drama Solo performance examination and responded with a wide interpretation of the prescribed structures. The work produced across the state was generally of a higher quality than in recent years, demonstrating students' increasing confidence with the format of the examination.

Some of the problems experienced last year with timing had clearly been addressed by students in their preparation for this examination, and most work fitted comfortably within the maximum seven minutes performance time. Some students and teachers seemed to think that it was appropriate to bring a lot of props into the examination space, some of which were very heavy and required more than one person to carry them. This is not appropriate. The Drama Solo performance examination is an acting task; the use of stagecraft, while essential, is secondary to this. Furthermore, students should not expect that examination centre coordinators or assessors will assist with the carrying of props. If the student cannot carry his or her own props into the examination space within the allotted time, then the props should not be included in the performance.

Better works continued to be characterised by the richness of the detail found within the performance and by the sophisticated use of editing. Students who included every aspect of the prescribed structure in their performance were rewarded for paying close attention to fulfilling the requirements of the task (criterion 1). Conversely, some students presented work that didn't fulfil the requirements of the task and appeared to have not carefully read the prescribed structure, nor understood the necessity of complying with the requirement to address the plurals specified in the individual dot points within the performance focus. No word is in the paper by chance, and every word must be given full consideration by students.

It was apparent that there continued to be a lack of understanding of the **non-naturalistic** performance style. Weaker presentations were typified by performances as a 'talking head' with a reliance on conversation or narration. Students must always inform their work with dramatic action. Each prescribed structure required the students to **recreate** or **present**, and the terminology section on page 14 of the examination paper stated that 'the emphasis in the recreation must be on action rather than narration; doing rather than telling'. This lack of understanding of non-naturalism had a direct impact on the assessment of the use of expressive skills (criterion 8), the development of the dramatic potential of the subject matter (criterion 2) and the use of the prescribed performance style (criterion 4).

As in past years, some students presented their performance in 'street clothes' (often with unnecessarily exposed flesh), not realising that this choice automatically gave their work a contemporary look and feel and that this choice may not have been appropriate for their character. This can also be applied to the choice of 'theatre blacks' as a costume. Neither of these approaches is helpful in trying to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the non-naturalistic performance style. Although theatre blacks provide a neutral 'canvas' for the actor, many students who chose this option could have significantly enhanced their performance with judicious choices in symbolic additions to this base costume.

Students need to be aware that it is not appropriate to initiate physical contact with assessors during a performance. Work should not encroach upon the personal space of the assessors nor cause them to feel threatened in any way by the actions of the student in performance.

Some students chose to refer to notes or read from a script during their performance. This had a direct impact on the assessment of focus (criterion 9) and the assessment of tension and timing (criterion 11), and should be discouraged.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Character	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	8	7	4	9	13	11	18	12	10	8

The characters

1. The Player

This structure was popular with both male and female students. A strong student performance was characterised by the demonstration of a detailed understanding of morality plays and the world of Elizabethan England, as well as the effective use of the 'play within the play'. It also contained a good sense of comedy, and inventive choices in the use of



the element of contrast. A weaker student performance contained little or no reference to morality plays and little use of the convention of heightened use of language. Also, many weaker performances failed to develop the 'play within the play', or to address the issue of 'strategies which could be used by the Queen' referred to in dot point three of the performance focus.

2. The persona of the bow of the Argo

This structure attracted some very different approaches, and some highly effective work was done with the element of sound. Weaker students struggled to demonstrate the elements of climax and sound and showed little evidence of detailed research into the Greek myth. They also failed to show the 'transformation' when changing from one character to another. Stronger students effectively manipulated their material and developed interesting and creative ways of exploring the relationship between man and the gods. Detailed research was evident in the density of the performance of better work.

3. Jung Chang

More successful students demonstrated the ability to construct work which was beautiful and sensitive, filled with emotion, and rich in the use of symbols. The best students also used precise gestures and concise language which was full of meaning. Less successful students' work was characterised by a failure to explore the Chinese culture, especially the concept of 'freedoms'. Weaker students also tended to use hackneyed and stereotypical references in their depiction of the world of the character.

4. Shaun

This structure was popular with both male and female students. Weaker performers showed little or no sense of Shaun Tan's world, and struggled to demonstrate an understanding of the elements of mood and contrast. Weaker work also did not convey any sense of theatre of the absurd. Stronger performers demonstrated an exciting inventiveness in their recreation of the complex world, and generated highly effective satirical and social comment throughout. The best work was typified by a high level of skill with the convention of exaggerated movement, shown most clearly through energy and a strong use of space.

5. The Knight

Not surprisingly, this prescribed structure was more popular with male students. The very best work contained extraordinarily physical material which, when combined with excellent comic timing and good writing, provided irreverent and often unexpected moments. Also, the clever use of caricature was particularly effective in exploring aspects of Pythonesque humour. Weaker work was characterised by 'toilet humour', and the poor application of caricature.

6. An Oompa-Loompa

The strongest performances demonstrated a clever use of satire and an intelligent and sophisticated use of song to explore the 'impact of Thatcherism'. Top students demonstrated the ability to establish pathos in their performance as well as showing humour. This structure often attracted weaker students who simply re-told the story from the film. Poorer performances contained little or no satire, didn't address dot point one (life in Oompa-Loompa land prior to Willy Wonka's arrival), and showed very little research into Prime Minister Thatcher.

7. The Diva

This structure was a popular choice with female students and attracted some highly abstract and wonderfully effective non-naturalistic performances. The strongest performances demonstrated a sophisticated choice and use of symbols. They clearly established the context of the 'ship', and explored the complexities in Lola's character, particularly the way she was plagued by inner conflicts. Weaker students' work tended to focus on the 'frock' factor, demonstrated little understanding of Lola's life, and contained an over-working of the 'dance'. Weaker students also presented strongly naturalistic performances, which was inappropriate.

8. The Freedom Fighter

This structure presented some of the most stunning work seen in this examination. The more successful students made excellent use of the conventions of song and pathos, demonstrating work which was very emotional and powerful. They were able to create a real sense of the world in South Africa during apartheid, cleverly interweaving government propaganda with the very personal stories being explored. The top performances contained beautifully handled uses of the 'toy toy' dance. Less successful performances made no reference to the journalists, incorporated modern song (which was inappropriate), had no sense of pathos, and contained little understanding of 'propaganda'.



9. The Showman

This was a popular choice with male students and was generally handled well. The best performances were highly physical, and were characterised by a good use of sound and strong dramatic images to help create the climax. These performances gave a clear sense of the media and its manipulation. The top students also created an effective differentiation between the showman and the magician. Weaker students struggled to demonstrate 'thrill' and 'glory of first adventure', and had little or no sense of symbol and climax in their work. Creating 'highlights of new material' (dot point three of the performance focus) proved to be difficult for weaker students.

10. Captain Holly Short

Less successful students were very wordy in their performance and had little control of their material. This added to considerable confusion in the plot. Strong work was characterised by very little talking and a lot of cleverly devised action; great use was made of the conventions, especially transformation of place, and inventive ideas around the significance and use of the 'artefact'. Top students also conveyed a real sense of the world of the Fairy People, capturing the humour evident in the novel.