



2003

Theatre Studies GA3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

In general, students who understood the conceptual framework of the course handled the examination well. Most students answered all questions on the paper. A noticeable number of students used illustrations to support their written answers.

Areas of strength and weakness

Common areas of strength were:

- a clear understanding of the concepts that underpin the course
- understanding of how the various elements of the key knowledge are interrelated
- appropriate use of subject specific terminology and concepts
- skill in reflecting on theatre processes used by themselves and others
- a sound knowledge of at least one of the following areas of stagecraft: acting, direction, dramaturgy, stage management, set design, costume, lighting, properties, make-up and sound
- understanding of requirements of different question types, for example 'describe', 'explain', 'discuss' and 'analyse' as required.

Common areas of weakness were:

- a limited understanding of the interrelationship between 'performance styles' and 'theatrical conventions' with some students assuming these terms are synonymous
- limited use of appropriate terminology pertaining to the area/s of stagecraft being discussed or analysed
- lack of clarity of the difference between the 'scene' and 'monologue' in Unit 4.

Advice for students

Where questions are either divided up into parts or have more than one focus, students can divide up their response into sections, or answer the question in its entirety in one extended response. Students should name the play to which they are referring where required. Students should note that their response to any question may be supported by an illustration, but that this is an option only.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The examination paper did not stipulate that a particular type of written response was required. Students may write in essay form, point form, short-answer form or any combination thereof. All are considered acceptable as long as the student addresses the focus of the question and that the response was appropriate to the type of response required, e.g. an 'evaluation', an 'analysis'. Where a 'discussion' was required, most students chose to write their answer in either short answer or essay mode (i.e. not in bullet points).

Question 1

This question related to the use of stagecraft to enhance the intended meaning of an excerpt from a play (the excerpt was printed on the examination paper). In part a students had to read the opening stage directions from a play and then describe how they would interpret the scene using one area of stagecraft and two stimulus materials from those supplied. In part b they had to explain why the two stimulus materials they had selected would be appropriate to an interpretation of the opening stage directions. In marking part b assessors considered the student's response in relation to the two stimulus materials chosen in the answer to Question 1a.

Question 1

a

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	5	1	3	5	10	14	16	16	15	7	8	6.00

Acceptable responses were characterised by a good level of description of how one area of stagecraft could be used to interpret the opening stage directions with appropriate reference to the synopsis and two chosen stimulus materials. There was evidence of a good understanding of the nature and purpose of the selected area of stagecraft that was evident in applicable examples selected and good use of theatrical terminology was used when making reference to the area of stagecraft chosen in the answer.

High-level responses were characterised by a well-informed description of how one area of stagecraft could be used to interpret the opening stage directions with clear and highly appropriate reference to the synopsis and two chosen stimulus materials. There was evidence of a clear and comprehensive level of understanding of the nature and purpose

of the selected area of stagecraft that is evident in highly applicable examples selected and a well-developed theatrical terminology was used when making reference to the area of stagecraft chosen in the answer.

Student example

Stimulus 3 and 4

Sound

It is clear that this play is a unique murder mystery reflecting elements of both naturalism and non-naturalism. Therefore, the stagecraft area of sound will enhance my interpretation by setting the atmosphere and mood of the opening scene. Furthermore, if the scene is set much like Stimulus #3, the audience will be able to recognise that this is a typical murder mystery setting as the play synopsis states, ‘...the plot seems like a standard murder mystery’. Moreover, a set such as stimulus #3 coupled with mysterious, or even classical music will reflect elements of naturalism, possibly with high production values.

However, we must take note that two of the actors begin in the audience (a non-naturalistic convention of breaking the fourth wall) therefore they will be acting as the audience comes into the performance space. To this end, sound effects such as a classical song cello concerto, first movement will help to create a setting for the audience to absorb; causing them to feel that they are involved in the plot. This idea could be further enhanced by using a mirror in the set design.

Given that the set design on the stage will most likely imitate a standard naturalistic looking manor house, the application of the sound will be in keeping with the naturalistic convention of pre-recorded sound effects operated by a technician in the bio-box.

Sound could be used not only to set the opening scene but also to create tension and climaxes throughout the performance. To this end, the image #4 is the perfect setting for a murder mystery. With this image in mind the sound designers could come up with ‘spooky’ sound effects that will cause the audience to feel uneasy or nervous about what is going to happen. A good example of this could be a scream (this would be pre-recorded).

Therefore, sound could clearly depict my interpretation of the opening scene, reflecting both the designer’s and director’s overall interpretation of the play script, collaboratively.

Low-level responses were characterised by some description of how one area of stagecraft could be used to interpret the opening stage directions with limited reference to the synopsis and two chosen stimulus materials. There was evidence of a limited understanding of the nature and purpose of the selected area of stagecraft and little or no use of theatrical terminology was used when making reference to the area of stagecraft chosen in the answer.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	10	4	10	18	25	19	14	3.56

An acceptable level of response was characterised by a good explanation of the appropriateness of the two stimulus materials to the interpretation of the opening scene the student described in his/her answer to Question 1a. The answer made appropriate links between the interpretation described in part a and the two stimulus materials.

A high-level response was characterised by a comprehensive explanation of the appropriateness of the two stimulus materials to the interpretation of the opening scene the student described in his/her answer to Question 1a. The answer made a clear rationale link between the interpretation described in part a. and the two stimulus materials.

Student example

Stimulus 4 and 5

(In part A – direction)

Stimulus 4 and 5 are very appropriate as they convey both the era of the play (Stimulus 5) and the sinister nature of the murder mystery within the play (Stimulus 4).

Stimulus 4 depicts a large manor (sinister, creepy and foreboding etc) and thus it is perfect to use as an establishment of contextual conventions for directing the play for the audience. The projection of this image could be used to further affiliate the play with a non-naturalistic style, whilst holding the potential to create many dramatic elemental effects (such as climax, as the first act closes, tension, contrast to other aspects of the play etc).

Stimulus 5 is very appropriate to establish a sense of context for the audience in relation to the era. These costumes (and props) suggest the 1930s/40s era, and in turn, can be used quite symbolically to contrast against the non-naturalistic performance style and theatrical conventions of the play (as these costumes can be also used to indicate to the audience the status, motivation and flaws of each character).

A low-level response was characterised by some explanation of the appropriateness of one or both of the stimulus materials to the interpretation of the opening scene the student described in his/her answer to Question 1a. The answer made little or no link between the interpretation described in part a and the two stimulus materials.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	2	5	9	14	17	20	15	17	5.43

This question assessed students' understanding of their use of one area of stagecraft in Unit 3 on the production of a play/s or excerpt/s from play/s. The student was instructed to analyse one area stagecraft that he/she applied to enhance the play/s or excerpt/s from play/s

An acceptable level of response was characterised by:

- an understanding of the selected area of stagecraft including its nature and purpose
- the use of appropriate theatrical terminology to analyse the application of the area of stagecraft
- examples of thinking and working processes
- analysis of ways that the application of stagecraft enhanced the intended meaning of the play/s.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- a high level of understanding of the selected area of stagecraft including its nature and purpose
- the use of highly appropriate theatrical terminology to analyse the application of the area of stagecraft
- detailed and well explained examples of thinking and working processes
- a high level of analysis of how the application of stagecraft enhanced the intended meaning of the play/s.

Student example

I was involved in our class production of the Ancient Greek play, 'Medea' by Euripides. In our production, one of my two stagecraft roles was as the make-up artist of the protagonist of the play, Medea. Whilst casting our production, we collectively decided to work with three different actors who would play role of Medea during the performance. We did this at first to give everyone a large part in the production, but the decision opened up many interesting possibilities to me as the make-up artist.

In order to enhance our overall interpretation, I aimed to use make-up as a portrayal of Medea's developing character through the action of the play. I was to do this by incorporating colour symbolism into the face make-up to depict the changing mind state of this complex woman. Though I wanted each of the three faces to convey a different aspect of Medea's character, I knew the faces would have to be quite similar in order to limit audience confusion. Therefore I used the same base, lip and elaborate eye decoration for each actor, and incorporated my colour symbolism into the eye shadow. I was inspired to do this after reading about the symbolist and surreal artist Rene Magritte, who stated that 'the eyes are a window in a person's soul'.

The first Medea had dark green eyes shadow to depict her envy, her 'sex jealousy', which is the fatal flaw of her character. The second Medea had dark blue eye shadow to represent the deceptive and intellectual peaceful façade. This was an important aspect of Medea which I felt vital to enhance as she pretends to be innocent and harmless. The third Medea had dark red eye shadow to enhance her rage and the bloody murder of her children. The third actor worked in the climax of the play, and therefore the red was the most intense colour I used.

The make-up assisted the audience in developing an understanding of the complexities of this woman. The style of the make-up was representative of classic Ancient Greek theatre, however back then the actors wore masks in order to enhance the *emotions of their character*.

A low level response was characterised by:

- little evidence of an understanding of the selected area of stagecraft including its nature and purpose
- little or no use of appropriate theatrical terminology to discuss the areas of stagecraft
- few, if any, examples of thinking and working processes
- little or no evidence of how stagecraft was applied to enhance the intended meaning of the play/s
- little or no **analysis** of the application of stagecraft.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	1	4	10	20	15	17	14	18	5.36

Students were expected to write a **discussion** about the interpretation of a prescribed scene that the student was involved in. The question provided students with a choice as to how they structured their responses.

Students could discuss the scene in relation to one, two or all of the following points:

- the monologue
- the playwright
- the play's theme/s.

The ONLY play scene the students could refer to, to answer this question was ONE of those listed for the question on the examination paper (which correlated with the Unit 4 prescribed Monologue list for 2003).

An acceptable level of response was characterised by a satisfactory level of understanding of the contextual background of the play as relevant to the bullet point/s selected. A discussion that demonstrated the interpretation of the scene with appropriate reference to one or more of: the monologue, the playwright, the play's themes.

Student example

Monologue and themes

The scene included the monologue I chose, which was the character of Salome. Before the monologue begins she dances the dance of the seven veils for King Herod in order to acquire the head of Jokaanan. The monologue implies a naturalistic style. For example Wilde says that the head of Jokaanan should be lifelike. I deviated from this naturalistic style and made use of non-naturalism. For example I developed a syncopated rhythmic section of lines to interpret Salome regressing into a state of obsession and become trancelike.

For the head of Jokaanan I used a ball. I chose this because it helped me to represent his unresponsiveness, and his subsequent death.

The play centres round the theme of sexuality. Salome is considered to be an attractive and enticing woman. She is enticing King Herod to her beauty by her charm. To show this I choreographed a stylised movement section and used veils and pre-recorded music to help me perform the scene.

When the play was written in 1890 the sexual themes were seen to be so risky that the play was banned from some theatres. However there are other central themes such as the futile death of Jokaanan and the mysterious nature of love. I tried to capture the essence of these in my performance.

A high-level response was characterised by a high-level of understanding of the contextual background of the play as relevant to the bullet point/s selected. A well-developed discussion of the interpretation of the scene demonstrating a high level of understanding of one or more of the monologue, the playwright, the play's themes.

A low-level response was characterised by a low-level of understanding of the contextual background of the play as relevant to the bullet point/s selected. Limited discussion of the interpretation of the scene demonstrating understanding of one or more of: the monologue, the playwright, the play's themes.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	3	1	3	6	8	9	12	12	13	11	11	5	6	6.93

This question required students to discuss the performance of one of the prescribed plays on the Theatre Studies play list for Unit 3. The choice of plays listed on the examination paper was: *Speaking in Tongues* by Andrew Bovell, *God's Last Acre* by Vivienne Walsh, *Inheritance* by Hannie Rayson and *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.

Students were required to analyse how the play text was interpreted through the use of three elements:

- performance style/s
- theatrical conventions
- one area of design.

All of these aspects of the play production are amongst the key knowledge for the associated Outcome in Unit 3. Each of the above bullet points was marked out 4 of (i.e. 4 + 4 + 4 = 12). Some students answered each dot point separately while others gave a more global response to all three. Either approach was acceptable.

Many students appropriately interpreted 'play text' as being the 'play in performance'. Others, however (also appropriately), also/instead made comparisons with the 'written' play text and the theatrical production.

An acceptable level of response was characterised by reference to a specified production and using specific examples, the student showed a satisfactory level of understanding of the contribution of each of the three bullet points to the interpretation of the play text. Well-chosen examples from the play were cited in the answer.

Hamlet, Bell Shakespeare

This production was centred round the theme of 'to thine own self be true'. Bell, the director made an important decision in regards to the protagonist, Hamlet. Bell wanted to modernise the portrayal as a youth who converses with the audience to get them on his side. To do this successfully the performance style needed to be realistic so the audience could relate to Hamlet and empathise with him. At other times though the performance style was more non-naturalistic, for example the delivery of soliloquies and exaggerated movement. The costumes were from a range of eras (yet they did have an overarching look of Europe in the 1960s) and this added to ambiguousness of the play. The costumes also helped to convey the theme of things 'not being as they seem' because they came from different time frames and locations (i.e. not Denmark at the time of the play).

The theatrical conventions such as the raked stage and the fake proscenium arch were used in staging the play. Conventions such as narration and the 'play within the play' device were used to enhance our understanding of the characters and plot.

A high-scoring response was characterised by detailed and/or insightful reference/s to a specified production and using specific examples; the student showed a highly accomplished level of understanding of the contribution of each of the three bullet points to the interpretation of the play text. Highly relevant examples from the play were cited in the answer.

A low-level response was characterised by limited reference to a specified production, using examples; the student showed a low level of understanding of the contribution of one or more of the bullet points to the interpretation of the play text. Few, if any examples from the play were cited in the answer.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	3	11	18	21	20	21	3.88

This question required students to make reference to the performance of one of the prescribed plays on the Theatre Studies play list for Unit 4. The choice of plays was: *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn, *Ruby Moon* by Matt Cameron, *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman, *Yanagai! Yanagai!* By Andrea James and *The Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni.

Students were asked to 'analyse how one actor used verbal language to interpret his/her character/s'. On the paper the students were advised that 'if the actor you have selected played more than one character you may write on one or more of his/her character[s]' and that they were to 'begin your answer by stating the name of the play you selected'.

Students were not required to identify selected actors by name. The student (where applicable) may have chosen to write about multiple characters performed by the one actor or just one character.

Most students answered this question quite well.

An acceptable level of response was characterised by a good understanding of the process of character portrayal in relation to the chosen actor. The student chose one actor whose performance was worthy of detailed analysis. The student showed a satisfactory understanding of the connections between 'verbal language' and the interpretation of character by an actor.

A high-level response was characterised by a high level of understanding of the process of character portrayal in relation to the chosen actor. The student chose one actor whose performance was worthy of detailed analysis. The student showed a high level of understanding of the connections between 'verbal language' and the interpretation of character by an actor.

Student example

Play: *Ruby Moon*

Actor: Christina O'Leary

- O'Leary played the main character of Sylvie Moon, whose voice changed when she lied. The voice would become like a whine and verbal language expressed in short, monotone phrases. When telling the truth the rhythm of her verbal language would flow more irregularly like that of realistic speech
- Sylvie becomes agitated at many stages in the play; her verbal delivery becomes fast, as if out of breath
- at some point Sylvie acts the character of Ruby Moon, her daughter who has gone missing. The verbal language here is childlike with the vocal quality being small as if choking on her words
- Veronica Vale – another character transformation by O'Leary. A sexual vocabulary- phrases are long slow, with a certain delay after each one. She sings a song to help convey her 'torch song' type character to the audience
- as Dawn the babysitter, the language is abrupt with short sentences. Voice is gruff and muffled from pulling beanie over her head

- as Dulcie – verbal language is rude and impatient. Parrot-like, as if she is about to claw into someone. Moves between talking like a parrot and more naturalistic rhythm of speech.

A low-level response was characterised by a limited level of understanding of the process of character portrayal in relation to the chosen actor. The student had a limited understanding of the work of the actor whom he/she selected for analysis. The student showed little understanding of the connections between 'verbal language' and the interpretation of character by an actor.

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