

**2011** **Theatre Studies GA 3: Written examination**

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

The 2011 Theatre Studies examination was based on the *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design 2007–2014*. The examination covered five areas of study from the study design; all Unit 3 and 4 Outcomes (except for Unit 4, Area of Study 1, which is assessed in the monologue performance examination) were assessed. There were 50 marks available for the paper.

In general, students who understood the underlying concepts of the *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design* handled the examination well. Most students answered all questions on the paper. Some students, however, were not guided by the number of marks per question in regard to the length and depth of their responses.

Students were given the option to support any of their written answers with hand-drawn illustrations and/or diagrams, and some took advantage of this option. Some questions required students to annotate their illustrations/diagrams and students generally complied with this requirement. Question 4, in part, required students to annotate a previously unseen excerpt of text. Most students handled this well.

**Areas of strength and weakness**

High-scoring papers demonstrated:

- sophisticated understanding and use of subject-specific language, terminology and expressions
- a high level of skill in explanation, analysis and evaluation
- a sound working knowledge of how one or more of the following areas of stagecraft can be applied through the stages of production (production planning, production development, production season): acting, direction, dramaturgy, stage management, set, costume, lighting, properties, make-up, sound, multimedia and promotion (including publicity)
- a high level of skill in developing images and/or ideas from playscripts using areas of stagecraft
- a high level of skill in developing images and/or ideas from stimulus material
- a sound knowledge of the ways in which understanding of the characteristics/qualities of theatrical style(s) can inform the intended meaning of a playscript
- use of specific, well-selected examples
- evidence of having viewed and reflected on performances of the plays from the Unit 3 and Unit 4 prescribed playlists and having studied the Unit 3 playscript
- a high level of understanding of the ways in which playscripts and contexts pertaining to them can be presented to an audience
- a high level of skill in applying practical and theoretical knowledge from the study to the stimulus material in the examination (*VCE Theatre Studies Study Design*, page 31).
- a good understanding of question requirements, and evidence that students had used the number of marks and number of lines provided on the examination paper as a guide to the amount of detail required in the response.

Low-scoring papers demonstrated:

- incorrect, little or no use of subject-specific language, terminology and expressions
- little or no understanding of the difference between an explanation, analysis or evaluation
- limited knowledge of areas of stagecraft, the stages of production, the characteristics/qualities of specific theatre style(s) and/or theatrical contexts
- limited application of practical and theoretical knowledge from the study
- limited evidence of having viewed and/or reflected on performances of the plays from the Unit 3 and Unit 4 prescribed playlists and/or having studied the Unit 3 playscript
- a lack of sophistication in developing images and/or ideas from playscripts using acting and/or other areas of stagecraft
- little or no understanding of how to annotate diagrams/illustrations/text
- little understanding of question requirements, and a lack of consideration of the number of marks and number of lines provided on the examination paper as a guide to the amount of detail required in the response
- responses that were repetitive or did not address all aspects of the task.

**Advice for students**

- Questions may be answered in any order.
- Students should attempt to answer all questions.

- Students should be guided by the number of marks allocated to each question when determining the length and/or detail of their response, particularly if the question implies that a short answer is required. For example, if only 3–4 lines are provided for a short answer question, students should contain their response to that space. The question requirements and number of marks provided on the examination paper are also a guide to the amount of detail required in the response. For example, a question worth 2–4 marks requires a short, succinct response, whereas a question worth 6–9 marks requires more detail to reveal depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding.
- Students should take note of the particular type of response required in each question, as indicated by words such as ‘describe’, ‘evaluate’, ‘explain’, ‘discuss’, ‘compare’, ‘analyse’ and ‘identify’, and respond accordingly. It seemed that some students did not understand the difference between an analysis and an explanation. When writing an evaluation, students are reminded that an appraisal should accompany analytical responses.
- Students need to understand what is required when annotating diagrams/illustrations/text. Annotations should add explanatory comments to the diagrams/illustrations/text.
- Students should apply a working vocabulary based on theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

The 2011 examination paper did not stipulate that a particular form of written response was required. Students chose to write in prose, point or report form or a combination thereof. All were considered acceptable, as long as the student addressed the focus of the question and the response was appropriate to the type required; for example, an explanation or an analysis. Where an explanation or analysis was required, most students chose to write their answer in prose or report format rather than using point form. The examination contained a detachable insert that provided stimulus materials for Question 4. When responding to this question, students were required to draw on the stimulus materials and the contextual background information provided.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

It was clearly noted on the examination paper that no prior knowledge of the plays, their contextual background or the stimulus material was required when answering Questions 1 and 4. For Question 1, an excerpt from a playscript was reproduced with accompanying questions.

### Question 1

Students needed to draw on key knowledge and key skills pertaining to Unit 4, Area of Study 2, and interpret a scene by applying an understanding of how acting and other stagecraft might be used to explore the intended meaning of the scene. The contextual background for this question provided information about a scene from *Educating Rita* by Willy Russell, with a synopsis, setting, themes and characters.

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	7	30	36	25	<b>2.8</b>

Students were asked to describe how an actor could use one or more of the following areas of stagecraft when portraying the character of Rita in the scene: costume, props and make-up.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an excellent understanding of how the selected stagecraft area(s) could be used to interpret character
- the inclusion of highly pertinent example(s) from the script and/or other aspects of the contextual background, such as dialogue and/or stage directions from the scene, and other aspects of the contextual background such as the synopsis, setting of the play, themes and characters
- highly appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

A satisfactory (or mid-level) response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory understanding of how the selected stagecraft area(s) could be used to interpret character
- some explanation of how acting can be used to emphasise the themes of a play
- inclusion of pertinent example(s) from the script and/or other aspects of the contextual background, such as dialogue and/or stage directions from the scene, and other aspects of the contextual background such as the synopsis, setting of the play, themes and characters
- appropriate use of some theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

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A low-level response was characterised by:

- little or no understanding of how the selected stagecraft area(s) could be used to interpret character
- incomplete use of or no example(s) from the script and/or other aspects of the contextual background, such as dialogue and/or stage directions from the scene, other aspects of the contextual background such as the synopsis, the setting of the play, the themes and the characters
- little, incorrect or no use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

The following is an example of a high-level response.

*Portrayal of the character of Rita in this scene could be added to through the use of costume and make up because both of these elements can be used to establish key features such as her socio-economic standing, age and style. An actor could portray Rita's discomfort with herself and her life by appearing to be awkward in the clothes she wears which could perhaps be misfitting or dated in style and her make up which could make her look cheap or unattractive because of the unskilful way it was applied or colours chosen. An actor could portray Rita's frustration with her situation by agitatedly tearing off her jacket or indicating her clothes and make up as one of the reasons she identifies herself as a 'freak' in this scene.*

## Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	9	33	35	23	2.7

Students needed to explain how, when performing Rita, an actor could use gesture and/or movement to communicate the meaning(s) of the scene.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- a high level of understanding of the scene and its contextual background
- an insightful explanation of how an actor could use gesture/movement to communicate the meaning(s) of the scene that combines creativity with evidence of understanding of the nature of gesture/movement in acting
- inclusion of highly pertinent example(s) to support the discussion
- appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions that enhanced the discussion.

A satisfactory (mid-level) response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory level of understanding of the scene and its contextual background
- an explanation of how an actor could use gesture/movement to communicate the meaning(s) of the scene
- example(s) to support the discussion
- some use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions that enhanced the discussion.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a limited understanding of the scene and its contextual background
- a scant explanation of how an actor could use gesture/movement to communicate the meaning(s) of the scene
- few or no example(s) to support the discussion
- little, incorrect or no use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

The following is an example of a high-level response.

*In this role, the actor could play up her loud nature and desire to be heard through her physical movement. Initially she could stand quite still as she describes what she doesn't want. As she continues her monologue, her manner could become more erratic as she attempts to demonstrate her isolation. She could continually appeal to Frank to show her desire for human connection. Her movement could be awkward and disjointed to show her discomfort in this world, and her feeling-at-odds in this environment. She could have a repeated gesture of crossing her arms to show her defiance but also the fragility of her character in covering her chest and protecting her body. This could be a gesture she continually returns to, to show that she remains insecure, but desires more in life.*

## Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	3	13	28	26	18	11	3.7

Students needed to explain two or more ways the actor performing Rita could convey the presence of the character of Frank, who was implied in the scene.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- a clear sense that students were able to use the provided information and imagine an interpretation of the scene, as well as using knowledge of how an actor can imply the presence of another character
- a high level of understanding of the characters, the scene and its contextual background
- an insightful explanation of how an actor can imply the presence of another character in a scene
- inclusion of highly pertinent examples
- an appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

The following is an example of a high-level response.

*The actor of Rita could demonstrate the presence of Frank by placing him in a chair (for her own reference) and directing her speech towards him. Not only her words, but her gestures and appeal for understanding could convey his presence. As she reaches out to the chair, she reaches out to Frank.*

*Additionally, Frank's presence could be established by the actor of Rita making direct 'eye contact' at the level of his implied eye line. Furthermore, her monologue can be interpreted with timed pauses and considerations, as if Frank had said or done something, which would then propel the actor of Rita to continue with the rest of her speech (e.g. when she asks Frank, 'You think I can, don't you?' she could pause afterwards to consider his response before continuing her line).*

*In these ways, the character of Frank could be established.*

#### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	2	2	5	10	17	19	15	14	9	7	5.3

Students were asked to select one of the listed questions, each of which related specifically to one of the plays on the 2011 Unit 3 prescribed playlist. In accordance with Unit 3, Area of Study 3, all students were expected to have attended one of the plays from the 2011 Unit 3 prescribed playlist and have studied the corresponding written playscript. Students were expected to refer to both the play in performance and to the written playscript.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an excellent understanding of the play in production and the written playscript from which it was derived
- knowledge of characteristics of theatrical styles and conventions, perhaps including reference to context, performance space, use of dramatic elements and stagecraft as required to construct and articulate examples
- inclusion of highly pertinent and clearly linked references to the written playscript and the play in performance
- the use of highly appropriate theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

A satisfactory (or mid-level) response was characterised by:

- an average understanding of the play in production and the written playscript from which it was derived
- inclusion of appropriate examples from the written playscript and the play in performance
- use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- little understanding of the play in production with little or no reference to the written playscript from which it was derived
- limited use of examples from the written playscript and/or reference only to the play in performance
- little or no use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions.

The following is an example of a high-level response that analyses how the theatrical style(s) in the written playscript was (were) interpreted in the performance.

*Next to Normal*

*The libretto of 'Next to Normal' written by Brian Yorkey, is eclectic in style and employs the conventions of a number of theatre styles. Primarily, though, it is a dramatic rock musical that borders on being sung-through. It contains light-hearted numbers such as 'Light', but the dark content matter (at odds with the traditional musical) conveys a darker, more dramatic element to the libretto. Additionally, the libretto pays tribute to many Epic Theatre conventions such as direct address to the audience (in song).*

*The MTC's performance of 'Next to Normal' built liberally on the Epic conventions implied in the libretto, and extended these greatly. Initially, the MTC's performance, in the opening number and following scene, depicted a style that is consistent with the generally accepted convention of 'cheesy American musical'. The characters were almost caricatures and the acting over-the-top. This style abruptly transitioned, however, with the song, 'He's not here': consistent with the libretto, the MTC's performance transitioned into a darker, dramatic rock musical, as the audience is exposed to characters that are not stereotypical and dealing with the confronting nature of mental-ill-health, specifically, Bipolar Disorder. The acting style becomes more naturalistic and less caricature, with more emotional depth.*

*If the MTC's performance hadn't evolved the style to more dramatic, to be consistent with the libretto, the family, who are not conventional, would have been at odds with the world of the 'cheesy American musical'. Additionally, the MTC extended greatly on the Epic conventions implied in the text, especially with the libretto's political nature. The MTC highlighted this at the very end (performance of 'Light') where every set object is stripped away, leaving only the characters of the performance standing in a line & singing. Overall, the MTC remained true to the style of dramatic rock-musical, but took creative liberty in extending the political themes.*

**Question 3**

**Question 3a.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	15	32	49	<b>2.3</b>

**Question 3b.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	20	33	44	<b>2.2</b>

**Question 3c.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	21	30	43	<b>2.1</b>

Students were asked to answer each of the three parts of the question, making reference to one of the plays from the prescribed playlist for Unit 4. The three parts of the question involved: describing two or more characteristics of one of the characters in the performance, discussing how one actor used verbal and nonverbal language when portraying a character in the play and analysing one actor's use of expressive skills to interpret the playscript in the performance.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an excellent understanding of the play and its contexts
- an excellent of understanding of the actor's use of expressive skills
- an excellent of understanding of the characteristics of the character(s) in the performance
- an excellent of understanding of how an actor used both verbal and nonverbal language
- inclusion of highly pertinent examples from the play pertaining to acting and character
- an appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

A satisfactory (mid-level) response was characterised by:

- an average understanding of the play and its contexts
- an average understanding of the actor's use of expressive skills
- an average level of understanding of the characteristics of the character(s) in the performance
- an average understanding of how an actor used both verbal and nonverbal language
- examples from the play pertaining to acting and character
- use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a low level of understanding of the play and its contexts
- a limited understanding of an actor's use of expressive skills
- no differentiation between a character and an actor
- little or no understanding of the characteristics of the character(s) in the performance
- little or no understanding of how an actor used both verbal and nonverbal language
- inclusion of scant or inappropriate examples from the play
- little or no use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

The following is an example of a high-level response.

*Namatjira*

*3 a. Albert Namatjira had the characteristics of being both respectful and generous. His respectfulness was demonstrated by his careful, considerate, slow-paced and low-toned way of speaking, and his non-dominating presence. This showed his respect for the land he lived in (on which he walked delicately & lovingly) and the family he had. His generosity was shown by his action of giving unquestioningly to his family (gives his money & buys alcohol) and his way of presenting himself which is unobtrusive and open to everyone. (Open gestures e.g. arms open shows his generosity).*

*3 b. Trevor Jamieson, when portraying the character the Pastor, utilised verbal language by evolving a voice which was high pitched and inflected a German accent. His timing was delicate and considered to reflect the likeability and unobtrusive ways of the Pastor. His non-verbal language of gestures such as holding his hands together as if in prayer highlighted the religious aspect of the character. Additionally, his slow paced movement and physicality of looking up continually served to create a character that was unobtrusive and likeable. In this way, Trevor clearly differentiated between characters as he transitioned from Albert to Pastor.*

*3 c. Trevor Jamieson effectively utilised expressive skills to transition the playscript into performance. Portraying several different characters, Jamieson developed unique voices, gesture and expressions which immediately characterised a character so that the audience could identify them without the need for costume changes. Playing the character Albert, Jamieson had to interpret a story where a man ages through a number of status evolutions from high status to low status to high status once more. As a young Albert, Jamieson's physicality was overt and playful, and his voice enthusiastic and driven. As the character ages, Jamieson's physicality dropped in energy and his voice became more mature to convey Albert's exposure to the world, and dropped in tone to show age. As Albert becomes even more downtrodden, Jamieson illustrates this through his physicality of dropping in on himself until all that remains is a pile of clothes. In this way, Trevor Jamieson effectively utilised expressive skills to demonstrate the playscript and the many characters he portrays.*

#### Question 4

##### Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	6	22	30	37	2.9

##### Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	2	2	4	9	16	19	20	14	14	5.3

##### Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	6	18	23	23	14	9	3.3

Question 4 was based on Unit 3, Outcomes 1 and 2, and required students to draw on their knowledge of and skills on how to apply stagecraft to interpret a playscript and analyse the application of stagecraft. Students were required to draw on two or more of the stimulus materials, as well as the contextual background provided in the examination booklet when responding to the question. The selected playscript was *The Birds* by Aristophanes. Students were not required to have prior knowledge of the playscript, its contextual background or the stimulus material provided. They were able to change the original time and setting of the play to another appropriate context. Students could use illustrations to support their answers.

Students were required to select one of the stagecraft areas listed from acting, direction, stage management, dramaturgy, set, properties, costume, make-up, sound, lighting, multimedia and promotion (including publicity), to complete all parts of the question. In Question 4a., Production Planning, students needed to annotate an excerpt of script from the play, making reference to the verbal and nonverbal language implied in the excerpt. In Question 4b., Production Development, they needed to describe how their work in the chosen area of stagecraft would be influenced by two or more of the stimulus materials provided. In Question 4c., Production Season, students needed to discuss how their application of stagecraft would convey the intended meaning of the play to the audience.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an excellent understanding and application of the chosen area of stagecraft
- an insightful understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen area of stagecraft in relation to the question and how it could be applied

- an excellent understanding of the stages of production
- a relevant and perceptive demonstration of the relationship and influences between the context of the play and the stimulus material, and the way in which this informed the selected area of stagecraft
- highly pertinent examples and insightful annotations
- an appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

A satisfactory (mid-level) response was characterised by:

- an average level of understanding and application of the chosen area of stagecraft
- an average level of understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen area of stagecraft in relation to the question and how it could be applied in the context provided
- some understanding of the stages of production
- a demonstration of the relationship and influences between the contextual background of the play and the stimulus material, and the way in which this informed the selected area of stagecraft
- appropriate use of examples and annotations
- use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a poor understanding and application of the chosen area of stagecraft
- little or no understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen area of stagecraft
- little or no understanding of the relationship between the play and/or stimulus material and/or context
- little or no understanding of the stages of production
- limited or no examples, or annotations
- little or no use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

The following are examples of high-level responses.

**Question 4a.**

*Area of stagecraft: lighting*

<i>Line(s) from the excerpt</i>	<i>Annotation provided by the student</i>
<i>Lines 1–5</i>	<i>Naturalistic lighting as the setting is outside</i>
<i>Lines 1–5</i>	<i>Gobo of clouds/other effect to establish setting?</i>
<i>Lines 12–19</i>	<i>As the chorus sings, lights perhaps focus on them during the song to highlight its importance</i>
<i>Lines 20–23</i>	<i>Coloured gobo – non-naturalism of singing</i>
<i>Line 24</i>	<i>Darker stage spot on these two characters during this secretive discussion</i>
<i>Lines 28–30</i>	<i>The private conversation could maybe not be heard by the chorus of birds and so warrants some separation done by the lighting</i>

**Question 4b.**

*During this interpretation of 'The Birds' I would use lighting to convey the difference between the two worlds of the play: the dark, corrupt original world which is escaped from and the new city of the Birds which is created. During the Production Development stage as lighting is being discussed and plotted and ideas to be used in this production finalised I would design a lighting plot which allows for darker, shadowy lighting during scenes in the original world. Drawing inspiration from Stimulus 1 (the Leunig picture) where shadows, darkness and a general atmosphere of foreboding hangs over everything, I would aim to light the performance area dimly and maybe also use gobos to create swirling shadowy effects to convey the corrupt danger that exists in this world. During scenes in the new bird city I would light the performance area with bright washes and also use coloured gels to create the effect of brightness, sunshine and happiness as is shown in the left side of Stimulus 2 (Kenny Scharf image) and implied in the idea of the Bird City being above and more accomplished than the corrupt world below.*

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## Question 4c.

*The intended meaning of this play, that creating a new utopian society can be beneficial to all and lead to power, could be communicated to the audience during the production season through the lighting concepts mentioned in Question 4b which include using lighting effects to differentiate between the two societies. Thus the Bird City would be portrayed as the utopian city through bright, colourful lighting effects during the production season and the old world would be seen as dark, harsh and dangerous because of the shadows and dim lighting employed. Another intended meaning of the play which pertains to the gaining of power through manipulation could be conveyed to the audience through lighting by using red gels to cast a sinister red glow over characters such as HOPE who are manipulative, thus giving the audience an insight into the characters and add to the understanding of this intended meaning (that one manipulative character can have great effect on a place or story). The lighting rig for this show could not be too extensive because of the studio performance space but I believe that the effects can be achieved through clever rigging.*