

O Level English Literature 2010 Unit 2: Drama

Recommended Prior Knowledge

Students should be aware from the start that drama is a different genre from the others they are studying, in that it is incomplete until it is performed and watched or listened to. Actors, directors and technicians have to interpret it and they can (and do) make varying contributions towards the interpretation. In an ideal world students will be able to see a performance of the set play *on the stage*, but for many students that may not be possible. DVDs, Videos or films make good alternatives, although the differences between these and stage performances should be explained and discussed. Audio interpretations can also be useful. The advantage of recordings is that more than one can be offered to demonstrate that there can be different interpretations, which make different impacts. It might also useful for students to attempt some performance for themselves, not necessarily of the whole play, but of at least one or two selected scenes.

Dramatic devices, which are not detailed in the text, such as silences, stage business, lighting effects, stage design might also be considered. However, this is *not* an examination in Drama or Theatre Studies; teachers should remember that the *literary text* still remains the focus of interest. Some dramatists, for example George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams give very detailed stage directions which are an integral part of the play and make clear the author's intentions. They can be a guide to the interpretation of characters or the creation of a mood. Students should give them full consideration, whilst not forgetting that an audience, while watching the play, will be unaware of them.

Learning outcomes	Suggested Teaching activities	Learning resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) to enjoy the experience of watching or participating in or listening to a play (ii) to experience the build up of interest and tension in a play (iii) to respond to the different atmospheres of scenes and how the words of the dialogue help to create these (iv) to relate to the different characters in the play, to respond to their troubles and joys with sympathy and/or other emotions (v) to be able to perceive 	<p>(xv) The first reading. Because plays are meant to be experienced within a time limit, so that the excitement of dramatic structures are not diluted, it would be worthwhile to arrange, if it is possible, a preliminary rapid showing of the play on video or a playing on tape. The teacher might prefer to organise a class reading. Whatever the circumstances, s/he might wish to intersperse the first reading with some activities which do not involve a knowledge of the whole play. Some suggestions are included in Appendix 4 for <i>Macbeth</i> and <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>.</p> <p>(xvi) Study after a preliminary reading/viewing Study should include close reading of selected scenes or parts of scenes. These should be experienced and analysed as Drama.</p>	<p>Set Text (Drama)</p> <p>One DVD, video or CD of a performance of the play</p> <p>Elementary props/ costumes to aid a classroom performance</p> <p>Appendix 4</p> <p>Set text</p>

Learning outcomes

- developments in characters throughout the play
- (vi) to explore the interactions between characters
 - (vii) to understand the rôles of characters in relation to the themes and issues of the play and in contrasting with other characters
 - (viii) to respond to the tone of different characters in the dialogue
 - (ix) to explore the dilemmas and problems experienced by the characters within the play
 - (x) to understand the thematic content of the play
 - (xi) to be aware of the writer at work – how effects are achieved through literary means, including:
 - the structure of the play
 - the juxtaposition of contrasting scenes
 - the use of different characters
 - recurrent imagery
 - the variation of style/diction to differentiate character
 - dramatic irony
 - verse/prose forms
 - use of stage directions
 - (xii) to be aware of the cultural and historical contexts of the work
 - (xiii) where helpful, to appreciate the relevance of literary antecedents to the work (e.g. in understanding the Chorus role

Suggested Teaching activities

Students should also be involved in activities which empower them to range more widely over the text. They should be encouraged to find and note for future reference episodes or quotations to support a point of view or illustrate their ideas. Finally, activities like exploring how characters who are silent are thinking at various stages of the drama, and mock interviews or hot-seating will encourage empathic responses to the text. Another useful activity might be for students to improvise selected scenes in a modern English idiom, for example, a father trying to impose his will on his daughter with regard to her marriage – as Lord Capulet did with Juliet.

Examples of such activities are to be found in Appendix 5.

(xvii) Tackling passage-based questions.

By demonstrating their response to a scene or section of a scene in their set play, candidates will be demonstrating their ability to appreciate how the words on the page come to life as drama. They should, therefore, when answering such questions, try to imagine the scene and hear the words spoken out aloud. The scenes selected will be central to the play and usually distinctive. There are plenty of examples from past papers to base work on in this part of the unit. In discussion and later in writing, students should be encouraged to:

- a. be aware of the context of the scene within the play as a whole. In drama, there are often contrasts of mood between scenes: a humorous scene, for example, following a particularly tense one, or a slow-moving poignant scene preceding one with rapid, violent action. Such structures should be kept in the student's mind always, even though there may not be occasion to demonstrate this knowledge explicitly.
- b. To be aware of the interaction between characters. This will normally be demonstrated through the dialogue, but also through specific actions, which often take on a singular intensity, sometimes of a symbolic nature and sometimes,

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Appendix 5

Selection of Videos/CDs/DVDs

Set text
Past papers

Learning outcomes

in *Henry V* or *View from the Bridge*)
(xiv) to experience the literary text **as a whole**, with each of the above relating to other items on the list to be able to communicate this experience in different types of essay.

Suggested Teaching activities

- through silences. Students should be able to discuss how the characters interact and also show how the dramatist has explored the interaction through the dialogue and, where applicable, the stage directions.
- c. to respond to the tone of what is being said – aware that, if you only have the words on the page, some interpretation of tone is necessary. Candidates should be able to respond to an increase of intensity in the writing, to the creation of dramatic climaxes, to the quiet pathos of some scenes etc. Again a response to how the dramatist achieves her/his effects is to be expected for higher grades.
 - d. to respond to the use of particular words and images. Part of the force of Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, for example, is created by the use of imagery related to religion and purity. Students should, in their first written work, be given a number of prompt questions or headings which will ensure that they are covering important lines of enquiry. Examples of these are contained in Appendix 5. As they proceed through the course, the number of prompts should be reduced until they are able to approach with confidence the single question that is normal in the examination. At this point, students may wish to develop their own sub-headings to replace the prompts which the teacher provided earlier in the course. In passage-based questions they will have to consider, with guidance, which parts of the passage are relevant to the task set and which are peripheral; they should also be aware of the effect of the passage as a whole. Students should be encouraged to establish their own effective method of planning such answers. In the examination they will often not be specifically asked to refer outside the passage, but the best answers will be informed by knowledge of surrounding events and issues.

(xviii) Tackling general questions

By doing some of the activities on the lines of those in Appendices 4 and 5, students should build up a first-hand knowledge of the text. Any notes which will act as an aide-memoire will be useful. These might include key quotations, a scene-by-scene summary of

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the play, lists of appearances of the main characters with accompanying character development notes. All of these are useful only insofar as they give students a handy tool of reference for finding relevant material when they come to put an argument together; they are not an end in themselves.

Most questions will be phrased in such a way as to encourage candidates to express their individual responses to an aspect of the text. If one looks at questions on character, therefore, they will generally ask candidates to make some sort of judgement about them: perhaps, giving what seem to be opposite verdicts on a character and asking candidates to give their view, or asking whether it is possible to feel sympathy or admiration for a specified character, or to judge what their role in the play is. It will *not* be helpful, therefore, for students to learn by heart a standard character study and feel that that is adequate. More useful would be for them to be constantly encouraged to take part in such debates and have enough knowledge of the text to support their views. Likewise, there might be questions on particularly dramatic moments in the play. Again, the question will be trying to elicit a response from the candidate and will most probably ask what makes an incident memorable or amusing or particularly tense *for them*.

As with the passage-based questions, preparation from the activities suggested in Appendix 5, should introduce candidates by a number of prompt questions or headings to the areas of enquiry appropriate to an adequate answer to the question concerned. They should be encouraged to identify relevant scenes of the play and to re-read them as a matter of course.

At this stage also, they should learn how to construct answers and to argue a case. They should see the relevance of their Language training in construction of paragraphs and be shown how to make a point and then develop/qualify it with reference to the text, which might come in the form of a *brief* quotation or in a *brief* paraphrase of an incident/action. They should try to develop a style in which quotation is integrated into the flow of the argument.

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They should learn the difference between an essay which just lists unconnected points and one that develops a coherent argument.

As part of this general development also, they should learn how to show evidence of (xiv) of the Learning Outcomes. This will normally come through closer analysis of quotations; while such an analysis is *essential* to an adequate treatment of passage-based questions, it is also entirely appropriate in general answers also.

(xix) Tackling empathic questions.

Many candidates find this type of question a useful vehicle for showing their knowledge and understanding of aspects of the text. Appendices 4 and 5 offer some ideas of how students might be encouraged into 'getting into the skin' of a character. Such activities will often be lively and students should find them a refreshing change, but the outcome should be entirely serious. False notes should be identified, again with close reference to the text. If a character could not possibly have used a word or made a comment, the misjudgement should be corrected if possible without affecting adversely the flow of the student's imaginative thought. Central to these questions is the identification of a precise moment at which a character might be experiencing particular feelings. Though imaginative engagement is required, it must be rooted directly in the text and not merely be general speculation. In the same way, it is not helpful to set empathic tasks on characters who are mentioned but who do not actually appear in the play (for example Hally's parents in *Master Harold...and the Boys* because students will have no evidence on which to construct a 'voice'. The movement into writing will have to be accompanied by work on trying to adopt the 'voice' of the character. It is not expected that blank verse or Elizabethan English would have to be used for a character in a Shakespeare play, but the language adopted should reflect the character whose "voice" is being used. Likewise, the emotions which might be being portrayed should be expressed through the voice as well as the content. It is through this that learning Outcome (xiv) might be demonstrated quite sharply in answers to this type of question.

Grade Descriptors,

Empathic Tasks booklet
Empathic task Grade Descriptors

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Progression to tackling full scale essay questions will generally be through increasing the scale of what is required. So early attempts might be very restricted - a brief diary entry for example - and one could work up to more detailed answers with discussions about the sort of areas which might be covered in a full answer.

Before the examination, a final complete showing of the play would be appropriate so that students can experience it as a whole again.