



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCSE

In Drama (1DR0)

Paper 3A Theatre Makers in Practice (1DR0 3A)

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Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Drama (1DR0/3A)

Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice

There are two discrete papers: 1DR03A (pre-1954 texts) and 1DR03B (post 2000 texts). Centres are required to submit the correct entry code for Component 3 to ensure that they receive the correct Question Paper. There is also a requirement to indicate text choice on the GCSE Drama home page. This will be required in 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the qualification.

Section A: Bringing Texts to Life

Candidates responded to all six texts available on the 1DR03A option paper, with *An Inspector Calls* and *The Crucible* the most popular options, and an increase in the number of candidates opting for *A Doll's House* and *Antigone*.

Most candidates answered on the text for which they had evidently been prepared for the examination, although there were a minority of candidates who responded to more than one text or who made an attempt at responding to a text with which they were clearly unfamiliar.

Q(a) - sub-questions (i) and (ii)

Q(a)(i) and (ii) are the lowest demand questions, requiring concise ideas for performance and short, linked reasons for each idea. The maximum mark for each question is 4 and 6 marks respectively; in each case, half the marks are awarded for relevant ideas/suggestions for performance skills offered and half the marks are awarded for linked reasons for these 'ways' of using performance skills.

In the 2506 paper, for Q(a)(i) across all texts/questions, candidates were asked to write as a performer playing a named character from the extract, offering two uses of non-verbal skills for that character. The question also requires reasons to be offered, to support the candidate's knowledge and understanding of playing this character, at this moment in the text.

Most candidates were able to fully meet the requirements of this question with the most common reason for candidates not achieving full marks being linked to misunderstanding the question. This tended to be where candidates had offered a different skill, or character, than that named in the question. There were very few incomplete responses to this question, or responses where candidates had offered no reasons for their choices or where reasons offered were inappropriate to the character.

Q(a)(ii) offered a short statement about a second named character and asked candidates to offer three suggestions about playing this character. Suggestions offered included a wide range of skills including non-verbal and use of

space/proxemics, although the most popular choices were a mixture of physical and vocal examples. Some candidates offered more than one example of vocal and/or physical skills and this is permitted, as long as the examples focus on a different aspect of how the performance skill was used.

As with (a)(i), many candidates were able to fully meet the requirements of this question with the most common reason for candidates not achieving full marks being linked to misunderstanding the question and drifting away from the character statement or failing to link clearly to the extract provided. There were also some incomplete responses to this question and in a minority of cases, reasons were repeated almost identically or were not offered.

In some cases, candidates offered more content than required to achieve full marks for these questions; the time spent on this may have negatively impacted on the time available for candidates to complete the medium and higher demand questions fully.

Centres are strongly reminded to support candidates in practising making these responses short, sharp, and clearly relevant to the question. The space provided on the allocated lines in the answer booklet is more than adequate to allow candidates to achieve the full 4 and 6 marks for these questions.

The majority of candidates had been well prepared for these sub-questions and were able to access all marks available.

Q(b) - sub-questions (i) and (ii)

The most challenging aspect of **Q(b) (i)** remains the requirement within this question for candidates to **make reference to** the performance context: **the time when the play was created and performed**. Some candidates became confused about the difference between the time when the play was set and the time when the text was created, particularly where the text had been created in one time and set in another.

There were also candidates who repeated the information stated at the beginning of each extract rather than using the context within their response. However there was an increase in candidates being able to refer to the correct time period with some effectiveness. The most successful candidates were able to embed their contextual knowledge, using it as a support to their design ideas in a variety of ways.

The FAQ document and the set text guides (both available on the Pearson GCSE Drama website) offer further guidance regarding the performance context to each text. Specific feedback and advice regarding the context requirements **for each set text** can be found below.

In the 2025 examination, candidates were offered the choice of three production elements: **costume, props/ stage-furniture or sound**.

In general, while several ideas were offered in almost all responses, candidates tended to take a design rather than a directorial approach. The most successful candidates for this question, referred to a chosen performance style and were able to link this concisely to the contextual information. For example, some candidates noted that the original performance of *The Crucible* was historically accurate to 17C Salem and offered justification as to how their naturalistic production ideas would take this as a starting point. Others commented that Antigone's defiance of the state would have been all the more shocking for the original audience due to her status as a young woman, and outlined representational production ideas which would highlight this status.

Costume was a popular choice for this question. Many candidates had understood the principle of colour use within costume, and were able to discuss colour symbolism and characterisation. Responses offered a range of ideas for style, colour and fabric although not all of these aspects of costume were covered by all responses. There was a growing trend to offer choices that would work better on screen, in close up, rather than on stage, for example, details of jewellery and hair ornaments that would not be visible for the majority of the audience in most performance spaces. There were also responses which offered choices that showed a lack of understanding of the text, for example, overcoats and hats worn by characters who had spent the entire play inside.

High-achieving responses offered ideas for costume which were clearly supported by the candidates' ideas for the performance of the extract, for example in terms of performance style and setting. These covered the specifics of fabric, costume and/or style and offered some understanding of how effects might be achieved, for example, stains or tears needed to show a specific character journey and when costume items might be changed. Examples were theatrical rather than cinematic, and made helpful reference to the audience and the appropriate performance context, embedding this into their own ideas for costume. There was also a clear grasp of the difference between costume selected by a designer to create meaning and impact, and clothes or outfits that could have been chosen by the character or performer.

Props/stage furniture was a popular choice, although this often-yielded descriptive answers. An overlap of content between set and stage furniture was noted, with some responses considering the set as a whole. Examiners marked these responses positively, rewarding all relevant ideas and disregarding ideas which drifted too far from the specified element, for example, projection ideas. This question is an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate creativity and originality of design; often the higher achieving candidates stayed closely in line with the original staging of the piece, using their understanding of the playwright's intention to influence their design ideas for props/stage furniture and set.

Props were less successful as a design element with candidates sometimes mentioning how the props might be used by the actors on stage. Technical detail was often absent from these responses, with at times, a sense of the cinematic in place as props were described that the audience would have struggled to see from the auditorium. There were also some ideas offered which were cinematic in other ways, for examples slowly disintegrating flower arrangements with no consideration of how this effect would be achieved as part of a live performance.

Many candidates were able to suggest helpful pieces of stage furniture, with consideration of positioning, size/ scale, style, colour and material as well as clear links to the way these items of stage furniture would be used by the actors within the extract. Examiners noted a growing trend where candidates were able to offer appropriate materials to create the setting, and time period; the highest achieving candidates were able to consider how to create the impression of these materials while considering practicality of use, for example light, modern fabrics to create the impression of velvet and silk, hard board constructed and stained to look like an oak table, and trucked in for ease of transition.

Higher-achieving responses on props/stage furniture offered creative and well-considered ideas which showed a clear grasp of using these production elements in performance. Technical language was used effectively and there was a sense of detail to the ideas, which showed a real grasp of the role of the designer, and a clear consideration of the audience.

Sound was a less popular option, and there were a number of lower-achieving responses to this question which lacked a clear grasp of how sound might be used to enhance the extract. In these cases, candidates offered inappropriate or extremely general examples which lacked knowledge and understanding of the extract. There were also candidates who offered vocal examples rather than focussing on sound as a production element.

There were some effective and clear examples offered that supported the director's vision of realising the extract through sound as a production element. These responses made use of existing stage directions/sound cues and used additional sound cues appropriately and creatively to support the director's vision. There were ideas for diegetic and non-diegetic sound FX and a creative approach to sound was seen. There was a clear sense of how the sound would be used with technical vocabulary, including phrases such as surround sound, recorded sound FX, live sound FX and indications of volume/recording levels as well as helpful reference to the audience.

For **Q(b)(ii)** while the majority of candidates were able to address the specifics of the extract effectively and show an understanding of performance skills. some lacked a clear focus on the choices candidates might make as a director, either drifting into writing as a performer or into writing about the character's choices in terms of voice, physicality and or stage space, rather than as a performer being

directed. There were also responses where candidates had made the choice to write about only one of the three bullet points, limiting the marks available.

While very few candidates were able to comment discretely on the playwright's stage directions within the extract, an increased number of the cohort were able to consider using their own specific directions to the performer, linking these closely to the text, and examiners rewarded this as part of the demands of the third bullet point, particularly where the extract was 'light' on accessible stage directions.

The vast majority of responses demonstrated a solid and well-prepared grasp of how the chosen character might be realised in performance, considering all three bullet-points and using the viewpoint of the director. Higher-achieving responses also demonstrated the candidates' knowledge and understanding of the way this character, might be realised at this moment in the play compared with other key moments, showing a director's view of approaching the character and their journey throughout the play.

In 2025, **Q(c)** offered candidates the choice of three design elements: costume, props/stage furniture and staging. Costume and props/stage furniture were both popular choices while staging was selected by a significant minority of candidates.

The majority of candidates did manage to answer this question, often with some success. However, in some cases, there was a lack of understanding of the role of a designer and/ or of the application of technical vocabulary. In these cases, candidates did not provide sufficient detail of the 'how' of their design ideas to merit marks in the upper levels. In some cases candidates approached this question in exactly the same way as in b(i) with a directorial approach supported by contextual ideas.

Some candidates offered ideas which linked with the whole play rather than the examination extract, but most tended to understand the content and potential of the specified scene. There were also some very short responses and some candidates were unable to complete this question or chose to move on to Section B due to timing issues.

Lighting was a popular choice for this question. Many candidates had understood the principle of colour use within lighting design. Similarly, there were many examples which showed understanding of gobos, blackouts and spotlights. Some candidates clearly placed themselves in the role of the director and were able to reference the chosen performance style.

Conversely, in some responses, the ideas themselves tended to lack sufficiently considered connection to the extract; suggestions were often explained very briefly. In some responses, too many lighting states were offered and/or lighting ideas that were confusing and disjointed; combinations were offered that were more likely to undermine than enhance the impact of the extract.

Some ideas showed misunderstandings about lighting vocabulary, for example, references to white/black gels and dark/black lighting. The majority of candidates considered health and safety when offering ideas to create candlelight and firelight on stage although there were a minority who had not considered the implications of using naked flames on stage.

Higher-achieving responses offered ideas for lighting which supported the realisation of the extract, making use of existing information about setting and stage directions, and/or using additional lighting effects appropriately and creatively. There was a clear sense of how the lighting states would be used, often with a 'less is more' approach to the lighting and with reference to the director's intentions for the extract and a clear sense of using lighting to create of mood and atmosphere, and/ or to suggest location and time.

Set was also a popular choice. An overlap of content between set and stage furniture was noted, with some set design questions focussing on the use of props/stage furniture, rather than placing these items within the set as a whole. Examiners marked these responses positively, rewarding all relevant ideas and disregarding ideas which drifted too far from the specified element, for example, suggestions for personal props.

Higher-achieving responses on set offered creative and well-considered ideas which showed a clear grasp of using set to realise the performance. Technical language was used effectively with references made to terms such as flats, projection, trucks etc and there was a sense of detail to these ideas, which showed both a grasp of the role of the director, and a clear consideration of the audience. Where changes were part of the set, for example, a vase of fresh flowers appearing to die on stage or a portrait appearing to deteriorate, ideas were suggested as to how and when these items could be swapped for the deteriorated version(s).

Staging was the most problematic choice for candidates, many of whom moved away from staging as a design element and drifted instead into writing about staging in terms of proxemics and blocking, offering ideas for the positioning of performers. This type of response struggled to meet the demands of the question as candidates were often writing as a director with a performance focus rather than as a director of staging as a production element.

Higher-achieving responses placed the extract on a specific stage or type of stage, made use of staging vocabulary such as exit/entrance, centre-stage, sightlines etc and referred to the way the stage allowed impact to be created for the audience in this specific extract. These were theatrical choices and made helpful reference to the appropriate performance context.

Please refer to the FAQ document (available on the website) for more details about staging as a design element.

Question 1 (1DR0/3A) A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen (adapted by Tanika Gupta)

In 2506, the examination extract was taken from Act 1, Scene 2 and the named roles were Niru (a)(i), Mrs Lahiri (a)(ii) and Tom (b)(ii). Niru, Mrs Lahiri, Tom and Dr Rank are all on stage at some point during the extract.

Candidates demonstrated understanding of plot, characters, action and setting seen through both acting/ direction and production/ design questions. A number of candidates were able to link their ideas for Q (b)(i) to 1879 when the original version of the play was created by Henrik Ibsen and performed in Copenhagen. What some candidates did instead was to write about the contextual background to Tanika Gupta's adaptation only or to repeated the information already given in the Questions and Extracts booklet. Candidates might choose to focus on the socio-political context in terms of the role of women in society at that time, or theatrical details of the original performance, such as the influence of naturalism on the first production.

Question 2 (1DR0/3A) An Inspector Calls by J.B Priestley

In 2506, the examination extract was taken from Act 3 and the named roles were Mrs Sybil Birling (a)(i), the Inspector (a)(ii) and Eric (b)(ii). Mr and Mrs Birling, Eric, Sheila and the Inspector are all on stage throughout the extract.

An Inspector Calls was, once again, one of the most popular texts this series.

The vast majority of candidates chose to set their productions in similar time periods to the original performance and many referenced the touring production, based on Stephen Daldry's concept and/ or the BBC filmed version featuring David Thewlis. This was often supportive of production and design ideas in particular. Many candidates were able to reference the time when the play was created and first performed: 1945/6. Others wrote purely about the time when the play was set (1912 Edwardian England). To meet the context demands fully, candidates might choose to focus on the socio-political context in terms of the class divide in society at that time, or theatrical details of the original performance, such as the influence of naturalism on the first production. There were candidates who offered costume ideas for Gerald, who was not on stage during the extract. This limited marks that could be allocated and suggested a pre-prepared answer rather than a skills-based response to the extract.

Question 3 (1DR0/3A) Antigone by Sophocles (adapted by Roy Williams)

In 2506, the examination extract was taken from Scenes 7 and 8 and the named roles were Soldier One(a)(i), Tig (a)(ii) and Eammon (b)(ii). Soldiers One and Two, Tig and Eammon are all on stage at some point during the extract.

Candidates demonstrated understanding of plot, characters, action and setting, seen through both acting/ direction and production/ design questions. To meet

the requirements of question b (i), candidates must refer to the context when the text was performed and created e.g. Sophocles original created and performed in 441BC. Candidates might choose to focus on the socio-political context in terms of the role of women in society at that time, or theatrical details of the original performance, such as the conventions of Greek theatre. Candidates must avoid writing purely about the contextual background to Roy Williams's adaptation without referring to the original performance context. Centres are advised to spend some time embedding this contextual knowledge in the teaching of this text. Some of the most successful responses to b(i) and C considered the transition between scenes 7 and 8 appropriately, for example in terms of lighting states.

Question 4 (1DR0/3A) Government Inspector by Nikolai Gogol (adapted by David Harrower)

In 2506, the examination extract was taken from Act 4, Scenes 2 and 3 and the named roles were Lyapkin-Tyapkin (a)(i), the Postmaster (a)(ii) and Khlestakov (b)(ii). These characters are all on stage at some point during the extract.

Government Inspector was one of the less popular texts this series, although responses seen often demonstrated creative approaches to realising the extract on stage. Some candidates suggested production and design ideas which made use of comedic, heightened and/or minimalist elements in their productions, while others suggested the use of more traditional performance styles. Ideas were often imaginative, showing a clear grasp of the intended setting and this supported responses. Most contextual ideas offered were supportive of directorial ideas, referencing the correct time period, although not all candidates remembered to respond to the fourth bullet point in the assessment criteria. Some of the most successful responses to b(i) and C considered the transition between scenes 2 and 3 appropriately, for example in terms of lighting states.

Question 5 (1DR0/3A) The Crucible by Arthur Miller

In 2506, the examination extract was taken from Act Four and the named roles were Herrick (a)(i), Parris (a)(ii) and Danforth (b)(ii). Herrick, Parris, Danforth, Hathorne and Cheever are all on stage at some point during the extract.

The Crucible was one of the more popular texts this series and the vast majority of candidates chose to set their productions in similar time periods to the original performance, keeping consistent with Miller's intentions. Responses to b(i) were fairly balanced between those candidates who were able to link their ideas to the performance context to the play, in particular the idea of McCarthyism in 1950s America, and those who were not. Design and production ideas reflected the general style of Puritanism, although a number of confusions were noted. This was supportive of production and design ideas in particular. There were candidates who offered costume ideas for characters not on stage during the extract, for example John Proctor. This limited marks that could be allocated and

suggested a pre-prepared answer rather than a skills-based response to the extract.

Question 6 (1DR0/3A) Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare

In 2506, the examination extract was taken from Act 3, Scene 4 and the named roles were Sir Toby (a)(i), Fabian (a)(ii) and Maria (b)(ii). Sir Toby, Fabian, Maria, Malvolio and Sir Andrew are all on stage at some point during the extract. Candidates who responded to Twelfth Night offered a number of interesting responses. Performance context in responses to (b)(i) tended to be helpful, although not all candidates remembered to reference this, particularly where they had set their production in a more contemporary time and place. Some candidates suggested production and design ideas that created setting and style effectively and many candidates set their performances in new times and places, while others suggested the use of more traditional approaches. Ideas often showed understanding of the text which supported candidate responses.

Section B: Live Theatre Evaluation

Section B has only one question to which all candidates should respond: Question 7, which is broken down into two parts, a) and b). The questions are identical on both the 1DR0/3A and 1DR0/3B option papers.

For this section, candidates evaluate a production that they have seen 'live' as a member of the live audience. Centres must contact Drama Assessment if there are extreme extenuating circumstances affecting access to live theatre.

Centres have a free choice of production for this section of the examination, and as such candidates responded to an enormous range of productions. In 2025, candidates wrote about live productions which included *Wonderboy*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *The Woman in Black*, *Blood Brothers*, *Life of Pi*, *Dear England*, Frantic Assembly's *Metamorphosis*, several productions of *Macbeth* and *The Play that Goes Wrong*.

A small number of candidates wrote about touring productions, peer performances and musicals. The specification does permit musicals to be seen to fulfil the requirement of live performance, however, care must be taken to answer questions appropriately for a Drama qualification and musicals can often be self-limiting. However in 2025, candidates wrote successfully about musicals, including (but not limited to): *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Matilda*, *Chicago* and *Heathers*. A minority of candidates wrote about a performance of a Section A set text which is not permitted in Section B, and thus gained no marks for their response. Similarly, there were a minority of responses based on 'sung through' performances; these are also not permitted and were given zero marks. Examples of 'sung through' musicals seen in the 2506 series, include (but are not limited to): *Hamilton*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Evita*, *Come From Away* and *Les Misérables*.

Where candidates had seen devised GCSE pieces with limited set, responses struggled to offer relevant examples. However, the range of styles and performances highlighted the commitment of teachers in enabling candidates to experience a wide range of high-quality theatre by the most appropriate method for the centre.

There were some examples of pre-prepared answers seen through very similar responses which could have been due to teachers having too much input in the creation of live performance notes. In these cases, candidates often struggled to provide appropriate evaluative comments as their focus was on repeating content from their notes. Centres are reminded that notes should act as an 'aide memoire', and that candidates should use these to support their analytical and evaluative skills. In addition, notes must be the candidate's own work, as per the teacher/ candidate authentication.

Overall, it was clear that this was the section of the examination where candidate responses appeared most rushed and where there seemed to be the highest proportion of unanswered or very brief questions. However, most candidates were able to respond with understanding and enthusiasm to the production about which they chose to write. There was also a clear focus on the question and the production from many candidates, and the level of analysis and evaluation was encouraging, with many secure and effective responses offered, even where candidates had struggled with timings across the whole paper.

Question 7 - sub-question (a)

This question is of low to medium demand with a maximum mark of 6 and is assessed using a level-based mark scheme, made up of three levels. Q7(a) asks the candidate to respond analytically as a member of the audience to one key moment within the production seen.

In 2025, the focus of the question was on the use of costume to create impact at **one** key moment within the performance. A moment was deemed to be a continuous section of stage time and candidates wrote about moments of varying length from those that lasted a few beats to moments that encompassed an entire scene.

This question was accessible to the majority of candidates, with many able to provide some analytical detail of how costume was used to create impact in one moment. Responses showed a wide range of observational detail and ability to analyse, but shorter responses could score just as highly as more extended ones if the detail was precise. Most candidates did attempt to analyse rather than just describe, and the most successful were those able to clearly analyse examples of how costume design created impact within a clearly defined moment. Examples included the costume design for one or more performers, as well as for an ensemble where appropriate. These extended to consider colour, style, fabric, contrast, hair, make-up and/ or personal props or accessories.

There were responses which offered examples from two or more key moments or from the production in general rather than staying focused on moment. This compromised the level of analytical detail offered. In these responses as marks could only be awarded for examples relating to **one** of the offered moments. Higher-achieving responses to this question were clear, focused and often very succinct, with a wide range of detailed analysis offered. These responses allowed examiners to clearly appreciate the candidate's understanding of costume design and the impact they judged this had made within the moment selected.

Question 7 - sub-question (b)

This question is of medium demand, providing a slight step up from 7(a) for the final question on the paper. The maximum mark for this question is 9 and the question is assessed using a level-based mark scheme, made up of three levels. Q 7 (b) asks the candidate to respond analytically and evaluatively as a member of the audience. This was the question most likely to be incomplete or unanswered, suggesting that timing needs careful consideration when approaching the paper.

In 2025, the focus of the question was on how the use of space by performers engaged the audience. This question was accessible to the majority of candidates and was often answered with confidence. Candidates tended to offer a series of specific examples from within the performance, although there were those who focussed on a specific section of the performance.

Some candidates responded to the question without consideration of the way space had been used by performers, focusing instead on set, stage furniture and staging, which made it difficult for examiners to award marks. Most candidates, however, were able to provide some analytical detail of how performers had made use of the space and offered some evaluation, even where responses drifted into theatrical staging responses, or were very brief with timing apparently a challenge.

Higher-achieving responses to this question were coherent, concise and showed a strong understanding of physical performance skills, with a wide range of detailed analysis and linked evaluation offered. In these cases, candidates were able to refer to the way the space had been used creatively by the performers to engage the audience by supporting and enhancing the performance in subtle and/or powerful ways. These candidates also tended to place the audience at the heart of their response and demonstrated a clear sense of how performers use of space had brought the performance seen to life.

Summary

Overall, examiners reported that while achievement appeared mixed across a proportion of papers, the majority of candidates achieved at a comparable level

to 2024. Candidates appear to be more aware of and demonstrated a greater understanding of theatre maker roles, in comparison to earlier series’.

The most notable area for improvement is the differentiation of director (of production elements) in Q B (i) and designer in Q (c). For many candidates, responses could provide a clearer sense of the director or designer at work, showing an understanding of the differences between these two roles. In question C, a greater consideration of the mark allocation would have supported many candidates. At 14 marks, this question represents just under 25% of the 60 marks available on the paper. Responses which offered a range of detailed examples to support candidates’ understanding of working as a designer were the most successful in achieving marks in levels 3 and 4.

Based on their candidates' performance on the paper, centres are offered the following advice:

- select a set text which fully supports the widest range of candidates within the cohort and make use of the Edexcel Pearson set text guides: https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Drama/2016/teaching-and-learning-materials/GCSE_Set_Text_Guides_All_Texts.zip
- provide opportunities for practical exploration of the chosen set text, exploring a range of characters and scenes within the text and teaching the roles of theatre-makers from Section A: performers, directors and designers
- analyse the differences between the director’s and designer’s roles in terms of language, detail, practicality of ideas
- consider the demands of specific questions e.g. using the time when the text was created and performed for Q(b)(i) and the complete text for Q(b)(ii) to support the suggestions for working as a director
- offer opportunities to see as wide a range of theatre as is practicable
- support candidates in creating their own live performance notes, which focus clearly on the possible demands of the Section B questions
- develop a wide subject-specific vocabulary for candidates which can be used across all three components
- focus candidates on reading and responding to the key words in each question
- offer candidates access to past/specimen papers and allow them to become familiar with the format of the current question paper and answer booklet
- provide regular opportunities for candidates to practise writing under timed conditions, drawing their attention to the marks available for each question

