



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2024

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
in English Literature (WET02) Paper 2: Drama

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Introduction

The June 2024 series featured a similar size of cohort to the June 2023 series and all of the texts were answered on. The paper was very similar in performance to previous series. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination.

AO1:

In order to fulfil the criteria of the higher levels candidates must make sure they answer the question directly and from the very beginning of their response. As has been noted in previous reports there is still the tendency, by some candidates, to start with a pre-prepared introductory paragraph, one which often includes the date and historical detail about the play which is not relevant to the task. As highlighted in previous reports, candidates would be best advised to take the time to plan their responses, developing lines of argument which directly answer the question and engage with the critical viewpoint given.

AO2:

The most successful candidates stay close to the text and make sustained reference to it throughout their response. A focus on the characters as constructs is essential and an approach which can be encouraged with the foregrounding of the playwright in sentences such as 'Shakespeare uses' or 'Williams' choice to . . .' for example. Candidates are advised to consider a range of techniques, moving away from the word-level analysis sometimes seen in less successful responses. Consideration of these texts as examples of drama is essential and candidates should be encouraged to think about the way they playwrights construct and convey meaning to their audiences through the use of visual techniques, rather than just focusing on dialogue.

AO3:

In many of the responses seen in this series the consideration of contextual factors was a strength. Candidates should be wary, however, of allowing the discussion of context to dominate the answer and of turning the argument into a history essay rather than a literary one. As mentioned in the June 2023 report candidates need to consider the idea of 'illumination'; what ideas of the text does the consideration of context illuminate? How does context *add* to meaning?

AO5:

The use of criticism and of critical viewpoints/perspectives was perhaps the weakest area across the assessment objectives. A significant number of candidates did not engage with AO5 at all, except perhaps for a brief consideration of the view in the question. Candidates should be reminded that AO5 is required in both sections and that it can be accessed in a number of ways:

- engaging with the view in the question – including challenging this view
- engaging with literary criticism and using it to develop a line of argument
- considering the text from a literary perspective, e.g. post-colonial
- offering more than one interpretation of a given idea/line/image in the text

If a candidate does choose to use literary criticism they should be careful to actually do something with it, rather than place it at the end of an argument as was seen in a number of the responses this

series. Candidates should be steered towards the idea of 'digging deep' on the critical statement and using it to develop their argument. Some of the most successful responses embedded a key critical statement at the beginning of their answer (perhaps one which epitomised their argument) and then returned to it throughout the essay as they developed their line of argument.

SECTION A: Pre-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 1 and 2: THE ROVER

Most candidates responded to Question 1 which asked them to weigh the desire for money against the desire for love, although Q2, on Florinda was also handled competently by those who chose this. Most candidates demonstrated impressive knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a range of Behn's comic effects and how these contribute to her exploration of ideas. Many compared Angellica and Florinda in their love for impoverished men, gaining AO2 credit for commenting on structure. AO3 was strong throughout, particularly in terms of familial power structures at the time, and the conventions, or rather the dismantling of conventions during the time of Carnival.

QUESTIONS 3 and 4: SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

Question 3 was the more popular here, with the majority of candidates opting to write about the play as dramatising a 'world of emotional extremes'. As in previous series there was a tendency for candidates to write about the characters as real people, with less focus on Goldsmith's choices and conscious shaping of the plot and characters.

QUESTIONS 4 and 6: TWELFTH NIGHT

As in previous series Twelfth Night proved to be a popular text with candidates, inspiring engagement and demonstrating a real enjoyment of the play's ideas. The complexities of the plot were firmly grasped and elements of stagecraft were often intelligently analysed.

With reference to Q5, many candidates took the cue to discuss Antonio, and often to very good effect. Many pointed out that, perhaps, Antonio's love is the only one in the play untainted by delusion, lack of self-control or egoism. AO3 was often addressed in terms of contemporary attitudes to homosexuality and cross-references to the Sonnets were made. Olivia also drew much attention for the speed with which her mourning vow is overridden by desire.

Q6 was equally well-handled with the discussion of Orsino being a main focus for many candidates, almost all noting that his exaggeration springs from luxurious and Petrarchan self-dramatisation.

QUESTIONS 7 and 8: DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Q7, which asked candidates to focus on the dramatic function of magic in the play, was by far the more popular question. There were broadly two approaches: magic as a recurrent marker in Faustus' journey through degradation to doom, and those who focused on the use of comic characters to throw light on the delusion and triviality of his obsession. Some candidates managed to cover both of these ideas.

AO2 was addressed confidently in terms of structure and in the consideration of Marlowe's language choices. AO3 was similarly effective: contemporary religious debate, the morality play tradition, biographical factors, the tension between mediaeval and Renaissance were all handled competently for the most part.

The few candidates who wrote on soliloquies when answering Q8 tended to lack range and fell back on a more descriptive approach rather than the more shaped answers Q7 elicited.

QUESTIONS 9 and 10: OTHELLO

As in previous years Othello proved to be the most popular Section A text, with Q9's focus on Desdemona and Othello's relationship providing fruitful scope for discussion. Most candidates wanted to see the relationship as doomed from the start, citing Brabantio's final couplet as foreshadowing the end. Others preferred to focus on Iago and his role in the relationship's downfall. A number of candidates made interesting points about the structure of the play, exploring how Othello's early status and eloquence is juxtaposed with his final acts of brutality. There was some more nuanced discussion as to how far his tragic fall (and the inevitable breakdown of his relationship) was a product of external forces or his own insecurities, with the most confident answers providing a debate rather than a finished conclusion. AO2 was well handled, often in discussion of the disintegration of Othello's language, the structural contrast between Venice and Cyprus, and the disturbingly sexual undertones of Desdemona's death in her marriage bed. Although Q10 was not as popular as Q9, the idea of desire did prove to be a flexible concept and candidates did explore a range of different desires within the play. Many read Othello's chief desire as acceptance by Venice rather than love for Desdemona and the desires of Cassio, Roderigo and Desdemona were analysed intelligently and supported.

Section B: Post-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 11 and 12: TOP GIRLS

Q11, which focused on different types of inequality, proved to be more popular than Q12 which focused on Churchill's presentation of loss. As in previous years there was, in some responses, more of a focus on contextual elements rather than on Churchill's stagecraft, with a number of candidates added context relating to Margaret Thatcher when it perhaps wasn't relevant to the line of argument.

QUESTIONS 13 and 14: A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Q14, which directed students to consider the social and political issues, demonstrated candidates' solid understanding of the relevant contexts of production and reception. However, a focus on these issues did lead to a number of candidates somewhat neglecting elements of Hansberry's stagecraft. There was very little discussion, in the responses to both questions, of her choice of costume or setting or even stage directions.

QUESTIONS 15 and 16: DEATH OF A SALESMAN

In both sets of responses candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the main elements of plot of the play and ideas related to both loyalty and respect. However, in a number of answers AO2 was underdeveloped and candidates did not really capitalise on Miller's definite style of staging. There were missed opportunities to discuss the playwright's distinctive use of staging, time shifts and lighting for example.

In Q15, both respect and self-respect were, validly, addressed. There was much sympathy for Linda - as one candidate put it, 'for all her love and misguided efforts to support Willy he often treats her with disdain'. Biff provided a rich vein of comment. Catching Willy with The Woman was not a sudden disillusion, one candidate claimed, as 'respect has been draining away for a long time'. Honesty in Q16 solicited equally knowledgeable responses. Willy's dishonest claims about his status and earnings were often commented on, as was his liaison with The Woman. Linda was

not spared criticism - her pandering to Willy's illusions was seen as dishonest, if with the best of intentions.

QUESTIONS 17 and 18: A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

A key strength across the many responses received for Williams' text was the analysis of the drama as a play and the focus on the playwright's dramatic choices. Many candidates discussed Williams' theatrical skill in eliciting sympathy for such a complex and flawed heroine. AO3 was quite effective in both questions, though author biography sometimes got in the way of textual focus. Approaches via Freud and/or Marx tended to simplify rather than enrich discussion.

QUESTIONS 19 and 20: WAITING FOR GODOT

In both questions, candidates often began with AO3, citing the Theatre of the Absurd and existentialism with varying degrees of success. Other contextual references were numerous - Camus, Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, the postwar context of production, the decline of religious faith, the impact of the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Attempts to see Didi and Gogo's relationship as a veiled portrait of Beckett's marriage were less convincing, as also was the labelling them as the superego and the id.