



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback
June 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level In
English Literature (WET02)

Paper 2: Drama

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Introduction

The June 2025 series featured a similar size of cohort to the June 2024 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:

It was pleasing to see that this series featured fewer examples of pre-prepared introductions and that candidates were taking time to think carefully about the structure of their answers and plan them out. It should be noted that one of the key descriptors in the Level 4 band is 'controlled', with the candidate developing an argument in a logical, cohesive way through a series of well thought out paragraphs.

AO2:

As highlighted in past reports, the most successful responses are those which engage with the texts as examples of drama. Relevant and insightful analysis of stagecraft and how it is used to develop the writers' ideas is often a characteristic of a Level 4 or 5 answer. Candidates should aim to strike a balance between embedding quotes into their argument and analysing some in greater detail.

AO3:

With AO3 it is worth repeating the comments in last year's Examiners' Report, especially when considering the analysis of *Doctor Faustus* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. 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. 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:

Whilst most candidates did engage with critical viewpoints/perspectives there remained a not insignificant number who only really considered the view in the question. Whilst this qualification uses a holistic mark scheme it is still very difficult to achieve the mid to higher levels if this AO is missed out completely.

In addition, there was a significant increase in the use of critical perspectives, including looking at the text from a psychoanalytical viewpoint and a Marxist viewpoint. Whilst this is an acceptable way of addressing this AO it should not come at the expense of others – in particular AO2. Candidates sometimes became distracted with discussing the intricacies of such perspectives and this pulled them away from the analysis of the text. Again, as with AO3, the key word is illumination – how does the consideration of other viewpoints and perspectives illuminate our understanding of the texts?

SECTION A: Pre-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 1 and 2: THE ROVER

Both questions were equally popular, with candidates answering on both comedy and social conventions in equal numbers. Candidates seemed to have been a little more successful when answering on social conventions, especially those who did not let context dominate their answers but used it as a springboard back into the text

QUESTIONS 3 and 4: SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

Question 4, which asked about the conflict between reason and passion, was more popular than the question about setting. In attempting to explore this conflict a number of candidates did adopt a more descriptive approach which meant that it was difficult for their responses to achieve above Level 2.

QUESTIONS 4 and 6: TWELFTH NIGHT

In responding to ideas about shifting moods and self-deception in Twelfth Night candidates demonstrated good understanding of the play's complexities and the different ways in which the drama would be received at the time of its first performance and now. A number of responses made effective reference to a number of different performances, using these to strengthen their argument. When exploring the different moods of the play (question 3) the weaker responses tended to list the different moods and find examples as to where these are in the play. Stronger responses considered more carefully the wording of the question, which asked candidates to consider the '*effects* of Shakespeare's use of a variety of moods during the course of the play'. This led to more considered arguments and more detailed reference to the text. Candidates should be encouraged to read the wording of both parts of the question very carefully.

QUESTIONS 7 and 8: DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Both pleasure and rebellion proved fruitful topics for exploration. A number of examiners commented that, in contrast to previous series, context did not dominate the answers but instead was used to illuminate ideas. Particularly impressive was the reference to different productions and how the analysis of these were tied into the candidates' argument about how the pursuit of pleasure of the act of rebellion could be interpreted. A number of candidates became somewhat distracted with the discussion of Freud's psychoanalytical theory, pulling them away from the text for relatively large sections of discussion. As discussed above, the analysis of different perspectives is a valid way of accessing AO5, however it should always be linked to the text and used to develop an argument linked to the question.

QUESTIONS 9 and 10: OTHELLO

Othello was the most popular text in Section A, with question 10 and its focus on power more popular than question 9 which asked about the unfamiliar. Whilst the main focus for question 9 was on Othello and how he is perceived by white Venetians, giving rise to some effective historical AO3, candidates also considered Othello as a man, regardless of colour, and the unfamiliarity of a close and passionate relationship with a woman. There was some very effective comment on stagecraft

and structure, noting how Othello is often yanked from the domestic sphere to the military, so that in the short timescale of the play he never has the chance to become familiar with domestic life. As with Q9, the range of response to the theme of power was very wide. There were numerous considerations of Emilia's growth into a powerful woman in her revelation of the truth and denunciation of her husband. This allowed candidates to go beyond the citing of broad and generalised context about women being passive and powerless in Jacobean England, statements which are often applied generally and without specific reference to the text. Particularly fruitful was the discussion of Iago and the way his power lies in his verbal felicity. When the candidates considered Othello, they recognised his physical power, and his military and political influence but also that he lacks power over himself and that his power deteriorates over time. As one candidate eloquently observed, 'In the end, he only has power to kill, not to forgive, or make a balanced judgement, not to love.'

Section B: Post-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 11 and 12: TOP GIRLS

This year's questions asked students to analyse the presentation of the world of work or the presentation of escape, with the latter proving to be slightly more popular with candidates. There was some useful discussion of Churchill's non-linear sequencing and contrapuntal staging. Context continues to be problematic for some candidates as a number added references without making them relevant to the argument/question.

QUESTIONS 13 and 14: A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Q14, which asked candidates to consider the presentation of belonging was more popular than Q13, which focused on the character of George. Whilst there was some useful analysis of Hansberry's craft the application of AO5 was more mixed, with a number of candidates omitting any reference to different perspectives/views.

QUESTIONS 15 and 16: DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Q15, which asked candidates to analyse Miller's presentation of the past, provided a fruitful area of consideration. A number cited Miller's remark that there are no flashbacks in the play – past and present co-exist in Willy's mind. Many called the reality of these reminiscences into question, asking which were real, which embellished, and which fantasy.

Question 16, which asked about strength, was less popular but still provided candidates with a focus which they could engage confidently with. Strength was addressed in all its possible interpretations: physical, mental, moral, endurance. Linda tended to be a central figure, with most candidates seeing her as a character to be admired for enduring love for Willy and her spirited defence of him.

The ebbing of Willy's physical and mental strength was seen as adding substantially to the poignancy of the play, and it was often noted how Willy's early aspirations for his sons were grounded in the physical attributes of these 'Adonises'.

QUESTIONS 17 and 18: A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Blanche was the clear 'outsider' many candidates focused on for Question 17. Most used the opening section of Williams' play to great effect, focusing on Blanche's alienation from the

multicultural urban environment she finds herself in. Stella was often seen as doubly an outsider; alienated from her background by her husband, and from her husband by her background. There was much discussion of the men in the text - Mitch was seen as not fitting into the macho world and Stanley's violence as evidence of a real but suppressed insecurity about his roots. And Alan's desperate and painful isolation was examined in detail.

Although Q18, which focused on Stella, was less popular than Q17 candidates still found much to write about. The main instances of selfishness were her deserting Belle Reve and dispatching her sister to a mental institution, but even these, as thoughtful candidates recognised, are grey areas. The ending of the Kazan film was often used effectively.

In both questions, approaches via figures such as Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Darwin were usually of little benefit. Neither Stanley nor Blanche are 'emblems' of the id and the superego, or of Dionysus and Apollo. Candidates are to be congratulated on their broad cultural knowledge, but unless such references are addressed to the demands of the mark scheme they risk taking the answer off in an unproductive direction

QUESTIONS 19 and 20: WAITING FOR GODOT

The analysis of the presentation of complex ideas (Q19) proved to be more popular than Q20, which asked about survival. Perhaps this was because it allowed candidates to decide for themselves what 'complex ideas' Beckett does explore. The strongest answers engaged with the stem of the question, namely the idea of Beckett's 'apparent simplicity'.