

# DRAMA (US)

Paper 0428/11  
Written Examination

## Key messages

- Literary approaches to answering questions must be avoided. Where questions ask the candidate to provide advice on how a dramatic role should be performed, it is not enough to recount the story or to provide detail of the character's personality, attitudes and relationships without making clear how the character should be *heard* and *seen* on stage in order to convey those traits.
- Candidates should read the questions carefully and ensure that they provide all that is required of a particular question. Equally, they should not waste time providing information that is not asked for in the question.
- In **Section A**, candidates should observe the number of marks available for each question. Lengthy responses for a 2- or 3-mark question are not necessary and will result in less time to respond to the essay questions in **Sections B** and **C** which are worth 25 marks. Using bullet points to answer **Section A** questions is acceptable.
- In **Sections B** and **C** candidates should support their knowledge and understanding of dramatic concepts with *practical* examples together with, where required, detailed evaluation of the success and effectiveness of the piece in performance. Purely narrative responses attract very few marks.
- Candidates who have engaged practically with their devised pieces tend to show greater engagement with the questions in **Section C**.
- Candidates should be familiar with the dramatic and technical terms in current use. An extensive (but not exhaustive) glossary is provided in the syllabus to assist in the identification of key terms.

## General comments

A number of Centres had clearly investigated the context of *A Fine Balance* and many candidates displayed a perceptive understanding, especially in relation to plot, characters and their interactions within the political and social circumstances of the piece. There seems to be a growing awareness of how the elements of drama can be applied effectively to enhance performance, and the understanding and use of appropriate technical language continues to improve although there are still some key terms which appear to be causing confusion.

The approach to the devised pieces varied considerably, but this year there appeared to be fewer candidates who had not had the opportunity to perform their pieces. However, it is still the case that mundane and unimaginative approaches to devising tend to lead to weak responses to the questions based on the stimuli. Pieces which confined themselves to 'soap opera' or daytime television/celebrity-related material were limited by that medium and produced unrewarding responses whereas innovative and creative work gave candidates the chance to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. Where time, money and technical facilities are limited, Centres should encourage candidates to speculate in some detail how their devised pieces could be improved if the necessary resources were available.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A**

#### **Questions 1 – 5 *A Fine Balance***

##### **Question 1**

Most candidates were able to score full marks here with both a valid piece of advice and a statement as to how it would be effective. However, a significant number scored only one mark because they did not provide adequate justification of effectiveness.

## Question 2

Though this question was approached with confidence in the majority of cases, there were a number of instances where candidates clearly did not understand the definition of a prop. A significant number of answers suggested aspects of the set, such as chairs or doors. There were even occasions where jewellery and hair styles were cited. When candidates suggested objects which might normally be considered elements of the set, answers were given the benefit of the doubt if they were justified in terms of how they were used by the actors. A number of candidates suggested the use of puppets for use in the scenes featuring MONKEYMAN. This is a grey area and technically, since the animals are given names, and even personalities, they are in fact characters. Credit was not awarded for the use of puppets as props. The candidates who fulfilled the 'effective' aspect of the question were often those who chose props that were not mentioned in the text, but that they had thought of because they would add something to the performance.

## Question 3

Though there were some excellent answers, some far beyond what was required for the question, a number of responses demonstrated widespread lack of knowledge concerning the concept of pace within a dramatic context.

Typically, candidates skirted around this key term (often with clear advice about tone, facial expressions, gesture etc.) without actually identifying it. Some seemed to have a sense that it somehow related to 'speed', but very few appreciated how pace can be varied within a scene thereby affecting atmosphere and communication, although a few were able to link it to the creation of dramatic tension. On balance, this question produced fairly poor responses but this was by no means a universal outcome.

## Question 4

Candidates were much more confident discussing their suggestions for MONKEYMAN's sacrifice of the dog TIKKA. Many focused on the immediate relationship between man and animal with sensitive and often perceptive explorations into character analysis. Other responses approached the question from a practical staging perspective. A few decided to make the animal a puppet and where this was the case responses became less defined because of the need for either MONKEYMAN himself or a third party to manipulate the creature. The use of a puppet is not in itself problematic, but candidates needed to be aware of the added dimension puppetry introduces to the scene, especially where it deals with rapidly changing emotional levels and reflect this in their answers. It would have been far more appropriate to stick with advice to MONKEYMAN only, without introducing the added dimension of interaction with puppetry.

## Question 5

Again there was a good range of effective responses with many candidates perceiving how the character of MANEK changed and developed as the play progresses, from a naïve youth, lacking experience of life to fierce protector of DINA's rights. The most insightful responses were able to cite his shrewd handling of the tailors as well as his ability to act as DINA's conscience. In this question as with other similar character-based approaches such as in **Question 9**, a number of candidates did not stick to the text and its requirements, and in some cases almost invented a character of their own.

## Questions 6 – 8 *Devised work*

### Question 6

Discussions on dialogue rarely included anything on the type of language used. Many candidates had not used much dialogue and had focused on mime or physical theatre where dialogue was secondary. Where such candidates had acknowledged this and then sought to communicate how gesture, facial expression etc. had created their own kind of non-verbal dialogue, credit was given as if they had been discussing verbal dialogue. Many candidates reflected on their use of monologue where this method of communication dominated. In such cases, perceptive candidates were able to develop their discussion effectively by exploring the nature of monologue as a style and thereby meeting the requirement of the question. Those who simply described the nature or content of their monologues could not access the full range of marks available.

### Question 7

This posed something of a challenge to candidates. Many candidates took 'physicality' simply to mean movement on stage. Where the performance was not in the style of actual physical theatre, depending on the nature of the piece, responses were concerned with either nominally physical pieces or pieces that did not seem to contain any physicality at all. Candidates recognised that facial expression and gesture are indeed valid aspects of physicality but were less inclined to acknowledge elements such as posture and stance, delivery of lines, breathing, and projected mental attitude.

### Question 8

Those who attempted to define moments where contrast had been achieved tended to cite isolated examples of movement, sound or lighting without presenting a clearly defined appreciation of contrast. Many candidates simply outlined the plot for each scene. Some attempted to extract a sense of contrast between one example of movement and one of lighting which did not fulfil the requirement of the mark scheme. Candidates simply needed to be clear about what elements can add interest to a performance and to isolate in pairs one aspect where the element is present and one where it is absent such as loud noise and the absence of noise, bright light and shade or darkness etc. Even such simple contrasts achieved marks whereas comparisons or 'contrasts' between dissimilar aspects did not.

### Section B

#### Questions 9 – 11 *A Fine Balance*

### Question 9

This was a generally well-answered question. Most candidates were able to make a range of valid comments about the character of DINA, with some strong insights into character and consistent reference to the text. Some candidates did not develop their answers, however, and, having written about a range of valid characteristics did not develop this into a discussion about their application, thereby limiting themselves to the 'understanding' mark bands.

### Question 10

This question proved challenging for many. Less astute responses tended to focus not on directorial approaches to the drama but on the themes under discussion and consequently became entangled in areas of socio-political debate.

Some responses tended to concentrate on the visual aspects of the performance interpretation. Though these concerns are obviously valid in terms of the directorial approach, they do need to be considered in terms of the demands of the text and the need to create drama. For example, the use of posters containing electoral messages may indeed be a useful and engaging device to communicate a given subtext but they need to be considered in terms of the action of the play and not form the main thrust of the discussion. There were very few candidates who addressed key aspects of direction such as use of the performance space and proxemics, the delivery of dialogue, the portrayal of relationships and the handling of key moments in the piece.

### Question 11

Candidates responded quite well to this question. Answers were typified by a confident review of the key choices likely to be encountered by the lighting designer or costume designer. In terms of the lighting option, as well as specific lighting applications for the various scenes within the drama, the more astute responses were able to identify sophisticated challenges presented by, for example, the nature of the venue, time of day and resources available all within the context of a directorial concept. Most candidates were able to review the specific demands of the text posed by either the individual characters or on a scene by scene basis but lighting solutions were not always appropriate and sometimes lacked understanding. Less perceptive responses tended to rely on just a few obvious lighting features. Costume responses were, on the whole more consistent but there were few outstanding answers, examples of which focused on solutions over ideas and which considered the practicality of certain costumes in terms of their 'wearability' or the need for compromise to achieve a specific 'look' under given constraints. A few candidates answered the question from the perspectives of both lighting and costume. In such cases Examiners identified the stronger of the two submissions and awarded marks accordingly.

## Section C

### Questions 12 – 14 *Devised work*

#### Question 12

Many responses managed to provide some effective suggestions for set design but these were often limited. It should be borne in mind that the question requires a discussion based on 'opportunities' for set design which indicates that the response does not need to follow any constraints that may have been imposed by the actual production. It is recognised that Centres may be impeded by lack of time or resources but candidates are encouraged to consider the possibilities for a set that is not only practical but also one which engages with all aspects of the drama. Consequently, candidates should not necessarily feel held back by limited resources but enabled to give free rein to their imaginations, provided that the suggestions are both practicable and assist in the realisation of the text. Many candidates supplied detailed diagrams and though these in themselves did not attract marks, where they were able to add clarity to the written description they proved most useful.

Some responses did not elect to discuss set at all but instead focused on the performance space and reviewed how the proxemic relationships, entrances and exits etc. had been created in order to realise the drama. In doing so these candidates were anticipating an approach more suited to **Question 14**.

#### Question 13

Many candidates found it challenging to define dramatic tension although many were able to give examples from a range of sources that included dialogue, characterisations, staging and dynamics. A few candidates were able to describe their pieces in terms of a structure designed to create dramatic tension, using terminology such as rising action, climax and resolution. Many responses tended towards the narrative where there was a restating of the plot or action of the performance in which a whole range of techniques might be mentioned but seldom linked to the process of creating dramatic tension. Candidates needed to be clearer about how dramatic techniques of all kinds can be manipulated and balanced to create tension in a range of circumstances.

#### Question 14

A significant number of responses treated this question as if it had been **Question 12**. There were examples of detailed and extensive discussions about the set and its elements, with much use of rostra, levels, windows and doors but, with the exception of a few insightful responses, candidates neglected to engage with the use of performance space itself. It is understood that Centres differ widely in the spaces they have available to them and it is often the space available which dictates how a performance is staged. The question seeks to elicit a response which considers how, for example, a traditional proscenium arch or end stage might influence the entrances and exits or proxemic relationships in the performance. Or, if performed outdoors in a school courtyard setting, how did the positioning of the audience affect the way floor patterns were distributed on stage? Centres are advised to clarify the difference between the performance space and the set and remind candidates that they should be treated as totally separate concepts.

# DRAMA (US)

Paper 0428/02  
Coursework

## General comments

Most candidates' coursework showed an obvious and infectious enthusiasm for live performance and a genuine desire to communicate with an audience. The overall standard of performance work was very good, which was clearly a reflection of the hours of preparation and rehearsal put in by candidates, not to mention the patience and sensitivity of teachers in guiding them through the creative process.

## Administration

The series generally ran smoothly, although the overall administration relating to the coursework submission was more problematic than in previous years and there were a greater number of administrative errors. These are set out in detail here in the hope that it will be possible to avoid recurrence of such problems in future series.

### 1 *Timely despatch of the moderation materials*

A number of packages arrived late which delayed the moderation process. Centres are reminded that the moderation materials must reach Cambridge by 30 April for each June series. This is dependent on allowing sufficient time in the planning cycle for the constituent parts of the process: selecting the sample of candidates; internal moderation of marks where there is more than one teacher involved in the assessment; collating the required performances onto DVD(s), and accurately estimating how long is needed for the material to be posted to Cambridge.

### 2 *Documentation*

Several Centres submitted incomplete documentation resulting in significant delays and disruption to the moderation process. There were two common omissions: the Internal Assessment MS1 mark sheet (or a signed printout of the marks file if marks were submitted to Cambridge electronically), and the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets (ICMS) for **all** candidates, not just those in the sample. Moderation cannot start until all the required documentation has been received.

### 3 *Selecting the sample*

Some Centres did not select a sample of six candidates as required by the syllabus, and instead sent the recorded performances of all candidates, leaving the Moderator to select work. In other instances, Centres had selected a sample but it did not include the full range of marks, or the marks were not evenly distributed. The sample must include one candidate with the highest mark awarded, one candidate with the lowest mark awarded and four other candidates with marks spread evenly between these two. If there is more than one candidate on a particular mark, it is not necessary to send all of those candidates, just one which is representative of that mark.

### 4 *Accuracy of mark sheets*

The majority of Centres completed the ICMSs thoroughly and accurately. Nevertheless, there were a number of arithmetical errors. Centres are reminded **not** to round up or down any of the marks when calculating the 'final mark' for each of the three assessment objectives; marks should be left as decimal fractions. Only when the candidate's 'total mark' has been calculated should it be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number: fractions of 0.5 or more should be rounded up; fractions of less than 0.5 should be rounded down. Moderators also corrected the marks of many candidates where there were errors in addition. Please check all calculations carefully as even small errors can cause problems.



5 *Quality of recordings*

The overall quality of recordings was fairly good, with many Centres presenting their work in DVD format on DVD. Although not specifically required by the syllabus, it was extremely helpful that all DVDs were chaptered as this facilitated easy identification of candidates and made the moderation process much more straightforward.

There were also a significant number of submissions that proved problematic for the following reasons:

- DVDs that were broken in transit as a result of inadequate protective packaging.
- Recordings in formats that did not play on a stand-alone DVD player or a computer, where the DVDs showed as 'blank' or 'file unknown' when inserted. The following movie formats are accepted: MPEG (.mpg) and QuickTime movie (.mov). Please check DVDs in a stand-alone DVD player to ensure that they play properly before sending them to Cambridge. Centres are reminded that as this is examination material, the highest standards of presentation are needed to ensure candidates are not disadvantaged.
- Poor levels of sound recording so that performances were extremely difficult to hear or – at the other extreme – were overwhelmed by extraneous noises, particularly when performances took place in outdoor locations.
- Performances where candidates were not identified. Candidates should announce themselves to camera before each performance, clearly stating their candidate name and (if known at the time of the recording) their candidate number plus the role they will be playing in the piece. Some candidates used boards showing their name and candidate number as well as verbally giving this information and this was helpful. Most Centres provided a description of each candidate's appearance on the ICMS and, although not compulsory, Moderators were grateful to those Centres that provided photographs of the candidates.
- Filming that was so distant or grainy that it was very difficult to see the work clearly. Cameras should be static so that the Moderator can take in the total experience and see reactions and movements across the space rather than being limited by what the cameraman chooses to shoot. Some candidates played totally to the camera and there was little or no sense of a staged performance or a context for the work. Some static monologues were filmed from the waist up, which was unhelpful and candidates need to be filmed in long-shot not mid-shot.
- DVDs with no accompanying running order meaning that it was extremely complex and time-consuming to work out which candidates were performing.

**Assessment criteria**

The majority of Centres showed a clear understanding of how to apply the assessment criteria to candidates' work. Most teachers provided helpful comments to indicate why they had awarded a particular mark, generally pointing to specific features of the performances to justify that mark. Other teachers merely copied out the assessment criteria from the syllabus, which was unhelpful as it offered no additional information to help the Moderator understand why a particular mark had been awarded. It is essential that the comments on the ICMSs give an insight into how candidates have worked through the creative process and do not merely reproduce the assessment criteria.

There were occasional misunderstandings as to how the assessment objectives were differentiated, with some Centres referring to performance skills under Assessment Objective A and Assessment Objective B. In a few cases, teachers penalised the candidates under Assessment Objective A and B but then overcompensated by awarding inflated marks for Assessment Criteria C. To clarify:

- Assessment Objective A is concerned with the journey from page to stage, rewarding independence in making such decisions in the light of the performance standard achieved.
- Assessment Objective B measures a similar journey as candidates devise their own material.
- Assessment Objective C focuses entirely on the quality of each candidate's performance skills.

**Text-based performances**

Text-based work tended to produce higher marks than the devised work for the majority of candidates. There were some very emotionally charged performances. The strongest of these reflected a very good understanding of the play, its characters, themes and social and historical context. The weakest gave the impression of having been thrown together at the last minute and conveyed little sense of stagecraft, or any sense of context and performance.

The best work was typified by very high standards of preparation, and an obvious engagement with the process of rehearsing and refining dramatic performance. In such cases, there were very few, if any, memory lapses and the action was helped effortlessly along by the drive and commitment of the candidates, especially in the group pieces. This was often the result of excellent articulation and enunciation by all members of the group.

By contrast, weaker performances often lost pace and energy as a result of over-reliance on the use of props and/or furniture. There were several examples of static monologues with the performer seated on a chair. A significant number of pieces were essentially ‘table-and-chairs’ drama with candidates having imaginary conversations on telephones. This restricted the physicality of the candidate and rarely led to high marks, as there was little opportunity to use the stage space effectively. Repetitive phrasing by candidates was also a weakness, as was an inability to shape sentences or control dynamic levels. This often led to showing anger or frustration through uncontrolled shouting, of which there was far too much. The impressive use of register by strong candidates was frequently matched by monotonous mumbling by less able performers. Such under-projection was a major weakness in performance, but was even more significant when coupled with weak accent work. Accents – often American or English – were seldom well executed and Centres are advised not to choose plays where authenticity is reliant on the use of accurate accents if they do not think candidates will be able to employ them successfully.

Many Centres offered a wide variety of texts using different styles and techniques which provided adequate challenge for candidates whilst simultaneously extending their knowledge and understanding of theatre across different historical periods. In some cases characterisation had been successfully developed leading to excellent performances. Although not a syllabus requirement, some Centres paid careful attention to set and costume when period drama was tackled, and this helped candidates to get into character and develop stylistically.

Centres may find it helpful to consider the following representative list of repertoire from which extracts were selected in the June 2013 series.

Alan Ayckbourn	<i>Absent Friends</i> <i>Comic Potential</i>
Edward Albee	<i>The Zoo Story</i> <i>A Delicate Balance</i> <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i>
Michael Azama	<i>Crossfire</i>
Alan Bennett	<i>The History Boys</i>
Steven Berkoff	<i>The Trial</i>
Bertolt Brecht	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> <i>The Elephant Calf</i>
Louise Bryant	<i>The Game</i>
David Campton	<i>Reserved</i>
Jim Cartwright	<i>Road</i> <i>Two</i>
Caryl Churchill	<i>Love and Information</i> <i>Top Girls</i>
Martin Crimp	<i>Dealing with Clair</i>
Friedrich Dürrenmatt	<i>The Visit</i>
Athol Fugard	<i>No-Good Friday</i>
John Godber	<i>Bouncers</i> <i>Shakers</i>

	<i>Teachers</i>
Nikolai Gogol	<i>The Government Inspector</i>
Carlo Goldoni	<i>A Servant to Two Masters</i>
Lorraine Hansberry	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>
Henrik Ibsen	<i>A Doll's House</i>
David Ives	<i>Sure Thing</i>
Sarah Kane	<i>4:48 Psychosis</i>
Federico García Lorca	<i>Blood Wedding</i> <i>The House of Bernarda Alba</i>
Arthur Miller	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> <i>The Crucible</i>
Ferenc Molnar	<i>A Matter of Husbands</i>
Harold Pinter	<i>The Caretaker</i> <i>The Dumb Waiter</i>
J B Priestley	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>
Willy Russell	<i>Our Day Out</i> <i>Shirley Valentine</i>
Diane Samuels	<i>Kindertransport</i>
Peter Shaffer	<i>Amadeus</i>
William Shakespeare	<i>Henry V</i> <i>Macbeth</i> <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Neil Simon	<i>The Prisoner of Second Avenue</i> <i>The Star-Spangled Girl</i> <i>The Odd Couple</i>
George Bernard Shaw	<i>Getting Married</i> <i>Man and Superman</i> <i>Pygmalion</i>
Simon Stephens	<i>Country Music</i> <i>Punk Rock</i>
Shelagh Stephenson	<i>Ancient Lights</i> <i>The Long Road</i>
August Strindberg	<i>Miss Julie</i>
Oscar Wilde	<i>An Ideal Husband</i> <i>A Woman of No Importance</i> <i>La Sainte Courtisane</i> <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>
Thornton Wilder	<i>Our Town</i>
Tennessee Williams	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>
Olwen Wymark	<i>Find Me</i>

### **Devised performances**

There were a number of powerful pieces that demonstrated a mature understanding of how to create drama for an audience, were well shaped, and conveyed a clear message to their audiences. These were generally well acted and revealed a level of attention to detail that was highly commendable. Moderators reported, however, that the overall standard of devised performances was lower than that of text-based pieces. As in previous years, there was a tendency for pieces to slide into the predictable areas of teenage issues such as drugs, unwanted pregnancies, schizophrenia, bullying, marital infidelity, cultural expectations and challenges, and madness.



The best pieces were performed to a live audience, which energised the performers and made them more responsive to other characters in response to the reactions of the audience.

Several pieces were very naïve and simplistic with a tendency to be quite filmic in approach.

Once again, a number of monologues appeared to have been filmed in candidates' living rooms, bedrooms or gardens or any available space, with little thought given to the suitability of the space for performance. This 'talking-heads' approach meant that there was hardly any real sense of dramatic performance with other characters in the stage space. In such cases the camera became the other character, allowing limited scope for acting. There were some good examples of setting, however, that had been clearly thought through as part of the creative process and consideration had been given to the context of the work.

Dialogue was often poorly constructed and diction frequently weak, and this was inevitably accompanied by a 'tables-and-chairs' approach. Many candidates seemed ill at ease in creating physical roles and approached the work almost as if the resulting drama was intended for radio. Some performances used background music throughout, which tended to overwhelm the dialogue and obscure what was being said.

The best work was clearly derived from the dramatic stimuli in the syllabus, which helped candidates to expand their thinking beyond the well-worn themes that typified much of the work. Moderators reported seeing many powerful pieces based on pictures, stories, and exploring stylistic conventions as a means to shaping and refining their work. The enthusiasm of the audiences to whom the work was presented was evident and a fitting tribute to those candidates.