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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE
Drama and Theatre (9DR0)

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Introduction

This paper was written for the June 2020 series. Unfortunately, there were no examinations in June 2020 following the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper was offered in October 2020 and was sat by less than 20 candidates. Because the entry was so small, it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions in terms of popularity of questions and trends within responses; neither can the report be too specific in order to protect the anonymity of candidates. All statistical evidence should be given scant regard when the numbers are so small.

We can be wholly confident that the level of difficulty and accessibility of the paper sat in Autumn 2020 was of exactly the same standard as previous series. This paper was not written specifically for this series, as stated above, it was initially intended for June 2020.

There are 6 questions on the paper. Candidates have a choice from questions 1 or 2 and questions 5 & 6. Questions 3 and 4 are mandatory. In total, they write 4 essay-style responses to 4 questions and have to use 3 different texts across the whole paper.

Section A Live Theatre Evaluation.

Candidates evaluate a theatre production that they have seen. Almost all candidates wrote about a production that they had actually seen live, before lockdown in March 2020. Given the closure of theatres, candidates could have used recorded versions of live theatre performances though no one actually did.

There was no sense of one production proving popular, indeed every single performance used was different. Unfortunately, 1 candidate had evaluated one of the set texts from Section C which is not allowed and resulted in a mark of zero.

The notes that they are allowed into the exam room with them to support this Section resulted in detailed, personal responses that allowed almost all candidates to analyse and evaluate what they had seen.

Question 1

This question was about the survival of theatre in the 21st century and in the main, candidates argued that they had seen diverse, exciting theatre that reflected the world we live in today. They were able to relate the content and style to a range of audience types. It wasn't as well answered as question 2, having a mean mark of 10.6 out of 20 and was slightly less popular than Question 2.

Question 2

This question was about the use of technology in performance and produced some really strong arguments both for and against technology. Most candidates cited examples they had seen where the technology was stunning as well as examples where the technology was unnecessary or even detracted from the performance. There were also some delightful responses that stated how they had seen some beautiful moments where there was little or no obvious use of technology at all. This question had a mean mark of 14.5 out of 20.

Section B Page to Stage: Realising a Performance Text

Candidates have to use one of the 6 set texts to answer questions 3 and 4. From these 6 texts, 5 were used by this very small cohort.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to outline how they would use movement and physicality to portray one character in the given extract. All candidates chose the character that had most scope at that given moment in the extract. They were nearly all able to put themselves in the role of the performer and state what they would do and why. Most of the responses were Competent or Assured. The main reason that responses didn't achieve higher marks was a lack of references and connections to the rest of the play. Question 3 had a mean mark of 10.1 out of 18.

Question 4

This question asked candidates how they would use set and props as a Designer to create impact on the audience. Most of the responses were able to visualise the scene given in the extract and cite logical, workable ideas for set and props. Stronger responses were able to connect or contrast the extract with other scenes from the play but a good number gave no references at all to the rest of the play. Question 4 had a mean mark of 9.71 out of 18. This would bear out the trend of a much larger cohort where candidates tend to do slightly better on Q3 than Q4 although this gap has closed in recent years.

Section C Interpreting a Performance text

Both questions 5 and 6 were chosen in almost equal measure. The section has 9 available texts but within this very small cohort, Woyzeck, Hedda Gabler and Lysistrata were the most frequent texts used. The particular focus of Question 5 was on the intentions of the playwright and how they might be reflected in the candidate's concept. Question 6 was about how the Director's concept could create impact on the audience.

One of the key aspects of success in Section C is choosing a concept that supports the text, indeed the playwright's intentions. It can be modern, futuristic etc. but it isn't a re-writing of the text. A number of the concepts actually detracted from the re-imagining of the text and meant that candidates were focussed on telling their version of the play rather than responding to the precise demands of the question.

Similarly, the choice of practitioner needs to support the original text and its intention. There are so many permutations for Section C and the strongest responses weren't too bizarre or quirky; they were logical, appropriate and well considered. Rather like Section B, one of the most neglected areas of the responses was a lack of, or scant reference to the rest of the play.

Question 5 had a mean mark of 12.75 out of 24

Question 6 had a mean mark of 11.44 out of 24.

Summary

While it is very difficult to derive any real evidence from such a small entry number, the statistics illustrate that all the questions were pitched at the right level and accessed in roughly even numbers when there was a choice.

The full range of marks was used for all questions, marks awarded ranged from the highest level (Sophisticated) and in a few responses down to the lowest level (Limited).