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DRAMA

<p>Paper 0411/01 Written Paper</p>
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General comments

Administration

It is gratifying to report a significant increase in the number of entries for this session with a total of 609 candidates. The majority of work was received in good time with appropriate administrative tasks efficiently completed by Centres. One or two submissions were slightly delayed by the international security measures pertaining but this did not affect the examination process in any way. Once again it is pertinent to request that where at all possible, Centres submit scripts on paper with a right hand margin, tag tied at the corner. This facilitates easy manipulation of and access to the script during the marking process.

The examination

Overall performance of the candidates

This session evidenced a very wide range of ability. A number of candidates showed a satisfying grasp of the process and were able to link theory to practice effectively. At the other end of the scale there was a marked shortfall between the responses sought by the paper and candidates' ability to meet them. In several such cases this was perhaps more contributable to inadequate English skills rather than failure to engage the material studied. Sound reasoning is required in support of answers and this is what provided the biggest challenge in terms of accessing the marks available. In general terms, the devised pieces were approached with an enthusiasm and application comparable to the previous session. The textual study revealed some interesting responses, some of which were excellent. However, it is worthy of note that Brecht, rather than the text of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* became the focus of many candidates, who became bogged down in his theories rather than answering the question. It is clear that these theories had been well taught in Centres but nonetheless, a considerable number of candidates expended much energy on citing examples of Brechtian technique rather than demonstrating how drama is created.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

Question 1

Most candidates gained at least one mark here by citing the textual reference to Azdak's tattered clothing as representing one aspect of his character. Many candidates concentrated on the judge's robe and the status it represented, taking a tangential route thereby misrepresenting Azdak's true character. Some candidates chose to ignore the stage directions and discussed Azdak in a suit. Even if the Centre had chosen a modern dress solution for the practical investigation of the extract a robe would still have been a requirement.

Question 2

The responses to this question were a good example of how Brecht's theories got in the way. The majority of candidates only succeeded in attaining half the marks available. Many candidates produced an abstracted 'list' of postures and voices; e.g. 'pleading', 'crying' which they would adopt at certain moments in the text. Grusha's character and her motivation for this speech was, sadly, absent from most answers. It seems that candidates began with Alienation uppermost in their minds and did not allow themselves to ask how Grusha could actually realise her role within the extract.

Question 3

The majority of candidates focused on the Cook's loyalty, honesty, integrity etc. which allowed them to gain marks. Some concentrated instead on the dramatic function of the character (such as enlightening us about Azdak) and therefore strayed away from the terms of the question.

Question 4

This question highlighted the polarity between those who understood the play and those who did not. Whilst there were some very good answers indeed, a significant number of candidates departed on some unpredictable excursions into the nature of Azdak's character and what he represents. Some candidates cited a Christ-like characteristic that either demonstrates a misunderstanding of the play or a flight of fancy in terms of contemporary production. Whichever the case, it disadvantaged those candidates who opted for this approach.

Question 5

The answers to this question demonstrated an improved understanding of the function of lighting from previous sessions. Many candidates identified a single hard spotlight for use on the Singer and many related a selection of red lighting to the stage direction referring to the fires in the distance.

Questions 6 - 8

Devised Work

Question 6

A lot of answers comprised a simple list of characters, by name. Some of these also included the function of these characters and their relationship to others. A relatively few candidates were able to review the characters created in any sense of depth or roundness. So many were simply 'stock types' whose motivation may be simply, 'greed' for example. Regrettably, many candidates did not seem to appreciate what 'motivation' actually meant in terms of character but discussed the motivation of the script devising team instead.

Question 7

Though much better than last year's responses, narrative continues to be in evidence. Nevertheless, the vast majority of candidates were able to focus on the final scene and discuss their intentions for it in terms of audience response.

Question 8

Once again, this question sought to explore the creation of drama within the devised context and once again candidates experienced difficulty with the concept of 'dramatic techniques' leaning instead towards technical method such as lighting, costume etc. This is an area where Centres can really improve candidates' responses by concentrating on the methods used to create drama from the source e.g. dynamics, proxemics, etc.

Section B

Staging The Caucasian Chalk Circle

Question 9

Generally well answered displaying good understanding of positioning and status. There were some very good diagrams illustrating innovative and potentially exciting schemas for the set.

Question 10

This question also seemed well prepared. Candidates demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of Grusha's character than that evidenced in **Question 2**.

Question 11

Not many candidates opted for this question. Those who did managed well, with the stronger candidates relating moments of potential humour to both text and subtext. Weaker candidates relied on 'funny' stage business or the more obvious comic lines.

Questions 12 - 14

Devised Work - Production

Question 12

Many candidates concentrated on the strength of the original idea at the devising stage rather than the way that idea was worked in practical terms through dramatic method. The question candidates should be asking themselves is 'which aspects of our production worked well, i.e. effectively, in terms of our intention.' Conversely, they should be able to discuss moments which failed to work both in terms of the intention and the outcome, i.e. the eventual effect on the audience.

Question 13

Characterised by much use of narrative, answers indicated a lack of understanding of the meaning of the term 'structure'. Responses often resorted to generalisations such as 'too long' or 'too short' and rarely engaged with the idea of creating shape and flow through construction techniques using the different models available.

Question 14

There was much narrative here also but a pleasing number of examples where candidates gave detailed and perceptive responses which discussed the techniques used and evaluated them. The reader was left with a clear sense of what actually took place in dramatic terms.

<p>Paper 0411/02 Coursework</p>

General comments

Numbers of candidate entries rose again for the third year running from 521 to 601 and Moderators were pleased to report that the overall standard was broadly comparable with that of the previous two years that the syllabus has run.

Administration

There was more clarity about how the coursework forms were to be filled in this session and there was evidence that Centres understood how to use the relevant forms for the three assessment objectives. On a practical level, it would help if the sheets were grouped by candidate and the cover sheets put on top. In a few cases the top boxes giving texts/subjects for devising were not always completed.

The composition of the sample was well understood although one Centre did not select a sample and another Centre sent the coursework folders and working diaries of the entire cohort which amounted to a huge package.

Forms and commentaries

The comments on candidates' work was in most cases detailed, accurate and properly linked to marking criteria. The forms are available electronically and this was a great help to both Centres and Moderators in the respective preparation and reading of the forms. One Centre had printed the forms back to back, however, which was difficult to use.

There were relatively few mathematical errors on forms although there were some cases of bizarre marks created through using decimal points. Centres are reminded to round up marks in such cases.

Video recordings

The quality of recordings was generally improved and Moderators appreciated the efforts that had been taken in obtaining VHS format videos for the purpose of producing the moderation tape. Not all Centres followed the CIE requirement to put individual pieces on a separate tape and there were occasional difficulties for Moderators in finding the relevant pieces to moderate.

Centres are reminded of the need to enclose a running order of what is on the video as well as photographs of the candidates. In addition, it is essential that every candidate announces himself/herself before each piece and that this is done steadily, allowing the camera to pause on each candidate. A few Centres had cut off the start of performances and this caused considerable problems in moderation. More significantly, some of the individual pieces were filmed in close-up. This was effective on camera but difficult to gauge whether the candidate had sufficient projection for a stage performance.

Devised pieces

There was a fairly equal balance between numbers of repertoire pieces and devised pieces in individual Centres. However, Moderators reported that the standard of devised work was often not as high as the standard of repertoire work. This was invariably because of the limitations of the devised pieces rather than the quality of the performances. Whilst candidates clearly enjoyed performing their own devised pieces in spite of the lack of creativity in their approaches, it was lack of challenge in material that proved the greatest hindrance to candidates in demonstrating fully their skills.

Devised group pieces often lacked structure and focus and the situations created were frequently predictable and banal. Domestic tensions predominated as subject matter and dysfunctional families appeared frequently. The influences for this appeared to have come from American TV and film which are not the most appropriate models for the creation of live drama.

The quality of language and the extent of physical work were the key determining factors in the quality of devised work and it was a pleasure to report that a good number of candidates were clearly skilled in both. However, the majority of devised pieces took a clichéd approach. This relied heavily on the excessive use of tables and chairs, poor quality of language and well-worn attitudes. However, it was encouraging that even in cases where the quality of the devised material was unpromising candidates were still able to perform with considerable belief.

In both individual and group devised pieces there was a tendency to ramble and as a result to go over length. Candidates are reminded of the need for their work to demonstrate craftsmanship and refinement in shape and direction and to avoid spelling out every detail of the supposed plot.

There was also some excellent devised work that demonstrated a good variety of techniques. Whilst static performances where candidates do little more than recite lines while sitting on a chair allow hardly any scope for the effective use of physicality and space, some performances displayed the use of mime and movement as well as words in order to communicate with their audience and this was pleasing. It was particularly pleasing to see more candidates using music in their pieces this session as this added an extra dimension to the work.

Repertoire pieces

Repertoire work was based on a very wide range of pieces and this was commendable. In most cases, candidates were able to imagine themselves into the cultural and historical setting of the piece chosen although weaker candidates often struggled with cultural context, language or a sense of period. As in previous sessions, the quality of articulation and diction varied enormously. Given the centrality of acting skills within drama, Moderators reported that a worrying number of candidates seemed to make no attempt at expressive and controlled delivery of the material choosing instead to simply say lines in a manner that detracted from their meaning.

There were a number of highly successful performances of extracts from repertoire and a short list of some works used may be helpful to Centres embarking on the course for the first time.

Ayckbourn	Absent Friends
Cartwright	Road
Churchill	Top Girls
Glasser	Love is a Place
Godber	Teechers
Miller	A View From the Bridge
Pinter	Trouble in the Works
Pomerane	Vanessa
Priestley	An Inspector Calls
Samuels	Kindertransport
Shakespeare	The Taming of the Shrew
Shaw	Mrs Warren's Profession
Pinter	Saint Joan
Sheridan	The Rivals
Sophocles	Antigone
Thurston	Snobs
Wilde	The Importance of Being Earnest

Centres are reminded, again, that candidates are prohibited from performing the current year's extract for Paper 1, in this case Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle.

The approach to characterisation was a vital element in the creation of effective drama.

Some candidates used physicality in their performance to great effect and where this was controlled the work was of a high quality. Weaker candidates simply used physicality as an excuse to throw things around and shout and this added little to the performance. There were still a distressingly large number of 'talking heads' and these tended to score poorly because of their static nature.

Where candidates had given thought to the broader context of their character's situation, the performance was convincing although pieces where performers spoke one side of a dialogue with an unseen other character generally lacked credibility.