



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback
Summer 2022

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

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Introduction

The June 2022 series featured a significant increase in entries when compared to the last 4 series and each 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.

Examiners saw a range of responses, with the majority of candidates achieving Level 3. A number of responses were restricted to Level 2 or below because of a narrative, generalised approach with overviews/introductions which made little or no reference to the specifics of the question. 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. There was evidence of some Band 4 and Band 5 answers where candidates had clearly taken their time to consider the critical statement in the question and respond accordingly, rather than write a thematic or character led response. Although a character-based approach can sometimes be effective, it can also result in a list-like response where the same argument is repeated.

There was some evidence this year that candidates had memorised large sections of a response, including context and critical statements. These were added in after a more promising/relevant introduction, and served to send the response off on a tangent and candidates found it difficult to pull the answer back to the question. This should be avoided in future series.

In terms of analysis, it was pleasing to see that in general candidates engaged effectively with how meanings were shaped by the playwrights, rather than falling back on general assertions. However, as in previous series, some candidates did rely on explaining the loose connections as to how the writers had created meaning, resulting in rather generalised argument and assertion. Candidates who saw the characters as constructs, consciously constructed by the playwrights, tended to access the higher levels as their responses were more focused on writers' choices rather than talking about the characters as real people.

In general, contexts and critical responses were handled effectively, with some useful references to relevant productions used to develop and support a candidate's argument.

Overall, candidates who were most successful engaged with aspects of stagecraft and showed understanding that the characters in the plays function as literary constructions. They also explored a range of interpretations, debating a thesis rather than setting out a definitive reading.

SECTION A: Pre-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 1 and 2: THE ROVER

Question 2, where students were asked to consider the role of marriage in the play, proved to be more popular than Q1 and elicited some strong answers where candidate did more than describe the marriages in the play.

QUESTIONS 3 and 4: SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

Questions 3 and 4 proved to be equally popular, with candidates successfully exploring relevant contextual factors.

QUESTIONS 5 and 6: TWELFTH NIGHT

Twelfth Night proved to be a very popular text this series, with the majority of candidates answering Question 5 and responding to the idea that love is as much a source of pain as it is joy. The answers which accessed Bands 4 and 5 went beyond offering a list of characters who either saw love as a source of pain and/or joy and offered a more considered approach to the question, with a number debating how far this 'pain' was self imposed. In a number of responses for this question and for Question 6 candidates seemed to have memorised a large chunk of a response and added this at the beginning, even though it was not made relevant. This is to be avoided in future series.

QUESTIONS 7 and 8: DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Another popular text, with almost two thirds of the candidates opting to answer Question 8 asking them to consider whether or not Faustus could be seen to be solely responsible for his downfall. There was a real sense of debate in a number of responses here – with candidates both agreeing and disagreeing with the statement and using contextual factors to support and develop their points.

QUESTIONS 9 and 10: OTHELLO

As in previous series Othello proved to be a popular text with centres. Question 9 saw the most responses, with candidates debating how far Othello is responsible for his own demise. There were a significant number of Band 4 and Band 5 responses here and students clearly had strong views about Othello's culpability, or lack thereof. Some candidates, who had perhaps not planned out their answers in enough detail, did digress into writing a response on race rather than using it to develop an argument.

As with Q9, Q10 produced a range of responses, from Level 2 to Level 5. A number of successful responses considered how the women in the play could be seen as possessing 'intelligence; and 'fortitude', rather than dismissing the critical claim completely.

Section B: Post-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 11 and 12: TOP GIRLS

There was a small number of responses to the Churchill play. Q12 on 'the lengths women are willing to go to, to achieve success' was more popular and there was some clear discussion as to how Marlene and a number of other women achieved success. The more successful responses tended to consider the idea of whether these women's behaviour could be seen as being more stereotypically male, with a number of candidates exploring the role of motherhood in the play.

QUESTIONS 13 and 14: A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Question 13, with its focus on money as a dramatic device, proved popular with candidates answering on Hansberry's drama. The majority of answers achieved Level 2 or Level 3, with a number of candidates tracking through the different characters and exploring, in isolation, how each of them wanted to spend the inheritance.

QUESTIONS 15 and 16: DEATH OF A SALESMAN

There was an almost equal split here, with both questions proving popular with candidates. Question 15, which asked candidates to consider audience's reactions to Willy, elicited mainly Band 3/low Band 4 responses, where students used different parts of the play to support the reasons why an audience may react to the central character in certain ways. Q16, elicited slightly more subtle responses, with a number of candidates exploring how Willy's own refusal to believe that he is ordinary affected how he treated his sons. There was less of a listing approach evident here, and therefore a number of candidates were able to demonstrate a more discriminatory approach, enabling them to access the higher levels.

QUESTIONS 17 and 18: A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Williams' play remains the most popular choice of text in Section B, with Q18 (on the role of props and costume in the play) proving to be the more popular. There was a range of answers here, with the more effective ones pausing to consider the ideas behind the props/costumes rather than listing them and repeating ideas as the response developed. In responses to both questions there was evidence of assertive biographical context which did not develop or support the argument being made. Assertions about Williams' father or his own alcoholism tended to describe rather than support the development of an answer.

QUESTIONS 19 and 20: WAITING FOR GODOT

Beckett's play attracted a small cohort of students this year, with almost equal numbers attempting Question 19 on time and Question 20, which asked candidates to debate whether or not Estragon and Vladimir could be considered friends. A number of candidates found exploring the abstract idea of time challenging and would perhaps have found it beneficial to use the critical statement to anchor their responses. It was also notable that in most responses, to both questions, context was minimal.

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