

TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 15	16 - 30	31 - 46	47 - 59	60 - 71	72 - 84	85 - 100

This was the sixth year in which candidates completed the course. Significant changes are being introduced from September 2008, for first examinations in 2010.

The results in this session tended to group very much in the upper middle end; the highest grades were not common and it was rare for a candidate to fall below a grade 4.

The lack of academic rigour in candidate responses was particularly apparent in Paper 1 and, while there were some truly outstanding performances, both solo and group, together with some articulate and relatively sophisticated oral presentations, the personal report and critical analysis section of the coursework appeared to be misunderstood by a number of candidates.

The modified course will challenge students academically and it is hoped it will raise the academic profile of the subject bringing it closer to Language A1 and to the demands of the new Theatre course.

Standard level internal assessment

Oral presentation

Component Grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 4	5 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 14	15 - 16	17 - 18	19 - 20

There were some exciting textual choices with Browning, Fitzgerald, Garcia Marquez, Neruda, Attwood, Clare and Poe, among others. It is always risky to generalize but the less challenging and literary the text, the more difficult it was for candidates to actually get anything of substance from it. With the challenge of a literary text came the imaginative response as candidates grappled with the subject matter, themes and characterizations in their transformation.

This exercise is essentially about three responses: first to the original text as the source for transformation, second to the process of transforming and third to the transformed piece which is staged and becomes the “performance”.

The candidates' observations on the core text tended to be perfunctory and this led to difficulties with a criterion that should not have been problematic. An oral presentation needs structure and balance if candidates are going to score in each of the criteria. Neglect of the core text and any "cultural or literary traditions" that are germane to its form (since this is what will be transformed), is therefore careless. The form of a poem or a story and its genre needs to be established, since there may be conventions which the transformation will use as tools of communication that may be immediately recognized by an audience.

Poe is a good example of a writer immersed in certain gothic conventions, and the performances of the candidates were quick to emphasize a quality of morbidity and ghoulish preoccupation that are fundamental to the genre but were not always brought out in what were articulate oral presentations. Writers like Poe and Browning are so richly associated within their literary tradition that candidates can only gain by ensuring that the tradition or conventions are brought into play by explicit reference to them in the oral and by the "quoting" of them in the transformation (often achieved).

The candidates spoke well and generally scored highly in the use of language. The use of critical and literary terminology generally distinguished the more accomplished candidates but again the choice of a literary text obliges the candidate to grapple with this language: non-literary texts allow the candidate to evade that exercise often to the detriment of the oral.

The notion of process as a sequential narrative made this examiner feel that candidates were producing a rather sanitized version of their struggles at times. Everything appeared to happen almost automatically and there were few presentations where one got the sense of challenges being faced and overcome. The key skill of reflection that forms so fundamental a part of group 6 criteria needs to be far better understood by the candidates, who, with few exceptions, treated the act of reflection in a cursory manner. The candidates are attempting very difficult tasks and need to acknowledge the complexity of what they do rather than simply emerge from the process with a story of triumph and achievement. An act of reflection in this context is a difficult one and needs to be alive to the process not as a series of steps leading inevitably to a successful transformative piece (because many of them were not), but as an account of a process where whatever is gained is gained as much through error as through a "master plan" (they don't last long in any devising process). Nor should candidates be afraid to fix on the specifics rather than engaging only with the general. The listing of themes or characters, the summaries of content really should play little part in the oral presentation unless they are germane to the transformation.

Performance

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 9	10 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 20

Here the language of the theatre becomes a crucial factor and it is clear that this is not a language that all the candidates are entirely confident with.

Many of the performances were conceptually based and at times the “concept” rather overshadowed the performance leading to a stilted rather “head heavy” approach to the creative act of transformation. Those candidates who revelled in the physical expression of their piece and were less constrained by establishing parallel meanings generally communicated in a fresher and more vital way to the audience.

Lack of experience on stage was easily distinguishable just as the assurance of some candidates was, on two occasions in particular, quite breathtaking. There are simple things that candidates need to be aware of before they engage with this component: clarity of diction, ease of movement, avoidance of clichéd gesturing, rehearsal to the point where the material has been “lived with”.

Not all pieces were performed in front of a live audience and they should have been. Not only because this is mandated but because it provides a sense of occasion that candidates appreciate and it also reinforces them by offering a human response.

Again, design aspects of these performances can be rudimentary and for some very good reasons should be. To mention a couple: lighting, well there were obviously some ambitious lighting designers out there this session because some of the performances certainly tried to use lighting to rhetorical effect. Although an understandable impulse this should really be resisted. Generally the more complicated the light design, the less likely your inexperienced actor will find the light. A number of performances presented finely edged pools of light with the actor unfortunately speaking from a stranded position outside the pools. It is difficult to assess an actor’s performance if he/she is determined not to be illuminated and this can look to be the case if lighting is too concentrated.

Sets tended again to be often rather more ambitious than they needed to be, often appearing to reinforce the “concept” but not to complement the performance. The actor needs to act in relation to the set if it is there, otherwise it need not be there at all. Too often the actor was speaking from within various contrivances while contriving to ignore them. It is also not a good idea for candidates to put themselves on chairs or behind desks for too long as they very soon circumscribe themselves within their comfort zone and stop communicating.

At times the transformation of the original piece had been partial and this is a problem of degree which depends on the exercise of taste and discrimination on the part of the performer(s). There is no criterion applied to the exercise of these two qualities of awareness but when they go missing their absence is immediately felt.

The imposition of a style on the piece, an acting style, provided an interesting challenge for more than one of these performances. Once the candidate goes in that direction there may be an even more complex tasks to confront than the original transformation itself. The key to success is to internalize the role, whatever style might be adopted, so that the candidate is convincing on stage. Even Brecht needed the actor to inhabit the role first before he/she took that step out of it. The audience needs something to be alienated from. There were a couple of quasi-Brechtian approaches that were not sustained, the usual plethora of method acting, some rather effective Berkoff, and some that was verging on the surreal which Artaud might have been interested by. There was some dancing, even *Riverdance*, which enhanced the poetry when applied to Browning in an exhilarating manner. There was a fair bit of play with costume, some of it well done indeed, and mask work that could have been more effective had it been more sustained.

One thing that stood out in all the better pieces, and there were few pieces that were not at least interesting, were the convictions the candidates brought to their performance. This could rarely be faulted and made the watching of them an engrossing experience.

Standard level written tasks

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 16	17 - 19	20 - 25

Coursework: Personal Report and Critical Analysis

There are some issues with these two Assignments, both in terms of schools understanding what is required and with the breadth and relevance of the descriptors.

Assignment A: Personal Report

Schools are not all entirely clear about what the nature of the exercise is or is meant to be. In the planning stages of this course, it was perceived that this report would indicate both what the student had grasped of the practice of performance and what kind of personal growth had been experienced through the exercise. A number of otherwise good essays gave themselves over primarily to describing the process of deciding what to do about the play, and then to reporting at length what was done. In one case, very good work fell short of top marks because the candidates offered very little information about the role of the individual writing the report and indicated less about what had happened as a result of the experience. Descriptor B therefore proved a pitfall in that school whereas some weaker or more balanced reports were advantaged by addressing Descriptor B to some or to a substantial degree. Another weakness of these reports was the apparent lack of any plan, which eventuated in a hasty nod to personal experience in the final paragraph. Some reports were well written and lively; some wandered and appeared random. The candidates need to know that a shapely, coherent report is what is required here.

Assignment B: Critical Analysis

Critical approaches and methodology were not often in evidence. Texts were seldom cited and in only some schools was the demand for supporting textual detail met in any way. Topics were sometimes either too broad or oft repeated, causing one to wonder how much real investigation of the text occurred in the latter situation. Many “essays” were merely redescriptions of the play or a series of generalizations about the play.

There were a few properly focused, well-supported essays (employing direct textual reference). On the whole, schools would be well advised to look carefully at the descriptors for this exercise.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 14	15 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 35	36 - 41	42 - 50

There was a feeling shared by both examiners that too many candidates had not studied enough literature for this paper and some fears that many had tried to get by on a minimum of texts. The general treatment of the content and style of the works was not encouraging and there seemed to be too many essays that reflected not an exploration of the texts by the individual candidate but a formulaic reading and analysis of it by the class group.

Poetry when it was not reduced to narrative but considered as poetry was sometimes successfully treated in relation to the questions. There were a variety of poets: Coleridge, Donne, Atwood (described on too many occasions as a 19th century Canadian poet!), Browning, Clare, and (thankfully) Shakespeare.

The novel section usually attracted longer essays but not always more accomplished ones. Again there was quite a variety of texts used and some honest attempts to deal with the questions, question number 8 being a popular choice.

To run through the questions:

Question 1: Few candidates were able to make much of the poet as a “spokesperson for culture and society” though there were some attempts to make poor melancholy John Clare stand for his times.

Question 2: The “manner of treatment” was often difficult for candidates to grasp, so many of them fell back on content rather than form and thus surrendered the most difficult part of the question. Here candidates who knew the poems well enough to quote and do something critical with the quotation were in a better position to respond advisedly to the challenge of the question.

Question 3: This was predictably a popular question. With Browning and Coleridge some candidates were able to make the necessary connections but too many wrote about the poems as if they were stories, an easy mistake to make with a thematic question.

Question 4: Most candidates were able to point out stylistic features in the poems they chose to write about. With more than a few, such identifications were about as far as they got. The better candidates were able to show how style conditions our reception of the poem and our eventual understanding of it

Question 5: This was not a popular question although some did use *The Great Gatsby* to explore the question; a good choice of text in this context.

Question 6: The word “quintessential” may have thrown some candidates and few entered into any discussion of the proposition, being content to delineate relationships without finding their weight in the novel by comparing them to other things the novel might “be about”.

Question 7: This was something of a familiar question to apply to the novel, again Nick Carraway on Jay Gatsby and milieu was a popular choice. *Things Fall Apart* produced some uncertainty in the context of the question.

Question 8: Probably the most popular of the questions set, a great favourite for the devotees of Ms Esquivel and generally the candidates who attempted this gave it an effective treatment. The “power” was generally interpreted as the product of personality rather than political conditions, so the essays did tend to revolve around discussions of character - but many were detailed and, in a few cases, exhaustive.

The new paper which will not be of three hours duration will obviously change candidates’ pattern of response to the written paper but it cannot be too strongly stated that this is a literature paper and, as such, can only be adequately prepared for by serious and sustained study of literary texts. This is the part of the course that most completely intersects with language A1 SL and attention needs to be paid to the expectations that course places on candidates.

Conclusion

This has been a year of change for Text and performance and we will be facing a different exam format and some different assessment components from May 2010. The November ’09 session will be the last before the new syllabus is examined.

It is felt that the changes that the teachers who deliver this course have designed will more explicitly emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the subject in the assessment components and in the course that precedes them. There has also been a consciousness that whatever changes should happen an emphasis needs to be placed on sustaining and, if possible, enhancing the academic rigour of the course. The addition of a mandatory Shakespeare text is an obvious move in that direction.

There may still be some tuning to be done in the light of helpful and constructive comments at May Grade Award from Dr Hannah Tyson but there remains a lot of belief in this course, a tremendous enthusiasm for it on the part of teachers and students, and a real common interest in its development.