

## A LEVEL

*Examiners' report*

# **DRAMA AND THEATRE**

**H459**

For first teaching in 2016

## **H459/46 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

## Paper 46 series overview

The single Assessment Objective – *demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how drama and theatre is developed and performed* – is examined through how *The Crucible* is interpreted for performance to others by a director.

The play needed to be deconstructed, analysed, dismantled, exposed, explored, experimented with and interpreted before being shaped into a credible performance.

This requirement led to some exciting, innovative and unusual ideas for production. While it is not expected that each one of the four strands in the level descriptors grid will be in evidence in equal measure in both responses, there was credit for responses that recognised directing is a layered and often collaborative process.

It was expected that candidates would refer to acting and design as well as simply telling everyone what to do or simply slavishly follow the stage directions from the text. Costume, props and effects played a part in most responses. The use of contemporary technology to set the play in a modern context was occasionally well exploited.

A few candidates discussed budgets that a director might have or wish for. This was a relevant aspect of the directorial vision, as the reality of financing has to be addressed, though imaginary limitless resources were accepted as part of the vision.

The specification makes clear that the production process and theatrical practices should be part of the learning. While many candidates referred to Stanislavski, with occasional mentions of Artaud, there were few references to how the study of practitioners, dead or alive, had informed their ideas and experiments.

With their learning from the other AS and A Level components, research into performances, staging styles and dramatic exploration of the themes, there was an expectation of inspiration drawn and ideas applied from the work of practitioners; some they'd seen, some they'd actually studied.

There was rarely a sense that practical work had been undertaken on and around the text as part of the journey candidates had made. Sometimes it was superficial or simplistic. 'We used a Stanislavskian technique' showed neither knowledge nor understanding.

If that kind of sweeping generalisation was expanded with a sentence on what they understood about the 'what if..?' or the 'given circumstance', for example, then they demonstrated learning from a practitioner. Illustrations of processes and theories could be implicit, if explained.

In *The Crucible*, the influence of a variety of practitioners may legitimately be called into use to help in understanding how the play was created and works in performance. Where a range of techniques were used as devising and explorative tools, responses were more effective.

Some candidates had been prepared with generalised directorial responses, specified settings and political interpretations before knowing the wording of the questions. While that formulaic or pre-prepared response is understandable, it limits candidates' creativity and originality. Centres should not offer candidates ready-made directorial ideas, but help them work towards finding, exploring and presenting their own.

The understanding of how staging underpins a performance was generally well understood. Whether to use a proscenium arch, thrust, traverse or in-the-round layout was crucial to realising the vision. Staging was particularly important in a drama of such moving and profound emotion.

**What is a Director?**

- Has responsibility for an overall concept, direction, purpose, imagining, shaping, guiding
- Works with performers, designers (of costume, set, lighting, effects, props, staging), venues, stage management and box office
- Is often all things to all people in a production while being the boss!

Candidates often found inventive ways of introducing the extract vision (Q1) and the whole play vision (Q2) using different words and expressions. Some felt that copious background and/or biographical information on the play, Arthur Miller, first performances, McCarthyism and the 'Red-Scare', the HUAC, hysteria, crowd theory, Puritanism and the witch trials of Salem were needed. Only when such information was made relevant to addressing the question from the directorial viewpoint were they truly helpful.

Clearly the historical and social contexts are highly significant in this play – both the 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – but candidates needed to show how they affect a director's viewpoint in the production of the play to be more than interesting background.

A production of today will be unable to avoid an audience perception of the story and the characters within the post-truth, fake news and moralistic realignments of our world. The roles and perceptions of women, family loyalties and blood ties, adolescent hysteria and intolerance stretching beyond the dogma of religious fervour to psychological obsession and control are among the themes that form part of the response to this play in Q1 and/or Q2.

Higher ability candidates conveyed a sense of this without writing a history, philosophical or moral judgement essay and certainly didn't lose sight of the directorial aspect of bringing the text to life on a stage. Lower ability responses described a production that took the play at face value.

**Directorial focus**

The sole focus of this component is directorial. Examiners looked for any aspect of the director's function, including an overall dream of what a show would look like, the aim of conveying meaning and/or a message to an audience, staging, blocking, levels, proxemics, semiotics, set design, lighting, sound, effects, costume, props, stage furniture, genre and contexts.


The handwriting of a small minority of candidates presented something of a challenge for examiners and it was noted that several candidates opted to type their work, although most of the annotations needed in Q1 were handwritten. Centres may wish to give thought in future sessions to advising candidates on handwriting or word processing.


**Most successful approaches**


- Considered the directorial purpose is to convey meaning to an audience.
- Frequently used examples from the play to support discussion and ideas.
- Demonstrated learning from directorial practices and processes, methods, techniques and applied them.
- Commanded the language of drama and theatre knowledgeably and with understanding.

**Least successful approaches**

- Discussed text as a piece of literature rather than as a blueprint for live performance.
- Began both responses with identical wording and explanation.
- Produced very few annotations to the extract in Q1 or simply repeated the given stage directions.
- Relied solely on the Q1 extract to provide material for the Q2 response.

	<b>AfL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Besides reading and discussing the play text, work through a number of drama exercises and style, exclusively from the directorial viewpoint.</li> <li>* Use techniques and ideas from Brecht, Stanislavski, Boal, Artaud, Grotowski, Berkoff, Katie Mitchell in turn to interpret a particular section.</li> <li>* Encourage students to direct their peers in that particular sections and try them out in front of an audience.</li> </ul>
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	<b>OCR support</b>	<p>The OCR resources for this component and for <i>The Crucible</i> in particular are invaluable <a href="https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/delivery-guide/component-dt041-deconstructing-texts-for-performance-4148/delivery-guide-dtdq004-deconstructing-texts-for-performance">https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/delivery-guide/component-dt041-deconstructing-texts-for-performance-4148/delivery-guide-dtdq004-deconstructing-texts-for-performance</a></p>
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	<b>Resources</b>	<p>a) Useful introductory to the work of contemporary stage director Katie Mitchell <a href="https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-katie-mitchells-theatre">https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-katie-mitchells-theatre</a></p> <p>b) <i>The Guardian</i> on <i>The Crucible</i>: 'the perfect play for our post-truth times' <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/feb/14/the-crucible-the-perfect-play-for-our-post-truth-times">https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/feb/14/the-crucible-the-perfect-play-for-our-post-truth-times</a></p>
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## Question 1

- 1 As a director, describe and justify your vision for directing this extract to show its significance within the play as a whole, and annotate how you would bring this out. [30]

This question is not in two parts – the explanation and the annotations are marked holistically. Annotations should generally support and expand on the account of the vision written about as the opening.

Some candidates felt that the single page of lines offered before the extract was a limit to their account. It is not. They may continue on the extra pages after the extract, if they wish.

The question asks for a description and a justification of the directorial vision. It requires a view on its significance within the play. The annotations should demonstrate how the vision would be brought to life on stage – page to stage.

If examiners felt as they read the response that they could visualise the section on stage, that it worked, that it achieved the artistic intentions and that it was a series of credible ideas, then they credited responses accordingly. How directors' creative and artistic choices influence how meaning is communicated should be on show in this response.

Miller's own notes on his play's historical accuracy should have been studied and taken account of. Equally, his long chorus/extended stage directions and directorial points, his lengthy expositions and his psychological profiles should not be ignored.

Annotations took many forms. Some candidates drew lines across page from text to note, some drew thumbnail sketches of blocks, levels, stage layout or even a costume while others compartmentalised ideas into voice, tone, physicality, proxemics and intention. Some saw annotations as space to confine themselves to the actors' perspectives. A minority used annotations to mention influences from practitioners they'd studied.

A few candidates highlighted themes, characters or specific instructions with different colours. Unfortunately the scripts are scanned in black and white, so it is not a helpful practice.

### Exemplar 1

In this scene in act 3, I would direct the actors to consider the theme of fear and the widespread effect ~~this~~ this has on characters abilities to think clearly, often forgetting their integrity. For example even the righteous Elizabeth lies in fear of her husband's reputation and

Mary's fear of the mass manipulation of the girls causes her to join them to save herself. This idea of fear is significant in the play as a whole as it is the driving force of actions and Miller makes a point about how fear can lead to hysteria causing the collapse of seemingly ordered systems reflecting the way hysteria today can have that effect, such as the fear of immigrants.

To direct this theme I would use highly naturalistic acting in a small in the round theatre space so as the audience are up close and intimate, literally able to smell the fear through the stench of alcohol in the air as characters such as Giles could have been drinking to calm his fear. The still physicality of Abigail such as upright posture only eyes moving, when not pretending to see Mary's spirit would emphasise her control over the situation, creating fear and mass hysteria through her subtle manipulation. (see extra page).

Overall, I feel that this extract has significance in the play as a whole as it emphasises the mass fear caused by Abigail's manipulation and power she has in the room which should be emphasised by the proxemics in the 'in the round' staging form'. The turning point that



Overall, I feel that this extract has significance in the play as a whole as it emphasises the mass fear caused by Abigail's manipulation and power she has in the room which should be emphasised by the proxemics in the 'in the round' staging form'. The turning point that really evokes Abigail's wrath should be when Elizabeth leaves the room as she should notice the smile that John gives to Elizabeth to show his appreciation of her love (lying to protect him). Abi still can't accept that John is not hers even though John tried to convince her of it in act 1 when he was "alone with her".

This is an example of a response opening which avoids any background or historical context and gets straight into addressing the question.

It deals with the significance of the scene quickly and discusses the fear theme, before suggesting some actions for a director to take. This includes offering a smell of alcohol for the audience which is unusual but the reason has a justification.

On the continuation pages, the response raises the matter of proxemics in an in-the-round setting. This is neither expanded nor given much detail, but is a valid point and shows some evidence of understanding about staging and the audience.

The exemplar page finishes with the start of a discussion about relationships and characters, which has an air of narrative about it. The remainder is much the same and it finished (including annotations) near top of L4.

Overall it is confident, knowledgeable about how the play is constructed and can be performed and how directorial and artistic choices can influence the communication of meaning.

## Exemplar 2

DANFORTH.

HALE.

ABIGAIL.

DANFORTH.

MERCY LEWIS [pointing].

DANFORTH [looking up].

ABIGAIL.

PROCTOR.

40

45

50

55

60

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70

75

Aales coherent attempt to expose ~~at~~ Abigail, shown through pointing at her whilst looking directly at Danforth in the eyes should be dramatically interrupted by Abi's loud, high pitched scream showing her ability to manipulate the situation.

→ Abigails anger should intensify at this moment as she knows she has fully lost John as Elizabeth showed her act of love proving her not to be the "cold, snivelling woman she was first described to be". This anger causes more manipulation shown through her exaggerated movement eg pointing with wide eyes an open mouth whilst moving backwards in to the centre of the in the round space, thus demanding the most status and evoking excitement from the rest of the girls who join her pretend fear.

This is the second page of annotations, from the same candidate as Exemplar 1. It is a general response that focuses on a few of the chief aspects of the text, rather than trying to determine action to cover every single line or stage direction.

The second aspect picking up on anger develops directorial advice with some comprehensive detail so that it can easily be imagined being performed.

Additionally it refers to status and starts the process of discussing character and audience perceptions, particularly as the tragedy of Proctor's imminent death comes ever closer.

The remainder of the annotations continued in the same style. Sometimes annotations peter out towards the end either through lack of time or being keen to move to the next question.

This is but one way of annotating. See the points above about how some candidates do them in different ways. What matters is that they should support the earlier text and cumulatively build into a consideration on the level descriptors.

## Question 2

- 2 As a director, explain and justify how you could stage a performance of *The Crucible* using both traditional and contemporary techniques. [30]

This play is very much of the time it was written and first staged but deals with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so the question was generally interpreted as how to produce it to appeal to a contemporary audience with its historic concerns about religion and all the themes listed above.

Candidates needed to address an explanation and a justification and both traditional and contemporary techniques. Explanation was sometimes more readily forthcoming than justification.

Some arrived at a production that encompassed both traditional and contemporary techniques (particularly demonstrating the poorer technology of the 1950s compared with today's). Others suggested two entirely separate productions, a traditional one and a contemporary one. Both approaches were equally valid.

Q2 did not require coverage of every single section in the play but was addressed when candidates selected scenes and sections they felt were important to demonstrate their overall directorial vision.

The angle of the contemporary production took shape over the post-truth, fake news in which we live now, over the role and perception of women, family loyalties, adolescent hysteria and an intolerance that stretched beyond the purely religious to psychological obsession.

## Exemplar 3

In order to stage a traditional / contemporary version of *The Crucible*, as a director there are several things I would have kept true to the text and true to the modernised performance of that text. Firstly, I would like to keep the costumes true to that era.

cloth tunics and headscarfs for women to emphasise my vision in creating a society that obeys certain laws. Also Therefore, the costumes will give the audience a further insight into the story of Salem and Witchcraft as well as the Puritan lifestyle. Furthermore, this will ~~partly~~ again emphasise the juxtaposition created between Abigail and the Puritan religion as she takes her headscarf off at times when she's driven by her lust for freedom & recklessness. In terms of ~~creating~~ embedding contemporary elements, I would like the stage to be a in the round stage. Not only is this a more modernised form of staging but it assists the Brechtian style I wish to go for as audience members will be involved with the performance. Resembling ~~this~~ This resembles the size of the small ~~city~~ village of Salem, ~~and~~ also suggesting how word gets around so easily, but ~~also gives the audience further insight to~~ also gives the audience again more insight as they're apart of the village. and everything that goes ~~on~~ ~~was~~ went on during ~~the~~ the 1960's in Salem. Again, linking back to traditionality, the ~~stage~~ stage design itself should be kept true to the text. I would have an old ~~set~~ set of furniture including tables and chairs to ~~on~~ the create a 1960's household. However, for scenes where it's outdoors, I would ~~replace~~ direct the replacement of furniture to instead be props such as a ~~or~~ traditional water bucket or Halls Parris' Bible for example.

Again relating *The Crucible* to a hybrid performance of traditional and contemporary styles. I would have surveillance cameras placed around the room and stage to further the feeling of always being watched as Puritans derive from the fact that they're the most important Christians and that God is always watching. Hence why they go to church every moment they can, and why Proctor is ~~was~~ looked upon and judged for not. Although this method of adding cameras into the performance is therefore makes the play appear futuristic. It could be taken in the way that the audience are taken back to 1969 and this historical moment in time as the *Crucible* is based off of Miller's research in *Witchcraft and Salem*, as well as the court proceedings and transcripts that took place during the 1950's - 1960's.

This was the whole response for Q2 and after a general statement of intent, begins with costume. Many responses did the same, as perhaps that is the most obvious visible differential between contemporary and the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and/or the 1950s.

The point about Puritanism and her headscarf is well made and touches on the need to grasp how contexts can affect the interpretation of the play.

The candidate wishes for a Brechtian style on a round stage and the idea of close proximity of audience to action is an effective one, both explaining and justifying a point of view. There is confusion over the 1960s and earlier times – the same error appeared in Q1 by this candidate, but it could have been argued that a production in any period may be valid as the issues are timeless.

This candidate's solution to the traditional/contemporary aspect of the question is to come up with 'a hybrid performance' and the introduction of surveillance cameras is both novel and reasonably well justified. A number of other candidates referenced *The Handmaid's Tale* and other futuristic, dystopian worlds to compare with a modern Salem.

Despite referring to the 1960s, the candidate has some grasp of different times and values, a clear reference to how artistic choices influence meaning and how this text has been constructed. It lacks a sense of the broad sweep of the play, of characters and their reactions under pressure and many examples of theatrical practices and processes being deployed.

Overall it is clear, Level 3.

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