



2009 Theatre Studies GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

It was apparent that most students had followed the guidelines of the monologue performance examination. It was also evident that the number of students making ill-considered choices regarding monologue selection and contextualisation is diminishing. The monologue task is based on creative, expressive and imaginative theatrical choices; it is not a task that demands the reconstruction of the real world of the play or chosen context in its entirety. Students should make judicious choices regarding how the use of stagecraft such as set items and properties will enhance their performance. Students are responsible for bringing all stagecraft items in and out of the assessment room without assistance and this should occur within the allotted time. Teachers should note that it is not appropriate to ask for a room change because a student is using furniture that is too heavy or if there are too many individual pieces.

Most students were aware of the limitations placed on the use of weapons and hazardous materials, as stipulated in the guidelines. The use of breaking glass, stage blood, other liquids or anything that may damage carpet or furniture is often not necessary, can be hazardous and is generally not advised. Liquids and aerosol sprays are not forbidden, but there is a high expectation that the use of liquids and aerosol sprays will be limited, highly controlled and very well rehearsed. If in any doubt whatsoever, liquids should be avoided.

Some students planned to stand or jump on furniture or, in some instances, to throw furniture. Students should be aware that venues are hired spaces. When in doubt, or if there are particular requirements, students should bring their own furniture. In some instances the furniture supplied, one table and two chairs, is not designed to be stood upon and in no circumstances should the furniture or the floor be damaged. The throwing of items is advised against as such actions may cause injury.

Each assessment room has a power point outlet for the use of electrical equipment such as audio devices. However, it is the responsibility of the student to plan the use of such equipment beforehand, including considering whether to bring batteries and/or an extension cord depending on where in the room the power point is situated. It is also advisable for students to check the sound level of audio equipment before commencing their performance.

While it is not mandated that students are to adhere to the stage directions in the monologue, they are advised to consider them in their interpretation; often stage directions provide additional contextual information about the intentions of the playwright and the intended meaning of the playscript.

There appeared to be a trend this year of students exceeding the 100-word limit for the Statement of Intention. Students should provide a brief indication of their directorial choices and do so within the word limit.

Areas of strength and weakness

Stronger performances were generally characterised by:

- a thorough knowledge of the monologue, associated scene and the play as a whole
- a high level of direct or indirect research and preparation
- a strong and consistent directorial vision
- a strong correlation between the interpretation of the monologue and its contexts, including those within the scene and the greater play
- a high level of understanding of subtext and the intended meanings of the playwright
- consistent and creative application of theatrical style(s)
- mastery of the language as appropriate to the monologue and the greater world of the play
- a clear awareness of implied time, place and person(s)
- accomplished performance skills, including the use of verbal and nonverbal expressive skills
- well-chosen and effectively applied stagecraft other than acting, dramaturgy and direction
- highly evident and effective use of focus and space
- an understanding of, and an ability to manipulate, theatrical tension and timing.

Weaker performances were generally characterised by:

- an incomplete, limited or poor knowledge of the monologue
- a poor perception of the world of the character within the context of the scene and the play as a whole
- little direct or indirect evidence of research or preparation
- little evidence of a consolidated directorial vision



- poor or inappropriate contextual choices
- concentration on text and literal meaning, with minimal reference to subtext, context or the intended meanings of the playwright
- limited use and application of theatrical style(s)
- poor understanding and/or application of the language in the monologue
- limited physicalisation of the character
- peripheral or irrelevant application of props, set items, costume and/or make-up
- a lack of awareness of implied time, place and/or person(s)
- limited manipulation of the performance space
- a poor understanding of, and inability to manipulate, the focus of the audience and the performer
- a poor understanding of, and inability to manipulate, theatrical tension and timing.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

To achieve full marks for criterion 1, as well as memorising the lines of the script and enacting the text, students were required to make directorial choices, select and apply a theatrical style(s), choose and apply stagecraft other than acting and create an appropriate context for the performance. This first criterion is quantitative rather than qualitative. That is, it asks the question whether and to what extent the student met the requirements of the task, rather than considering how well the monologue was performed. Approximately 11 per cent of students did not receive full marks for the first criterion. It appears that memorisation of lines and contextual choices were primary contributing factors in most cases.

Students should note that all assessment criteria have equal weighting and they should ensure that their performance meets each criterion. It was evident that some students paid little attention to the use and application of theatrical style(s) (criterion 4) and were unaware of the implied time, place and persons within the monologue and associated scene (criterion 2). It should also be noted that students who scored highly on criterion 2 created and conveyed highly appropriate contextual choices. Contextual choices as conveyed in the performance should be informed by the monologue, the associated scene and the greater world of the play. The combination of 'focus' and 'space' in criterion 7 appears to cause confusion for some students. Focus relates to the ability of a performer to portray and maintain a characterisation, plus the ability to focus an audience on aspects of a performance. One way of focusing the audience's attention is by manipulating the performance space. A characteristic of stronger performances was an intentional and highly effective manipulation of focus and space.

The Monologues

Number	Monologue Chosen	% of students
1	Martha	16
2	George	5
3	Sergeant Major	7
4	Mother Courage	4
5	Teiresias	4
6	Cassandra	11
7	Richard	7
8	Mary O'Donnell	14
9	The Stepdaughter	12
10	Moon	7
11	Prologue and Epilogue	10
12	Chorus	3

It was evident that some monologues attracted more students than others. Following the trend of recent years, the Shakespearean monologue was the least popular. Overall, contemporary monologues tended to be more popular than historic choices. Martha and Mary O'Donnell were the most popular female characters. The male characters, Sergeant Major, Richard and Moon, each attracted similar numbers of students. The Prologue and Epilogue monologue from Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* was a popular gender-neutral choice.

It was noted that an increasing number of students added stage business and action before the delivery of the spoken lines of their monologue. Some students continued with action and business after they had concluded the verbal delivery of their prescribed text. Such choices are to be encouraged as this can assist students to establish and maintain a



context. However, it should be noted by teachers and students that it is not within the conventions of this task to add any lines of dialogue to the performance.

As noted in previous Assessment Reports, along with new choices, monologues from previous years will be reused. This practice may assist teachers to become familiar with the plays and characters. Cutting and pasting passages allows students to address the challenge of shifts in time, persons and places that this requires. However, this can add levels of complexity and confusion. Some students this year performed sections that were designated as 'omitted' in the examination supplement of the *VCAA Bulletin* or did not perform all of the required lines of dialogue. Students and teachers should be careful of depending on conduits such as professional development and student workshop programs for information. Although these providers do an excellent job and work very hard to be as exact as possible, they are not, and do not claim to be, infallible, nor do they offer information for and on behalf of the VCAA. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the monologues studied by their students and any other information such as the scene are the versions published in the examination supplement of the *VCAA Bulletin* and any subsequent notices. Monologues should always be sourced directly from the plays and never from a secondary source, which may be subject to some error.

Martha, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee

This character was the most popular choice this year. It offered a number of challenges which stronger students were able to meet. These included conveying a sense of the age of the character and her social background, the ability to convey implied person and the era, knowledge of context and the multiple levels of subtext. Weaker performances tended to rely on the use of accent without any depth of characterisation, a stereotypical portrayal of Martha's inebriated state, overplaying the characterisation and/or recontextualising the monologue, which added an extra layer of meaning that was confusing and/or not appropriate.

George, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee

This monologue was taken from the same play as the character of Martha and offered similar challenges and pitfalls. Again the stronger students were able to masterfully manipulate elements such as implied person, the contextual background of the monologue, the era in which the events took place and the age and social status of the character. Weaker students tended to overly rely on the use of a non-descript American accent and the superficial application of costume and make-up. Another characteristic of weaker performances was rushed vocal delivery, avoiding the subtext of the piece.

Sergeant Major, *Oh What a Lovely War* by Charles Chilton and Joan Littlewood

Many of the stronger students who chose this character appeared to make creative choices in regard to its presentation. Their performances were well researched, entertaining and satirical, and picked up on the double meanings in the text. They were also characterised by an imaginative use of stagecraft and stage business. The weaker performances tended to be little more than a list of commands with some accompanying actions. Such performances tended to ignore or were not able to capture the subtleties of the piece.

Mother Courage, *Mother Courage* by Bertolt Brecht

Most students who performed this character attempted to convey at least some of the conventions of Brecht's Epic Theatre. The stronger performances tended to be steeped in the associated theatrical style and its conventions. The more accomplished performances also conveyed a high level of understanding of the multiple levels of meaning in the text and associated imagery and iconography. Weaker performances were characterised by inappropriate or clichéd contextual choices, with limited understanding of and ability to convey implied time, person and place.

Teiresias, *Oedipus Rex/King Oedipus* by Sophocles

Most students who performed this character appeared to understand his function in the play and conveyed a sense of the prophetic nature of the character either literally or symbolically. Many students chose to wear a costume suggestive of that worn in traditional performances of Greek tragedy. However, some appropriately contemporised the character, for instance, wearing dark glasses to symbolise his blindness. In the stronger performances there was clear and consistent evidence of research into the play, its world and characters as well as being steeped in appropriate theatrical style(s). Weaker performances tended generally to be a perfunctory recitation of the lines with little apparent understanding of what was at stake for the character and other essential contextual information.

Cassandra, *Women of Troy* by Euripides

This character was another popular choice. Like performances of Teiresias, stronger performances conveyed a very high level of understanding of the contextual background of the character and the theatrical style(s) of the play. Stronger performances also symbolically made connections to the supernatural and were characterised by a thorough evocation



of the subtext of the monologue and its associated scene. Weaker performances tend to overly rely on particular aspects of the character at the expense of others, such as Cassandra being a bride or being mentally unstable. It was noted that some students made inappropriate contextual choices for this monologue which, for the most part, tended to be ill-informed and/or confused.

Richard, *Zigzag Street* by Philip Dean, adapted from the novel by Nick Earls

Many students who performed this monologue tended to struggle with or ignore its comedic qualities. Weaker students tended to overplay the character and such performances were often characterised by being overly serious with a limited understanding of the theatrical style and the greater world of the play. Most students evoked the setting appropriately through stagecraft and stage business. However, weaker students tended to overly rely on props and set items, often creating accompanying stage business which tended to detract from rather than enhance the meanings of the text. Stronger performers were able to dextrously convey the comic elements of the text and were able to convey the associated qualities of the language.

Mary O'Donnell, *Bombshells* by Joanna Murray-Smith

This was a very popular character with a notable number of boys choosing to perform this monologue. Most students captured to some extent the comical, satirical and energetic qualities inherent in the text. Many of the stronger performances conveyed a high level of understanding of the character and her world, often to appropriate comical effect. Such performances were also characterised by song and dance routines which amusingly conveyed the limited acting ability of the Mary O'Donnell character. Weaker performances tended to miss the comic timing and highly ironic nature of the piece and tended to overly rely on the application of props, make-up and costume items.

The Stepdughter, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello

While a significant number of students chose this monologue, few managed to convey a high level of understanding of the greater world of the play. Weaker students appeared to base their interpretation on the contents of the monologue and the accompanying scene rather than on the play as a whole. Stronger performances effectively recreated the world of the play and conveyed a strong sense of the character and her function within it. Weaker performers tended to convey a limited understanding of the play-within-a-play structure and created a superficial character portrayal with little apparent knowledge of the subtext of the monologue.

Moon, *The Real Inspector Hound* by Tom Stoppard

It was noted that many of those students who chose this character did not fully explore the potential to create imaginative and creative stage business to accompany the dialogue. Many students did not explore the theatrical style(s) of the text sufficiently. Stronger performances appropriately included some highly comical nonverbal language, associated actions and use of space. Such performances were also often characterised by a high level of understanding of the social mores and theatre etiquette parodied in the play. Weaker performances tended to rush through the lines with little embellishment to the performance of accompanying stage business and use of appropriate stagecraft.

Prologue and Epilogue, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* by Bertolt Brecht

This gender-neutral character was a popular choice. Most students attempted to convey at least some of the qualities of Brecht's Epic Theatre and also the shift in time between the start and end of the play. Stronger performances were highly symbolic and stylised, depicting an accomplished understanding of the theatrical style(s), plot and themes of the play. Weaker performances tended to have limited ideas; often these performances were characterised by an overreliance on stage business, costume, props and set items. Timing and rhythm of the language was an important aspect of the delivery of this monologue and was a determiner between an effective and less effective performance.

Chorus, *Henry the Fifth* by William Shakespeare

This was the least popular choice this year. This was disappointing given that many students who attempted this monologue appropriately conveyed its essential qualities, including its storytelling style, it being an historical account and the atmosphere Shakespeare intended to be conveyed to the audience. As it was a Shakespearean text, effective delivery of the language was a challenge and something which characterised the stronger performances. Stronger performers also conveyed a clear understanding of the play and the significance of the monologue within it. In contrast, weaker performers demonstrated a very limited understanding of the text beyond the contents of the monologue. While classic texts such as those by Shakespeare and the Ancients tend to lend themselves to recontextualisation, it was noted that with this monologue some students made inappropriate contextual choices which added little to the meaning of the text and in many instances detracted from the playwright's intentions.