

FACTFILE: GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

STARTING POINTS – SECTION B: DRAMA 1900 – PRESENT



Section B: The Study of Drama 1900 – Present

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03 and A05.

A01: Textual Knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of the selected play.

This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A02: Dramatic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse the playwright's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in drama. This means identifying dramatic methods and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing dramatic methods – advice to teachers and students:

As this section is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail which can be provided in the time available. Every play has its memorable phrases which come to mind when writing, but it is anticipated that the larger-scale features of characterization, structure, language and staging will be most useful in constructing a relevant response in the time available.



Section B: The Study of Drama 1900 – Present

A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received.

Contextual information offered should be relevant to the question. Contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

A05: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the text, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument. This AO is the driver of Unit AS 1: Section B and is of primary importance.

A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be

- used with understanding
- incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion
- not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion
- properly acknowledged.

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.



Friel: Translations

A02: Dramatic methods

A few general features:

- The main dramatic device of the play is that in a play performed in English, some of the characters are at times understood by the audience to be speaking in Irish
- The stage set varies little but tells us much about the nature of life in Baile Beag
- Characterization through the use of language e.g. Hugh, Yolland, Jimmy Jack
- Use of contrast e.g. between Lancey and Yolland

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text and context in a response.

- Social and historical context: Ireland in the early nineteenth century
- The significance of the Irish language in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
- Relationship between colonizer and colonized



Beckett: Waiting for Godot

A02: Dramatic methods

A few general features:

- Circular or static conversations which 'go nowhere'
- Repetition of language without explanation or illumination
- Bipartite structure of the play
- Deliberately minimalist staging

A03: Contexts

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- Literary context, e.g. Absurdist Drama or tragi-comedy
- Twentieth-century philosophical ideas about man's place in a godless universe



Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire

A02: Dramatic methods

A few general features:

- Staging: specific scenes where music or other sound effects, lighting or costume is purposefully employed e.g. Scene Ten where many staging devices are employed
- Structure: rising tension in interactions between Stanley and Blanche
- Use of contrast in the presentation of the characters of Blanche and Stella
- Use of imagery in characterization e.g. the shimmering imagery Blanche uses to convey her desperation at the fading of her beauty

A03: Contexts

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- Social class in southern American states
- Position of women in the society depicted in the play
- Williams's own life



Miller: The Crucible

A02: Dramatic methods

A few general features:

- Character development – changing attitude of Rev. Hale towards the witchcraft investigation across four Acts
- Apocalyptic imagery e.g. in expression of Proctor's fury when Elizabeth is taken away
- Use of expanded stage directions and even short essays by Miller to throw light on characters and action

A03: Contexts

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- Miller's own life, e.g. McCarthyism in America
- Seventeenth-century witchcraft
- Puritan New England in the seventeenth-century



Stewart: Men Should Weep

A02: Dramatic methods

A few general features:

- Use of contrast e.g. between the sisters Maggie and Lily in their attitude to men, or between the younger and older generations in their aspirations
- Use of a wide range of staging devices to suggest poverty
- Use of language: dialect throughout, but also vivid imagery and observed details

A03: Contexts

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- Poverty and slum housing in 1930s Glasgow
- Social and sexual inequality in early twentieth century Scotland



Bolt: A Man for All Seasons

A02: Dramatic methods

A few general features:

- Variety in the scenes in which More is presented (with the King, at the trial, domestic) in order to give a rounded picture of the man which is entertaining in dramatic terms
- Use of the Common Man for entertainment, exposition and commentary
- Two part structure with Act Two presenting More's fall
- Language combining sixteenth-century and modern-day diction

A03: Contexts

This information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text and context in a response.

- Twenty-first century audience reactions e.g. to individual's attempt to resist the state
- Historical context of Sir Thomas More; his life and times
- Literary context of Historical Drama

