

GCSE

Drama Example Materials

Candidate One

Edexcel
GCSE 2009
Unit 2: Exploring Play Texts

Documentary Response: Unit 2

CANDIDATE ONE: (949 words)

We began the workshop by reading through and sectioning the whole play giving a title to each section. This idea comes from Stanislavski who thought that actors need to know the play well and found that this was an effective method.

When we looked at the first scene we used Artaud and Berkoffian approaches to interpret the lines and the relationship between the two sisters. We experimented with different ideas and I liked how two of the others showed the differences between them. One stood and turned away so she didn't have to look at Antigone. She added thoughts to her lines to say their brother would have understood why she couldn't bury him, using casual gestures and voice to try and put Antigone off. Macy stayed on the ground as if she was actually burying Polynices while they talked and used a deep voice that was paced a bit like a robot. It was as if they weren't even in the same place to show how different they were. Then we worked on using a speech in different styles. The other group used an Artaud idea to show the feelings through just voices. We had to close our eyes and they were all round us – it was really frightening because it began more calmly then changed to screaming, wrenching sounds then a big explosion. It was like hearing everyone in the city falling and dying. We used some of this idea when we had to apply what we had done into a group piece at the end of the lesson because we wanted the feeling of fear.

As a class we then looked at the play as a whole dividing the plot summary into sections. We were split into pairs and each was assigned to one section. Macy and I had to summarise out section with 2 or 3 still images and to bring them to life with dialogue. This led to an overview of the whole play firstly it was a lot more interesting than just reading it through, secondly it was a lot more memorable way of keeping the story sunk in as some did find the script boring. We got to use a Stanislavski technique here because we got to inhabit the character and their objectives.

One exercise really enjoyed was the conscience alley. We focused on one character and came up with different thoughts and ideas about what they were going through at a specific point in time. We formed two lines and one of us was Antigone on her journey to bury her brother. As she walked past each person had to comment on how she could be feeling eg 'Should I turn back now?' and 'My brother will appreciate this and he will finally get to rest in peace.' I think this really helped us to use the Stanislavski technique to play Antigone but also for the chorus to understand the conflicts and different emotions running through the character's head. My group then used this idea but we wanted to add lines from the play said by other characters as if what they had said echoed in her mind as she went to carry out her task. Another group did it very differently – they used movement and space in such a creative way that we could imagine the turmoil in Antigone's mind. Polina ran from them and held on to the ones that were supporting her while the others tried to pull her away. Their voices really showed the frantic feelings she was hiding – all shouting at once with some silent moments when she paused between one side and another.

We did many exercises in the Antigone workshop. Another one involved role play

between the guards when they found the buried body of Polynices. We took time to create a scene in which the problems in the play can be seen that arose between the guards such as who should have been watching when the body was part buried and who is the one to tell Creon. It is important to improvise off text scene whilst exploring a play because it can really help you understand the play to a better standard. It made it easier to understand why they wouldn't get involved with Antigone and how they were careful to obey Creon's orders because he was the one with power.

This exercise helped our work on the speech by the unlucky guard telling Creon about the attempted burial. We used frozen images and cross cutting when we pictured the two guards protecting themselves from a sandstorm behind rocks and we cross cut from the guards to Antigone burying her brother. What I liked about this piece was that we had two parts of the scene where we cross cut from one to the other and then we slowly joined them together as the guards see Antigone in the act. We also used slow motion when we capture Antigone which we did for dramatic effect. I found this experience of exploring the play, discovering the characters and their relationships and the dynamic power of the play really fulfilling. Greek tragedy is different yet exciting and I have learnt a great amount because you just don't learn about the play but you learn about the different techniques they used and the staging even though we have other methods and ways of performing them nowadays. I felt overall that the play is all about the struggle for power. About how people hold on to it when they have it and how others are desperate to have a grasp of it. All in all, learning about Antigone has been a great experience.

Moderator's Comments on Documentary Evidence Unit 2: Antigone

Note to centres: The Moderator commentary is to support centres. Teacher-Assessors are not expected to replicate in this level of detail.

CANDIDATE ONE

The candidate achieved Level 2 with elements of Level 1, .eg making the connection between their own experience of exploring the text using modern approaches and the contrast with classical Greek Theatre. There was also evidence of an understanding of different practitioners and how their theories informed the set tasks of the exploration although the reference to Stanislavski at the beginning was tokenistic.

Links were made between the explored extracts and the whole play eg the concluding paragraph 'Each task brought out more ideas' and the Forum Theatre exercise which broadened her view of Creon's role in the play demonstrating a growing awareness of the playtext as a coherent whole.

Explanations of how the use of strategies, elements and medium enhanced understanding were excellent with some outstanding aspects eg. use of the conscience alley exercise to inform an on-text development of Antigone's role. The description of the progression from the exercise to the inclusion of lines from the text to express Antigone's turmoil in both groups was excellent.

The description of working in a pair to show a section of the play through still images was brief but clearly linked to an understanding of the task's context. Descriptions of group tasks were excellent eg the description of the scene between the guards finding Antigone breaking the law, which showed an excellent juxtaposition of strategies, elements and the drama medium. More about the candidate's own ideas and experience might have lifted this to meet Level 1 criteria.

Unit 2 Response to Live Theatre

CANDIDATE ONE

The Good Soul of Szechuan (2220 words)

I went to see the play 'The Good Soul of Szechuan', a Bertolt Brecht play about Shen Te, a prostitute from Szechuan, who gets rewarded by gods who are looking for any remaining 'good' people' in the world. Her reward is a tobacco shop so she won't have to be a prostitute any more. However as the area was so poverty stricken all kinds of people came to her for help and support. The play is about her struggle to remain 'good' and the introduction of her 'cousin' who she pretends to be so she can get her way, which she is unable to do as 'good' Shen Te, and therefore survive.

The theatre was quite small and intimate so that you felt that you were someone living in Szechuan, simply looking onto the situation rather intrusively and rudely instead of being inside the situation.

One of the ways the director made us feel this way was through the set which looked like the inside of a cement factory, with bare wood for the walls, ceiling and floor, bags of cement around and actual machinery around the audience. There was a smell like a workshop. The lights were harsh neon lights and the chairs were just plastic ones, with nothing added for comfort. This made me feel quite uneasy and as though I almost wasn't welcome as most other theatres will lure you in with comfortable seats, pleasant lighting and decoration. However, in this theatre it felt like luring people in wasn't really the object and that they would prefer to let you think about the surroundings you are in rather than be pampered, as the play was about people living in poverty, so we were made to suffer as they do. I think the director chose to do this because it was thought provoking and Brecht's intention for his plays was to make us think.

In addition, the audience were made to enter the theatre by walking across the stage to get to their seats, which immediately created a quite surreal and disconcerting feel, especially as later people had to walk through the actors on stage. In the opening sequence, the actors walked around the stage, acting out the duties required in a cement factory, but very slowly and drone-like and they followed set paths repeating the actions over and over again which gave the feel that they had turned into the machinery. This gave the feel of a society which completely revolved around work that was uninteresting but that they had to do because they had no other choice. It also gives the feel that they are being controlled and that they don't have any control over their own life. Also as they carried on doing this for a very long time it made me feel quite impatient and out of control as there was no way of telling when they would start the play. It meant the audience got bored and distracted, talking to each other as though it hadn't started yet, ignoring what was happening on stage until something more interesting happened. It was quite unusual as even though the actors were on stage no one was really paying them much attention and the audience were the livelier ones.

One of my favourite characters in the play was Wang, the water-seller who in some aspects of the play I felt was like a chorus, for example in the beginning he told us about some general background information, in relation to what was going on and where we were at in this era and the influence of capitalism.

When the audience first saw him was in the opening sequence in the cement factory the first noticeable thing about him was the erratic speed at which he moved, rushing into the scene, which was dull and lifeless before, and then making barely any movement for a while after that. This drew attention to him and created a very interesting contrast while the factory workers seemed extremely controlled. Wang seemed to be the complete opposite by being very uncontrolled or appearing to have no control whatsoever. His movements were harsh and unforgiving, sometimes purposely banging himself into the lockers and often hitting himself as punishment for something he'd done. He moved his arms, sometimes quite close to his body, hands right near his face, looking as though he had a disability but sometimes they were out wide, always very expressive. He seemed rather eccentric and strange, full of energy and unsure what to do with it. Another effective technique he used was the use of different volumes and pitch in his voice, sometimes seemingly randomly screaming out a word. This unsettled the audience, created tension and gave a rather nervous energy to the performance when he did it. His jerky movements also gave a sense of unease to the audience however you ended up feeling slightly sympathetic towards him as, in his extreme poverty that was the worst in the whole play, he seemed the most honest and least corrupted other than Shen Te. Also the way he said things and his language were quite in contrast to everyone else as often he spoke very quickly, in an almost schoolboy lisp, and often louder than needed. In the raining scene Wang acts almost deliriously, moving around looking up at the rain and shouting viciously at the audience and stressing the expletive 'Who will buy my water when it's p***ing down?' This was the only use of strong language in the play and the harsh way it was said surprised the audience and made some of us laugh. I think the director chose to show Wang in this harsh, imperfect, coarse, unforgiving way to have a very real and rough character instead of someone quite polished to show the tough realities of poverty and also to shock the audience.

Shen Te, being the 'good' person in the play, was portrayed quite innocently by Jane Horrocks who always wanted to help others and do the right thing, and was therefore confronted with lots of dilemmas when it seemed like to do the right or good thing was impossible. This made her seem like quite an indecisive person and slightly child-like. Shen Te wore a blue and red dress with flowers which gave her a sense of femininity and innocence, despite her contrasting lifestyle (as a prostitute). I think this was interesting as the other prostitutes in the play came across as very sleazy and cheap in the way they dressed and talked and it was almost as if the director has ignored the fact that Shen Te was one of them, seeing her in much the same way as the gods, that no matter what she did she was a 'good' person and different to the others.

I was impressed by the performance of Jane Horrocks who played the two main characters in the play. She was able to change herself from the kind Shen Te (female) to the ruthless business man Shui Ta (male) who she pretends is her cousin. She was able to emphasise the change from woman to man by using a deeper tone in her voice and by a change in her body language where she came across as a harder and less sympathetic character than when she played Shen Te. Shen Te was shown to be a quiet loving woman, and we saw this through her high pitched, warm voice with a Yorkshire accent, innocent facial expressions and her welcoming body language whereas, Shui Ta was portrayed as a tough, hard working man. We saw this through his deep firm voice, the big steps he took as he walked across the stage, his blank

facial expression and the authoritative way he talked to people. She also wore a gangster-like suit with a hat, creating a completely different image to when she was Shen Te. As Shui Ta I felt that the character looked and acted more in control, like he could influence things and always got what he wanted, for example, when getting rid of the people from her shop. However, as Shen Te she seemed quite helpless and dependable and also quite naïve. By making the contrast between the two of them so much, it is as though Shui Ta was not any part of Shen Te or connected to her in any way as there was nothing common between the two. This helped the audience still see Shen Te as a 'good person' as the gods did, despite what she had done as Shui Ta as they were so separate.

One of my favourite parts of the play was the court room scene. In the beginning she was being interrogated by the gods and she replied in the character of Shui Ta. As more questions were asked, she became more like Shen Te and her body language showed us this. She began to shrink in her seat and all the confidence of Shui Ta seemed to evaporate and she was just this little innocent woman again. Her voice began to change back to a higher pitch. Wang showed his anger at Shui Ta but being very very argumentative, persistent and pushy.

I thought that the visual presentation of the play was very well done especially in scenes such as inside the shop, while Shen Te's neighbours were trying to take over. I liked this scene because we could see straight into the shop and its frame was clearly visible, however with all the people and madness inside the small box-like shape of the shop made a feeling of chaos and hopelessness come over the audience and that a good thing has now been ruined. Also the smallness of the box with the chaos within was a bit like Szechuan, where everyone was living on top of each other and having to depend on each other and because they were poor they couldn't get out and had nowhere else to go because they were trapped.

I thought that the symbolism with the use of paper bags on heads with smiley faces on to show heroin addicts was very effective because it had the effect of hiding their identities whatever true emotions they had and making them into a drone like state which would block out the real world.

In this way heroin abuse, how it affected people (for example, Yang Sun, who Shen Te falls in love with but who robs her blind for money for the drugs) and how it was used as an escape from the cruel and monotonous life the people in the play live was explored as a theme alongside others such as 'goodness' and what it meant to be 'good' and poverty. Poverty was explored in interesting and subtle ways such as using lockers for houses, perhaps hinting at the terrible conditions they had to live in or the fact that the people's work was their lives as the lockers symbolise a workplace as well as in very significant ways, such as Yang Sun taking advantage of the fact that Shen Te was in love with him so he could use her for money. What it really meant to be 'good' was also a very principal theme with no one in the place really wholly good because even the gods were imperfect, moaning and criticising among other things, as well as trying to make nothing of the fact that Shen Te had, by the end of the play essentially turned bad.. Shen Te the supposed 'good soul' of Szechuan did evil things disguised as someone else, lying among other things, and even before the gods met her, working as a prostitute.

However, the only reason Shen Te did this before hand was so that she could get some money as otherwise she would have nothing to live on, which makes you think, as Brecht plays are designed to do, whether you really can be 'good' with so much poverty around, especially if she had to let everyone get what they wanted she wouldn't have a shop left and her living would be destroyed. The play is set in a society where everyone is poor and brings to light the suggestion that you can't give and give continuously without taking something back, especially when you have little to begin with. It is quite clear that Brecht's message is that human beings are corrupted by the pursuit of wealth.

Overall I found the production and performances very interesting and I thought that for me it did what it set out to do which was to make the audience think about the topics and issues it raised. I also think that some of the dramatic techniques they used were very effective and very well executed. I found it a very enjoyable experience and although some of the storyline and a few moments in the play left me slightly confused I liked the performance and direction of it. I especially like the set and layout of the stage and the acting. This play also energised me as many parts in the play were funny and thought provoking. Saying this, on the whole I understood it and the themes from the play were communicated to me in what I thought was a good way.

Moderator's Comments on Candidate's Response to Live Performance

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CANDIDATE ONE

An uneven response to the production that meets elements of Levels 1, 2 and 3 but is chiefly in Level 2.

The Response began with a brief outline of the plot to provide the context and was followed by a detailed description and justification for the setting and the way in which the audience entered the space.

Many of the comments and descriptions of the performance were coherent with informed and justified critical judgements eg the description of the performance of the actor playing Wang and its effect upon the audience.

Use of drama terminology to describe the interpretation of the leading character was fluent showing evident understanding of the dual Shen Te/Shui Ta roles although this was not fully discussed in the context of the play's development.

Descriptions of the set and the symbols of the lockers and paper bag masks showed excellent dramatic understanding but there was a lack of overall coherence which confined this Response to excellent rather than outstanding.

QWC showed a good application of written communication with only minor errors. The form and style were suitable. The piece is overlong and should have been edited by the student to keep it within the 2,000 word limit - eg there was some repetition and the final paragraph could have been deleted.