

Theatre Studies GA 3: Monologue performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

A broad and satisfactory range of interpretations was presented this year. Student performances are increasingly stronger and both teachers and students are becoming more adept at the demands of the task.

Students who performed best tended to offer a specific interpretation well grounded in the text and displayed insights into the context of the monologue. Less successful students either tended to offer the text without significant interpretation or with an inappropriate interpretation divorced from the context of the play.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The Monologues

Medea

This was a popular choice. Students offered a broad range of interpretation, from innovative and theatrically inventive to the more traditional. This was a shorter monologue and therefore provided greater scope for timing, pauses, action and aspects of the monologue other than the purely verbal. Those who merely recited the text found that their efforts were of a very short duration. Timing is an issue for consideration when choosing a monologue. Students who are more adept with language might choose a longer monologue. Students with more physical skills might tend towards choosing a shorter monologue that might allow for more physical experimentation. Cross-gender playing is an option (one boy attempted the monologue) although it is worth noting that, on the whole, girls tend to effortlessly choose cross-gender roles whereas boys tend to find cross-gender roles more of a significant challenge. Regardless, all students should give some consideration to all choices and ensure that they are comfortable with their final choice. Work from schools offering the same costume, movements and interpretation for a number of students tended on the whole, to be poorer than work created more through individual choice.

Jason

This was not a popular choice. The better work tended to offer some interesting and innovative modern interpretations. There was provision for considerable action in the piece, which was utilised by many of the stronger students. The poorer work tended to reflect a lack of understanding of the context of the play.

Marvin

This was a very popular choice. The inclusion of a comic character into the monologue list was viewed favourably. The better students tended to have a strong sense of physical comedy. Students who shared props and furniture sometimes also shared theatrical choices with other students (such an approach is not encouraged). Stronger work tended to be derived from individual interpretations rather than shared ideas. Students should approach the performance task as an individual examination rather than an ensemble presentation. The monologue performance should primarily reflect the considerations, development and conceptual ideas of an individual student. The poorest work tended to play for drama and missed the comic aspects altogether. Less successful students did not play the age correctly. Students should note that even with such a superficially simple monologue there are considerable challenges in manipulating space, playing an appropriate age, creating the right period and setting as well as injecting physical comedy. Some students, attracted to the titillating situation and modern language, never quite came to grips with the sophistication or complexities of the comic situation.

Millie

Most students understood the humour and attempted a humorous characterisation. Students should note the added complications with comic work of including appropriate times to laugh and respond. A student may complete an entire rehearsal period without a single laugh, but find that the laughter of assessors interrupts their expected flow. Alternately, a student may have an expectation of the guffaws offered in a very supportive class and find that assessors are not so forthcoming. Additionally, an assessor may laugh at a completely unexpected or seemingly inappropriate moment. With comic work, students should be

aware of, and allow provision for, all such eventualities. All comedy is based on timing and all timing is based on the reactions of an audience which, for the monologue, will not be experienced until the day of examination. Better work tended to capture the cultural aspects of the character and the humour. Stronger work tended to use accent well. Some accents suggested some research and understanding of particular locations. Some of these choices moved the work from the realms of mere soap opera to that of a carefully considered period piece. An added difficulty to this monologue was the rhythm being interrupted by the omission of lines. Better work included specific strategies of how to interpret these omissions. Students should be aware that they have a relatively free choice of how they choose to interpret these omissions. They are not confined to a literal response to what is clearly a move away from the original text as written and intended by the playwright. Props were popular with Millie and Marvin, as both pieces included considerable action and prop-based comic business. Less successful work tended to approach the monologue as a naturalistic soap opera.

Iago

This was a difficult piece, with many possible sub-textual layers, but even so it was a popular choice. Students offered some innovative interpretations, with contexts and interpretations that were very clever and supportive of the overall intention. Others would have benefited greatly from a definitive and clearly expressed statement of intention. The more challenging the interpretation, the more risks are involved and the more important becomes the statement of intention. Some of the modern contexts did not work because they were presented in isolation rather than with some reference to the broader context of the play. These works in particular could have benefited from a well-constructed statement of intention. Better work acknowledged the sub-textual layers and incorporated the lists into the sub-textual meanings. Better work displayed an understanding of the full impact of the language, the implications of the meaning of what was being said, knowledge of the situation and a clear picture and understanding of the character. At least one girl attempted Iago; cross-gender playing neither advantages or disadvantages a student as long as the student is aware of the added difficulties and challenges of playing a character of the opposite sex. Less successful students tended to recite lines without understanding or appreciating the meaning of the lines or the complexities of the nuances, the characters and situation. Some students attempted this monologue with little affinity or understanding of Shakespeare, his world and his language. Students should be aware that choosing a Shakespearean monologue requires an understanding of Shakespeare, his world and, most importantly, his language.

Rosalind

This was potentially a strong physical piece. Clearly implied person and place tended to be the hallmarks of the better work. Stronger students tended to show an understanding of the implications of the comedy and situation. The best work clearly established the character and then used the comic aspects of the character and the situation to explore the comic potential of the scene. Less successful work missed the nuances of the comedy and did not create strong spatial relationships.

No boy attempted this monologue, but it is worth noting that males originally played Shakespeare's female characters. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare considered this factor when writing a

female character who takes on a male disguise, of which there are numerous examples (it would provide an interesting challenge for a boy to be playing a girl playing a boy).

Tartuffe

This was not a popular choice, especially when considered in relation to the popularity of last year's Molière monologue. Students may have been dissuaded by the belief that there was a requirement that they hire a costume. It should be noted that the use of a costume, especially a period costume, is merely one dramatic choice. The performance of Molière in period dress is no more valid as an interpretation than contemporary dress. The most important consideration is the validity of the interpretation and how it has been grounded in the text.

Students should be aware of the complexities and risks of hiring costumes. The limitations and potential of a costume may not be fully explored by the time of the examination. Students protecting costumes from dirt or damage may limit their movements and be more concerned with the costume than their presentation. Ultimately, it will be a difficult task for the student to appear to 'own' a hired costume because, more so than an item from their own wardrobe or a costume created with their own hands, they have access to a hired costume for such a limited period.

Many students gave considerable emphasis to make-up and accessories. The world of Molière lends itself to such considerations but once again it is worth stating, this is not an essential pre-requisite for performing such a character. The better work played the sub-text in an overt and clear way, without being too obvious and virtually turning the sub-text into the text. That is, what was being said and implied were distinct, though both clearly expressed. Some less successful work had difficulties establishing the implied person.

Elmire

This character offered a broad range of characterisations and standards. The bawdiness was easier to achieve with Elmire than Tartuffe, which demanded a more subtle approach. With Elmire, many students found the sub-texts easier to understand, establish and to play. Better work used the potential of the comic business. Several students appeared to attempt very similar interpretations which suggested a limited classroom approach. Students should be aware that a lack of student input and originality could be disadvantageous. A student must understand the context and the reasons behind an action, otherwise the interpretation can lack meaning and coherence. Students should note that a costume does not create a character. A character is created through the playing, not the appearance. Appearance can be important to enhance playing but is no substitute. Some less successful students appeared to have spent considerably more time on their appearance than their interpretation.

Anna

With this character there was much variation in costuming and attempts at staging. The better work established the importance of the relationship with the second character, the implied person and displayed understanding of, and explored, the emotional shifts. The stronger students took the audience on an emotional journey, managing to not only capture the immediate journey, but also the emotional range that encapsulated the harshness of an earlier life. Less successful students portrayed a similar emotional level from beginning to end.

Professor

This monologue attracted many of the stronger students with some detailed research evident in the work. In particular, research, preparation and knowledge of the play and context were important. The best work portrayed the appropriate age as well as an understanding of the complexity of the character and the character's emotional levels. In some instances, students failed to understand the professor's relationship with his other selves. Some of the less successful work was characterised by a poor choice of symbol.

Stage Manager

The use of props provided a challenge for this monologue. The length of the piece posed some difficulties. Students attempting this monologue should have been aware that there was little time for additional stage business and that it would not be possible to linger over phrases throughout. Diction was important in this monologue, which was lengthy and wordy. There were many varied interpretations, but some of the less successful work missed creating the character as a Stage Manager. In the less successful work, the stage movements could be distracting and time-consuming rather than providing a clear statement about character and situation. Less successful work tended to be more a recitation with ambling movements.

First Voice

The monologue provided a great range of characterisations with many strong students creating some exceptional work. The monologue, originally derived from a 'play with voices', allowed students an approach concentrating solely on the voice to evoke characterisation and situation. Movements and physical gestures tended to be minimal and subtle. Rather than distract from the quality of the presentation, this 'stand and deliver' approach tended to work well for this particular monologue. For many other monologues, this approach would not be recommended. Some of the better work was enhanced by a considered accent. Less successful students had little sense of character or situation.

SUMMARY

The stronger work offered a specific interpretation that clearly established character and situation. The best students made theatrical choices that enhanced the text and displayed some appreciation of the sub-texts. Less successful work either offered no discernible interpretation or an interpretation not well grounded in the play. The least successful work tended to be a recitation of lines with little sense of character, situation or the world of play. In 2001, with the revised criteria, students who make firm interpretive decisions will be advantaged. It is this area of interpretation in particular that teachers might stress with students for the forthcoming performance examination.

HISTOGRAM OF TOTAL SCORES

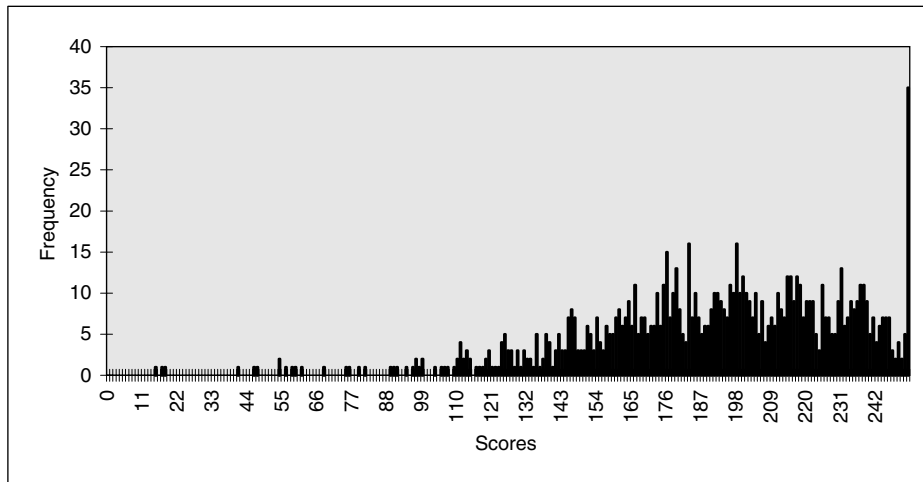
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Count 955

Mean 190.50

Standard Deviation 41.12

NA Result 117



HISTOGRAM OF TOTAL GRADES

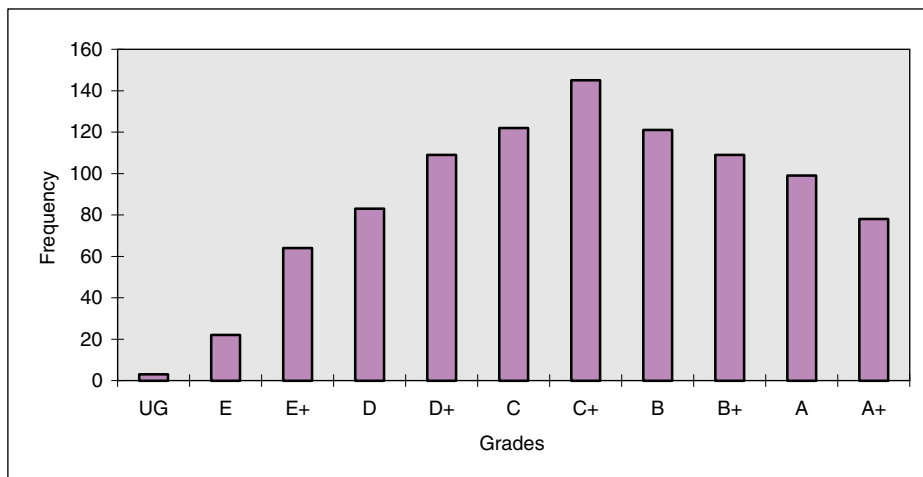
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Count 955

Mean 5.97

Standard Deviation 2.44

NA Result 117



ENROLMENTS		%
Female	709	66.1
Male	363	33.9
Total	1072	

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Count

Number of students undertaking the assessment. This excludes those for whom NA was the result.

Mean

This is the 'average' score; that is all scores totalled then divided by the 'Count'.

Standard Deviation

This is a measure of how widely values are dispersed from the average value (the mean).