Course Companion

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Literature and Performance · SL

Every topic handout in one volume

exercises.lol

Contents

1. Supported focus — Reading literature for performance possibilities 2

2. Supported focus — Individual performance choices and analysis 6

3. Supported focus — From non-dramatic literature to live theatre 9

Supported focus – Reading literature for performance possibilities

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Literature and Performance · SL

Reading literature for performance

IB Diploma Programme Literature and Performance SL (first assessed in 2024). This course joins two disciplines: **literary analysis** (close reading and critical writing) and **theatre** (performing and staging texts). It is offered only at SL. This topic covers how to read a literary text for the choices its writer made and for its **performance possibilities**, and Paper 1, a comparative essay on two works (1 hour 45 minutes; 30% of the grade).

"I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage," wrote the director Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* (1968). "A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged." For Brook, theatre needs only a performer and an audience. A poem or a story on the page has neither: it has a voice, images and silences that a reader hears in their head. This course asks what happens when you move those words into a body, a voice and a space, and what that teaches you about the text.

Must-know for reading literature for performance:

Area	Key content
the course	three areas of exploration; Paper 1, written assignment, transformative performance and oral
reading	voice, imagery, structure, silence and gaps
performance possibilities	who speaks, to whom, where, with what movement and pause
Paper 1	four general questions; one comparative essay on two works; 25 marks
comparison	a shared question, a different choice in each work, a judgement

The course

Component	What you do	Weight
Paper 1	a comparative essay on two works studied in the course (25 marks); the same paper as in the other two language and literature courses	30%
written assignment	an essay of up to 2,000 words on a dramatic extract you explored through performance (26 marks; topic 03)	30%
transformative performance and individual oral	turn an extract from a non-dramatic work into 10 minutes of live theatre, then explain the process in a 15-minute oral (32 marks; topic 02)	40%

Three **areas of exploration** (about 50 hours each) are ways of looking at every text: *readers, writers and texts* (how meaning is made), *time and space* (contexts of writing, reading and performing) and *intertextuality: connecting texts* (links between works, forms and traditions).

Reading with a performer's eye

Ask four questions of any literary text:

Feature	Question	What it suggests for performance
voice	who is speaking, and to whom?	one actor or several; speaking to the audience or to another character
imagery	what pictures does the text create?	objects, light, gesture, sound on stage
structure	how is the text ordered: repetition, turns, endings?	changes of position, rhythm, pace
silence and gaps	what is not said?	pauses, stillness, what the body shows instead of words

> **Worked example.** Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923). A traveller stops his horse at night to watch snow falling in a wood. The poem ends:
>
> The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep.

- Voice: one speaker, talking to himself; no one else is there except the horse.
- Imagery: dark woods, falling snow, silence: the pull to stay.
- Structure: the last line is **repeated** . The first time it can mean a long journey; the second time it can also mean death ("sleep").
- Performance possibility: say the line twice in two different ways: first practical, turning to leave; then slower, looking back at the woods. The repetition becomes a choice the audience can see.

Paper 1: the comparative essay

Paper 1 gives four general questions; you answer one in a comparative essay on two works you have studied. The IB's samples include: *How do two of the works you have studied portray the struggle to be understood?* and *Referring to two works you have studied, discuss how the author has created a convincing "world".*

1. Choose works that let you make a real **comparison** : the same question, answered in different ways.
2. Write a **thesis** that answers the question for both works.
3. In each paragraph, compare one feature (voice, structure, setting, symbol) across both works, with short quotations.
4. End with a judgement: which work presents the idea more powerfully, or what the difference shows.

Worked plan. *How do two of the works you have studied portray the struggle to be understood?*

- Works: Lu Xun, "Kong Yiji" (1919), and Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949).
- Thesis: both men are not understood by the people around them, and both protect their dignity with words; Lu Xun shows this through a narrator who laughs with the crowd, Miller through a family that finally speaks for Willy.
- Voice: Lu Xun's narrator is a boy in the tavern who joins the laughter, so the reader sees Kong Yiji from outside; when Kong Yiji says that stealing books "cannot be counted as stealing", his learned words only make the customers laugh more.
- Voice: in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's wife Linda insists: "Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person." The play gives Willy the attention his world refuses him.
- Judgement: Lu Xun's distance makes the reader feel guilty for laughing; Miller's closeness makes the audience feel the pain from inside.

Checklist

- The course: three components and their weights; three areas of exploration.
- Voice, imagery, structure and silence, each read for performance.
- The Frost repetition as a performance choice.
- Paper 1: one comparative essay on two works; 25 marks; 30%.
- The four steps and the worked plan on Lu Xun and Miller.

Supported focus – Individual performance choices and analysis

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Literature and Performance · SL

From non-dramatic literature to live theatre

IB Diploma Programme Literature and Performance SL (first assessed in 2024). The internal assessment has two compulsory parts. In the **transformative performance** (10 minutes), you turn an extract from a **non-dramatic** literary work (a novel, short story or poem) into a piece of theatre and perform it to a live audience. In the **individual oral** (15 minutes), you explain how you transformed the extract. Your teacher marks both parts (32 marks in all), the IB moderates the marks, and together they are worth 40% of the grade.

Lu Xun's story "Kong Yiji" (1919) is told by a man remembering the year he was twelve and worked behind the counter of a wine shop in Luzhen. The workers drink standing at the counter; the richer customers sit in the room inside. Kong Yiji is the only customer who drinks standing up but wears the long gown of a scholar. He failed the civil service exams, he steals books, and the customers laugh at him. At the end he crawls in on his hands, his legs broken, still owing the shop nineteen coins, and is never seen again. On the page, all of this reaches us through one remembered voice. On a stage, who will tell it, and where will the audience stand?

Must-know for the transformative performance:

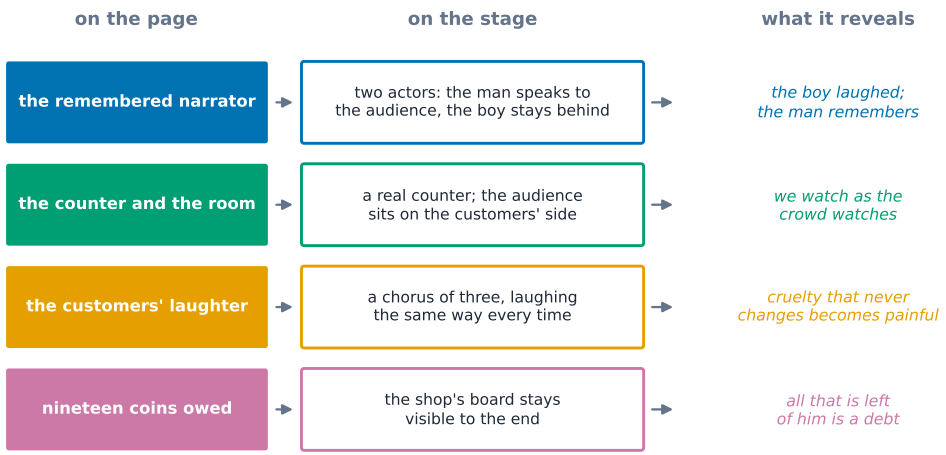
Area	Key content
the task	a 10-minute live performance from a non-dramatic extract; a 15-minute oral
transformation	narration, description and inner thought turned into stage choices
stage choices	space, voice, body, objects, sound and light
purpose	every choice should reveal something about the original text
the oral	explain your choices and what the transformation taught you

What changes from page to stage

A story or poem has features that the stage cannot copy directly. Each one needs a **transformation** :

On the page	On the stage, you could ...
a **narrator**	have one actor speak to the audience; split the narration between actors; replace it with action
description of a place	build the space with a few objects, light or the actors' bodies
a character's thoughts	use direct address, a recorded voice, a gesture repeated
a crowd or a society	use a **chorus** of actors who move and speak together
time passing	lighting changes, a repeated sound, a change of costume

Worked transformation: "Kong Yiji"



Each feature of the story becomes a stage choice, and each choice must reveal something about the text.

- **Space**: a real counter across the stage. The audience sits on the customers' side, so they watch Kong Yiji as the laughing customers do, and become part of the crowd.
- **Voice**: the narrator is played twice: the grown man speaks to the audience from the edge of the stage; the boy of twelve stays behind the counter. The gap between them shows the story's double view: the boy laughed, the man remembers.
- **Chorus**: three actors play the customers, laughing on cue. As Kong Yiji's story gets worse, the laughter stays the same, which makes it more and more painful to hear.
- **Object**: the shop's board with "Kong Yiji: 19 coins" written on it stays visible; at the end, it is the only thing left of him.
- **Movement**: he enters standing in his long gown; he exits crawling on his hands. The difference in height says what the narrator does not say.

Rehearsal and the oral

Keep a **rehearsal log** : what you tried, what failed, what you changed and why. The oral (15 minutes) explains your process:

1. The extract and why you chose it.
2. The key features of the text (voice, structure, imagery, themes).
3. The transformation: two or three major choices, each linked to the text ("I used a chorus because the story's cruelty belongs to a whole society, not one person").
4. What the performance taught you about the text that reading alone did not.

Common mistakes: retelling the plot instead of transforming it; choices made only to look good, with no link to the text; reading the narration aloud in full; not explaining what the audience was meant to feel and why.

Checklist

- Transformative performance: 10 minutes, live, from a non-dramatic extract; oral: 15 minutes; 32 marks; 40%.
- Narrator, place, thoughts, crowd and time, each transformed.
- The "Kong Yiji" transformation: counter, two narrators, chorus, board, standing and crawling.
- The rehearsal log and the four parts of the oral.
- Choices with purpose, linked to the text.

Supported focus – From non-dramatic literature to live theatre

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Individual performance choices and analysis

IB Diploma Programme Literature and Performance SL (first assessed in 2024). The **written assignment** is an essay of no more than 2,000 words (26 marks; 30% of the grade). You critically examine an extract from a **dramatic work** that you have explored through performance, and analyse how its **dramatic features** were staged through your own individual performance choices.

In Act 2, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macbeth is alone at night, about to murder King Duncan. Suddenly he sees a dagger in the air in front of him:

> Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

A few lines later he calls it "a dagger of the mind, a false creation". Every production must decide: does the audience see the dagger too? A real knife hanging on a wire, a line of light on the floor, or nothing at all? Each answer changes the scene. The written assignment asks you to make choices like this, and then to explain exactly how they bring out the features of the text.

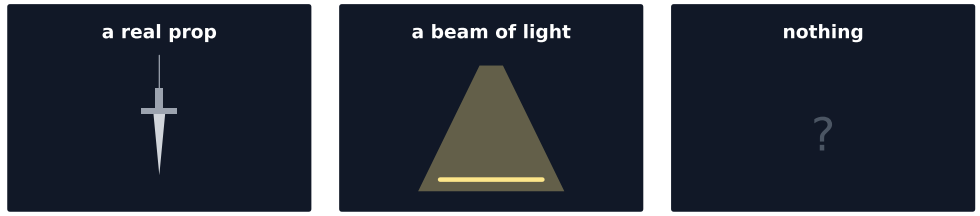
Must-know for the written assignment:

Area	Key content
the task	up to 2,000 words; 26 marks; 30%; an extract you explored through performance
dramatic features	dialogue, soliloquy, stage directions, dramatic irony, conflict, structure
performance choices	voice, movement, space, objects, light, sound
analysis	link each choice to a feature of the text and its effect
evaluation	what worked, what did not, and what it taught you

Dramatic features

Feature	What it is	In the dagger scene
soliloquy	a character alone, speaking thoughts aloud	Macbeth speaks alone; the audience hears his mind
stage directions	the writer's instructions for action	very few in Shakespeare; the actions are inside the lines ("Come, let me clutch thee")
dramatic irony	the audience knows more than a character	we know what he is about to do; he is still pretending to himself
conflict	opposing forces	desire for the crown against fear and conscience
structure	how the scene builds	questions, then commands, then a bell rings and he goes to the murder

Making and analysing choices



Each staging of the dagger answers a question the text leaves open: is it real, or in his mind?

For each choice, write in three steps:

1. **The feature**: what the text does ("Macbeth asks questions he cannot answer: 'Is this a dagger ...?'").
2. **The choice**: what you did in performance ("I played the speech with no dagger on stage, my hand reaching into empty air").

3. **The effect**: what it shows about the text, and how you know ("The audience had to believe in the dagger through my eyes and hand, as Macbeth believes in it: the 'dagger of the mind' became the audience's experience too. A classmate said the empty hand was more frightening than a prop").

Planning the essay

Part	Content	About
introduction	the extract, where it comes in the play, and your focus	200 words
two or three choices	feature, choice, effect, each with short quotations	1,400 words
evaluation	which choices worked; what you would change; what performing showed you that reading did not	400 words

Write about *your own* choices, even when you performed in a group: what you, as one performer, did with your voice, body and space.

Common mistakes: describing the performance without analysing it; analysing the text without the performance; long plot summary; claiming an effect without evidence (an audience response, a rehearsal change).

Checklist

- Written assignment: up to 2,000 words; 26 marks; 30%.
- Dramatic features: soliloquy, stage directions, dramatic irony, conflict, structure.
- The dagger scene and its three stagings.
- Feature, choice, effect for every choice; evidence for effects.
- The essay plan; your own choices; the common mistakes.