Reading literature for performance

IB DP Literature and Performance SL: reading for performance and Paper 1

Reading literature for performance

- describe the three assessment components and their weights;
- read a literary text for voice, **imagery**, **structure** and silence;
- turn a feature of a text into a performance possibility, as with Frost's repeated line;
- plan a Paper 1 comparative essay feature by feature.

The course

- Three **areas of exploration 探索领域** (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).
- Check the conditions before using the result.

Reading with a performer's eye

- 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 a **repetition** 重复 of the one before. 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

- 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.

Paper 1: the comparative essay (2)

- 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.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Literature and Performance guide* (first assessment 2024).
- P. Brook, *The Empty Space* (1968), chapter 1.
- R. Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", in *New Hampshire* (1923).

Sources for this lesson (2)

- Lu Xun, "Kong Yiji" (1919), translated by J. Lovell in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China* (2009).
- A. Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Act 1.

Common errors

- Treating performance as decoration: every possibility you suggest must come from a feature of the text.
- Calling the speaker of a poem "the poet"; the speaker is a voice the writer creates.
- Writing about one work and then the other in Paper 1, with the **comparison** only at the end.

Common errors (2)

- Ignoring silences and gaps; what a text does not say often gives a performer the most to work with.
- Answering a Paper 1 question with a summary of both plots instead of an argument.

Key terms

- **Literary analysis**: close reading and critical writing about a text.
- **Performance possibility**: a way a feature of the text could be shown through voice, body, space or sound.
- **Voice**: who is speaking in a text, and to whom.

Key terms (2)

- **Area of exploration**: one of the three ways of looking at every text in the course.
- **Comparative essay**: an essay that discusses two works together, in answer to one question.

Check yourself

- 1.
- Name the three assessment components and give the weight of each. 2.
- What four questions should you ask of any literary text? 3.
- Why might an actor say the last line of Frost's poem in two different ways? 4.