

Q&A

with Hugo Russell, student and Colleen Toohey-Jones, teacher
Kelvin Grove State College

Drama, Internal assessment 3: Project — practice-led project

Hugo Russell, student

Q: What did you enjoy most about Drama?

A: *The combination of creative expression and academically rigorous course work.*

Q: How did you prepare for this assessment task?

A: *I read and thoroughly discussed the text that the assessment was in response to (Richard III), isolating key scenes, their focuses, meanings and significant themes.*

Q: How did your teacher prepare you for this assessment?

A: *By facilitating discussions that thoroughly analysed individual scenes of the text.*

Q: What made you choose the topic or method of presentation?

A: *I chose to respond to the character of Clarence, reworking mostly content from Act 1 Scene 4 because Clarence is a comparatively simple character in the stimulus text, with little time on stage. This afforded me greater creative licence over my response and working with a succinct amount of stimulus material made it easier for me to respond in depth.*

Q: What is most important to you when you are preparing a response to an assessment task?

A: *Ample opportunity to both work independently on the task and discuss my progress with teachers/peers.*

Q: What are your thoughts about this assessment and the approach you took when responding to the task?

A: *This was an especially challenging task to complete. The assessment demands condensing a whole play into one key scene/moment, then reworking and expanding back outwards from there. I found it helpful not to get caught up trying to address the whole text in my response — satisfactory knowledge of the whole play, with deep understanding of one or two scenes and themes, made for an effective stimulus to begin my response from.*

Q: How will you use what you have learnt in this subject?

A: *Drama has expanded my ability in creative, critical thinking that is both conceptual and analytical.*

Colleen Toohey-Jones, teacher

Q: What was the purpose of this assessment and what key decisions were made in the design of the task?

*A: This technique aims to encourage students to deeply consider the effect of directorial choices on purpose and meaning. Multiple roles, characters and relationships in Richard III are relevant to our world today. It is a deeply human play that combines the sense of the minute — the ways we as individuals struggle with the conflicting aspects of our humanity — and with the macro — concepts of power, control, obedience and complicity within wider society. This complexity and broad range of possible and relevant interpretations meant students were **required** to make choices and justify them; the meaning and purpose of Richard depends heavily on perspective. At a more basic level, a sympathetic versus unsympathetic portrayal of Richard himself completely transforms the text and performance, allowing full participation for students who struggle with the more complex concepts of the task.*

Q: How did your teaching and the student learning experiences prepare the students to complete this assessment?

A: We began by unpacking Richard III as a text, focusing on relationships and the fluid concept of the villain. In class discussions, students argued to what extent they felt Richard himself was to 'blame' for the events of the play. Students presented given sections of the play, with a view to communicating their opinion to the audience. They practised communicating a randomly supplied theme or a specific dramatic meaning. We evaluated the communication of intended meaning in these performances. Students explored and experimented with postmodernism and contemporary theatre to manipulate the text and clearly communicate purpose and meaning.

The task itself was explicitly modelled for students and a series of questions were provided as a scaffold to guide the planning and development process. Students created a script, including detailed stage directions, to illustrate their concept and ensure they were meaningfully employing elements of drama and conventions. This gave them a really clear picture in their minds when they were explaining and justifying their choices in the directorial pitch.

Q: How does this assessment reflect the unique characteristics of your school and your students?

A: Richard III was chosen for these students because not only are there multiple female and male roles that are central to the events of the play, but it is a challenging text that offers diverse representations of gender. These representations are open-ended and therefore appropriate for a task requiring insight and interpretation.

Q: Can you explain the exemplary aspects of Hugo's response?

A: Hugo has offered a detailed, relevant and insightful interpretation of the text in terms of relationships, context, subtext and purpose. While Hugo has chosen to 'zoom in' on Clarence and his sense of guilt warring with his sense of self-preservation, he has positioned this choice within both the broader context of the play, and of this experience as a human experience, demonstrating a thorough and deep understanding of both the play in its original context and his own interpretation.

The use of physical theatre, chorus, tension, mood, production elements (sound and lighting) and fragmentation of text skilfully and discerningly creates the sense of place and meaning required at the opening of the performance. The script extract clearly outlines his vision and makes transparent how he intends for conventions and elements to interact onstage, therefore communicating his knowledge and understanding explicitly.