

Sample exam question notes for drama

Drama requires the reader to infer, or 'read between the lines', to collect information that is implied, but not directly stated. There is much that we do not know because we are only given an extract/passage. For example, we will never know what these characters look or sound like, but we can find out a lot about them by what they say and how they act.

You must understand a passage before you can start to interpret it, so before addressing the guiding question, make sure you know who the characters are and have a sense of their motivations and dispositions.

The activity below shows you how to learn about each character by collecting their key quotations.

Collecting key quotations to discover characterization in drama

This exercise will help you pay attention to the author's diction choices and the character development that is shown in this passage, and reveal some of the conflicts and tensions in the passage.

- In your learner portfolio, make a chart that has the characters' names across the top and key quotations or phrases from each underneath their names.
- Comb through the dialogue, collecting only quotations that seem interesting. These quotations will reveal the characters' interests and passions.

Here are a few to help you get started, using *Lady Windermere's Fan* as an example.

DUMBY

- How marriage ruins a man!
- I don't think we are bad.
- She doesn't really love you then?

CECIL

- don't be led astray into the paths of virtue.
- They [women] like to find us quite irretrievably bad,
- You must be in love. Who is the girl?

LORD DARLINGTON

- No, we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.
- The woman I love is not free, or thinks she isn't.
- Oh! she doesn't love me.

LORD AUGUSTUS – 'Tuppy'

- Promised Mrs. Erlynne never to play or drink again.

Write at least one sentence about each character and what you have learned about them from these quotations.

Consider repeating this activity with passages from all the plays you study in your DP Literature course.

The guiding question

Let the guiding question help you determine which ideas and literary aspects are most important and worth focusing on.

Let's start by reviewing the guiding question:

*How is **irony** developed, and to what effect, in this passage?*

In order to answer this question, you absolutely must understand what irony is. Irony occurs in three varieties:

- 1 Verbal irony is the result of a statement saying one thing and meaning the opposite. Its purpose is usually to criticize.

Example: It's easy to quit smoking, I've done it many times.

- 2 Situational irony occurs when a situation turns out differently from what one would normally expect. Often the twist is oddly appropriate.

Example: A deep-sea diver drowning in a bathtub is ironic.

- 3 Dramatic irony occurs when a character says or does something that has more or different meanings from what they think it means, though the audience and/or other characters understand the full ramifications of the speech or action.

Example: Romeo stabs himself, believing that Juliet is dead, when the audience knows that Juliet is actually only in a drug-induced sleep.

'Irony' is the noun form and 'ironic' is the adjective form of this word.

The next steps are for you to do the following:

- 1 Evaluate the passage in order to determine which of these forms of irony are applicable (note: in the actual exam, if you aren't sure, just use the term 'irony').
- 2 Determine what other significant literary ideas help create this irony.

Now we need to determine what further aspects in this passage should be explored. Here is the question again, with two new parts highlighted:

*How is irony **developed**, and **to what effect**, in this passage?*

The question asks how irony is developed.

- This means that the irony is created in collaboration with other literary elements, and that your job is to determine what those might be.
- Remember that not all of these collaborative elements are of equal weight. Focus on the ones that do the most to build the irony.
- These could be literary elements like theme, internal conflict, external conflict, tension, hyperbole, etc.

The question also includes the phrase ‘to what effect’, which could be rephrased as ‘What is the effect of this irony?’

- You must address every aspect of the guiding question in order to score high marks, so you need to consider this part equally with the other parts.
- Basically, this question is already stating that irony is developed in the passage ... and your job is to answer the ‘So what?’ about it.
 - Yes, there is irony ... so how does it affect the audience/reader?
 - Does the irony have an overall impact on how the passage should be interpreted?

Character interrogation: Drama Paper 1

- 1 Read the passage aloud (ideally with two or three other people helping out).
- 2 Interrogate and explore each character. Refer back to your collection of key quotations. Ask one another about who each of you are and try to make predictions about the characters.
- 3 Then, separately, draw a quick sketch of each character, including how you think they might be dressed, and write some of the key quotations each uses around each of their profiles.
- 4 In your mind, ask each character what is ironic about this situation in the passage. Write their brief responses under each sketch. Do your best to imitate their voices.
- 5 Write an outline of a possible essay on this passage and guiding question.

Consider repeating this character interrogation activity as you study other plays in your DP Literature course.

Alternative guiding questions

If you would like to explore a different guiding question than the one provided above, explore one of these instead in your writing:

- At the end of the passage, Lord Darlington states, ‘How can you be so conceited, Dumby?’ Why does he feel this way and how is this situation created?
- What are the conflicts in this passage and how do they create the tensions in it?
- What, if anything, is known about the setting of this passage, and how does it affect the characters and create conflicts for them?