



Shrewsbury School

SHREWSBURY SCHOOL

SIXTH FORM ENTRANCE EXAMINATION 2014

ENGLISH: Linguistic Competence (45 minutes)

Instructions to candidates:

- The quality of your answer and therefore your close reading of the printed extract will be assessed: you should think carefully before writing and perhaps briefly plan your answer.
- In answering the question, you should pay close attention to spelling, punctuation, grammar and presentation.
- It is advised that you should spend around 15 minutes reading the extract and planning your essay and 30 minutes writing your actual answer. Make sure also that you have read the question carefully before you begin.
- Answer on lined paper.

QUESTION:

Read the attached **NON-FICTION TEXT – *What is a Soap Opera?*** (printed on p2-3) carefully.

Outline concisely:

- What the article tells you about the key features of a soap opera.
- The ways in which soap operas differ from other kinds of broadcast drama.

Use your own words as far as possible.

You should aim to write between 250 and 400 words.

Pay careful attention to the accuracy and presentation of your writing.

(30 marks)

NON-FICTION TEXT

In this article from a website, Daniel Chandler describes the genre of television soap opera.

What is a soap opera?

The soap opera genre originated in American radio serials of the 1930s, and owes the name to the sponsorship of some of these programmes by major soap powder companies. Television soap operas are long running serials concerned with everyday life. A serial is not to be confused with a *series*, in which the main characters and format remain the same from programme to programme but each episode is a self-contained plot. In a *serial* at least one storyline is carried over from one episode to the next. A series is advertised as having a specific number of episodes, but serials are potentially endless.

Successful soaps such as *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* may continue for many years, so new viewers have to be able to join in at any stage in a serial. In soaps, the passage of time also appears to reflect “real time” for the viewers – the characters age as the viewers do.

Soaps share some features with other genres such as *melodrama*; these features include a focus on female characters, unlikely coincidences and exaggerated emotions. Like these genres, soaps make use of simplified characters and their stories develop in an episodic way. However, soaps do not share with these forms the happy ending or the idealised characters which are features of these related genres. British soaps are also distinctively different in their debt to “kitchen sink dramas”, which emphasised everyday social problems.

Unlike action/adventure programmes such as westerns and “cop” programmes which show men in positions of power, authority, aggression and technology, soaps, like *sitcoms*, are seen as more “feminine” and are more concerned with presenting women in relation to the family.

Recurrent events in soap operas include courtships, marriages, divorces, deaths and disappearances. Gossip is a key feature in soaps (usually absent from other genres): in part it acts as a commentary on the action. Broadcast serials have the advantage of a regular time slot, but even if some viewers miss it, they can easily catch up with events. Any key information which might have been missed is worked into the plot again when necessary. Nevertheless, knowledge of previous events can usefully be brought to bear by habitual viewers, and doing so is part of the pleasure of viewing for them. Viewers are also in an omniscient position knowing more than any character does. The form is unique in offering viewers the chance to engage in informed speculation about the possible turns of events.

Unlike a play or a series, there is always a wide range of characters in a soap opera (which means that no single character is indispensable). The large cast and the possibility of casual viewers necessitate rapid characterisation and the use of recognisable “types”.

Soaps are unlike traditional dramas which have a beginning, a middle and an end: soaps have no beginning or end, no structural closure. Viewers can join a soap at any point. There is no single narrative line: several stories are woven together over a number of episodes. In this sense the structure of soaps is not linear.

The structure of soaps is complex and there is no final word on any issue. There is no single “hero” and the wide range of characters offers viewers a great deal of choice regarding those with whom they might identify. Not much seems to “happen” in many soaps (by comparison with, say, an action series or an adventure serial) because there is little rapid action. In soaps what matters is the effect of events on the characters which is revealed through characters talking to each other. In soaps the key question is not “What will happen next?” but “What kind of person is this?” This invites viewers to offer their own comments and interpretations.