



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2011**

**English Language and Literature      ELLA3  
A**

**(Specification 2720)**

**Unit 3: Comparative Analysis and Text  
Adaptation**

***Report on the Examination***

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There were many varied and interesting scripts in this second winter sitting of the Advanced component of this specification. Some candidates had clearly become skilful in managing the unseen comparison and had practised textual adaptation skills through their set texts. However, other candidates were under-prepared for both sections of the examination: their answers were pedestrian at best and some were below the standard expected at Advanced level.

Most candidates followed the advice in the rubric and spent a proportionate amount of time on each section. This resulted in very few scripts with unbalanced answers, although there were some candidates who did not attempt the commentary question in Section B.

## **Section A**

### **Question 1: Analytical comparison**

Successful candidates:

- showed close reading skills by thoughtfully planning their answers
- compared the unseen texts systematically, some using an “anchor text” method to help find their way through the question, but many more using an effective integrated approach to their analysis of all three texts
- employed suitable terminology in their analysis, with the result that their answers were interesting and confidently expressed, focusing on differences of lexis, grammar, style and context
- found interesting comparative points which helped them to engage with the meaning of the texts
- used the three-point critical strategy throughout, in which a key textual feature is identified, an example is given and its effect is discussed.

Less successful candidates:

- did not read the three texts with sufficient care
- showed little evidence of knowing how to structure an analytical answer
- made generalised points and offered comparisons that added little to the interpretation of the texts
- commented on individual words in the texts, without engaging with textual meaning
- wrote three separate accounts of the texts, with few links made between them
- rarely mentioned the attitudes and feelings of the speakers or writers in the three texts.

The three linked texts were accessible to most candidates, many of whom spent time thinking about and planning their answers. This is to be encouraged, as it helps candidates to engage with the meaning of the texts first and then to look for links between them.

A useful start to this style of question is to make brief opening comments on mode, purpose and audience, with some consideration of context. A focusing paragraph of no more than half a side should suffice, before candidates get down to the business of close analysis. Some candidates waste time by writing opening paragraphs which merely repeat information given about texts on the question paper, sometimes accompanied by generalised thoughts on possible audiences and purposes framed in excessively narrow or in unhelpfully wide terms.

Many candidates concentrated on the similarities and differences of stylistic features and grammatical points. Fewer examined structural issues, however, which was a surprise given the differences in genre and their differing cohesive qualities. Some answers examined the clear attitude differences, gaining much by identifying the unbridled enthusiasm of Speaker B in Text A who speaks so passionately about the River Fleet. This was usefully contrasted with the subtle humour about the River Cam at the start of Text C, changing to the genuine

surprise of the kingfisher sighting. These qualities were balanced against the more playful and at times sinister feelings of the persona in Text B. Occasionally, weaker candidates misread the role of Speaker A in Text A, saying that he was bored by the conversation and tried to wrest power back from Speaker B. This is shown to be untrue when his back channelling is given more careful consideration.

Text B also posed some difficulties, some candidates not recognising the subtle rhythms and rhymes that mirror the flow of the river. A few missed the significance of the title 'The River God' and the sustained personification and, as a result, mistakenly thought the speaker was a man who swam around attacking women - a plainly erroneous reading. Text C was generally accurately understood.

Candidates tended to give greater weight to Texts A and C, with the poetry posing some problems of interpretation, as noted above. When candidates were sure of their interpretation and employed appropriate literary and linguistic terms, they were able to convey interesting and subtle readings. The following provided useful comparative angles:

- narrative viewpoint
- positive and negative evaluation conveyed by adjectival and adverbial use
- employment of similes and metaphorical language
- sound features
- variation in sentence structures.

For instance, Speaker B uses adjectives such as “beautiful” and “lovely” in Text A to describe the river, alongside lower frequency nouns such as “ambience” and the description of the viaduct to build up an enthusiastically positive picture. The speakers use interrogatives, as well as referential and expressive utterances within an adjacency paired exchange. These features gave candidates excellent analytical opportunities for comparison with the childishness in Text B of “Hi yih, yippity yap” and other phonological features in the blunt couplet of “I brought her down here /To be my beautiful dear.” Similarly the connotations of “The River Cam sleepwalks” and the informality of “No water-water rafting here, lads” gave many opportunities for candidates to interpret, to evaluate and to compare within and between texts.

Quite frequently, however, candidates referred to linguistic and literary features in each text by giving broad examples and generalised explanations without making effective and specific comparative points. A stronger sense of the importance of context would have enabled them to explore the writers and speakers' feelings about rivers more perceptively and to deal thoroughly with the effects of vocabulary, grammar and stylistic choices.

## **Section B**

### **Question 2: *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs***

This was the more popular of the two questions on the Section B texts, and it was tackled with varying degrees of success.

Able candidates selected appropriate material confidently, and wrote in a fluent, consistent style, reining in their emotions as a former prisoner and presenting the factual details in a clear and organised way, producing a dramatic but controlled account of imprisonment by the Pinochet regime.

Many candidates ignored the word limit and produced loosely structured accounts which far exceeded the content of Styron's original article. The task does not require candidates to create fictitious information and such an approach misses the point of this section, as this is a recasting exercise and not primarily a creative task. Some candidates also neglected to check their adaptation for technical accuracy. Surprisingly, some had little idea about how to adopt an appropriate tone in a letter to Amnesty and about how to set it out. Many

misspellings of words, including names, from the original text appeared and centres are reminded that examiners must consider technical accuracy in awarding marks for Section B questions.

#### **Question 4: *A House Somewhere***

This was the less popular question on the two set texts, but those who tackled it generally produced at least adequate answers.

A good number of incisive adaptations showed flair and imagination in recasting the source material to produce readable and believable letters. Candidates who framed the source material in a clear context by assimilating the notable events and facts produced an effective holiday narrative.

A number of unconvincing letters misjudged the need for a tone of friendliness and strayed into over-familiarity. E-mail or text-type answers were not an appropriate medium for this task and they were, thankfully, few and far between.

Some candidates also neglected to check their adaptation for technical accuracy and some were unclear about the conventions for setting out and writing a letter. Many spelling errors of words or names from the original text appeared and centres are reminded that examiners must consider technical accuracy in awarding marks for Section B questions.

#### **Questions 3 and 5: The Commentaries**

Overall, many commentaries still tend to be generalised and descriptive, lacking a clear focus on specific details of language use. Most candidates were able to explain what was intended in their adaptations but these comments were often too broadly expressed. Some candidates listed all the features they had employed in their letters but did not usefully exemplify or explain the specific effects of the features in context.

Word limits were ignored by many candidates too. Some candidates suffered from the fact that this piece is the final task of the examination and were unable to complete their answers, or were forced to write hurried, disorganised responses.

The best answers were those that focused on four or five distinct and well-chosen examples of the candidate's own new text, which is then discussed and analysed as an exemplification of what was done at that point and, implicitly, in other parts of the answer. Careful choice of different areas – lexis, grammar, style, cohesion and mode – proved the basis of the best answers. Sadly, these qualities were encountered in only a small minority of scripts.

#### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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