



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

**English Language and Literature A ELLA1
(Specification 2720)**

Unit 1: Integrated Analysis and Text Production

Report on the Examination

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General

Most students answered the two required questions in a relevant way and there were very few rubric infringements. As usual, the quality of responses varied enormously, from writing that was cogent, fluent and publishable to answers that struggled to communicate basic ideas. Examiners reported that, on the whole, students seemed to know their texts well and to have enjoyed them, although there were some notable exceptions where students from particular centres showed more sketchy knowledge of their texts.

The most popular text was *A Streetcar Named Desire*, followed by *The Kite Runner*. *Close Range* was the choice of a small minority and very few students answered questions on *The Rivals*. It has therefore not been possible to make useful comments on responses to *The Rivals* in this report.

'A' Questions

Many students made at least some attempt to comment on the language of their texts and to show some understanding of terminology. Very few students produced answers with no quotations whatsoever and there were many sound, well-focused responses. However, there were some centres from which students adopted a definite feature-spotting approach at the expense of meaning and other centres where students did not comment with sufficient precision on language or show familiarity with terminology needed to gain marks in the top band. There was a tendency for weaker answers to be simplistic and to have a superficial appreciation of the author's skill in presenting characters and ideas.

It was clear that students from some centres are being encouraged to use frameworks and approaches that are not suitable for this unit. For example, some students exclusively used a spontaneous speech framework to answer questions on drama. This inevitably limited their appreciation of the play under discussion and produced skewed answers. Examiners noted that some centres are burdening their students with concepts such as Grice's Maxims or convergence theory and, as a result, they struggle to make worthwhile points.

The trend towards rather forced analysis continues with some students, where it appears that they have been taught to make 'a lot out of a little' to such a degree that their ideas become unconvincing. In a few cases there appeared to be an unhelpful insistence on exploring alternative readings of texts. This seemed to lead to students presenting fanciful and forced alternatives rather than focusing on developing their arguments clearly and relevantly.

There are two marks awarded for this question on the following assessment objectives:

AO1 (15 marks) – Select and apply relevant concepts and approaches from integrated linguistic study, using appropriate terminology and accurate, coherent written expression.
AO2 (15 marks) – Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in a range of written and spoken texts.

The AO1 mark focuses in particular on the student's relevant analysis of literary and linguistic features of the text and on the use of literary and linguistic terminology.

The AO2 mark focuses on the student's interpretation and ideas in response to the question.

Successful students:

- focused on the question
- supported ideas by exploring the language of relevant quotations
- provided a sense of overview
- produced sustained answers

- showed a sound knowledge of literary and linguistic terms
- produced well expressed answers.

Less successful students:

- did not adequately address the question
- did not comment on the language of the text or the use of literary techniques
- feature-spotted, with very limited exploration of meaning
- tried to apply theories that were inappropriate
- produced very brief responses with only a few superficially relevant ideas
- produced answers that were poorly expressed
- wasted time writing conclusions that merely summarised the points covered.

B Questions

Examiners noted that there were many enjoyable responses to the production tasks. Section B responses were often better handled than those of Section A. On the whole, most students read the question accurately and wrote in the appropriate form. There were, however, some brief responses that suggested students may not have had sufficient practice at extending and developing their ideas for this task.

The main areas of weakness in the Section B responses were expression and technical accuracy. Punctuation was a real problem for many and a disappointing number of students seemed unable to distinguish sentence boundaries.

There are two marks awarded for this question on the following assessment objectives:

AO4 (30 marks) – demonstrate expertise and creativity in using language appropriately for a variety of purposes and audiences, drawing on insights from literary and linguistic studies.

AO1 (15 marks) - select and apply relevant concepts and approaches from integrated linguistic study, using appropriate terminology and accurate, coherent written expression.

The AO4 mark assesses the student's ability to do the following: show awareness of genre; write in an appropriate style for audience and purpose; create a convincing sense of a character's voice; choose appropriate information from the text in order to complete the task. The AO1 mark is solely concerned with the student's accuracy in terms of spelling, punctuation, grammar and expression.

Successful students:

- showed a sound sense of form/genre
- created a convincing sense of their character's voice
- revealed sound knowledge of the text
- used significant details from the text
- produced sustained responses
- produced writing that was well expressed and technically accurate.

Less successful students:

- showed limited or patchy awareness of form/genre
- used language that was inappropriate for form or character
- showed limited awareness of characters' attitudes
- revealed limited knowledge of the text

- copied extracts from the text
- revealed errors in understanding of the text

- produced very brief responses
- produced writing that contained technical errors and flaws in expression.

Things Fall Apart: Chinua Achebe

01

Most students wrote about the specified chapters but many found it difficult to focus on the details which suggest Okonkwo's anger. There was generally not a great range of points covered and a number of students did not seem to use the opportunity offered by having specified chapters to explore the range of ways in which his feelings are presented. Some students were under the impression Okonkwo had killed a white missionary.

11

There were some sound responses to this task which used appropriate details from the text and captured the idiom and attitudes of the Ibo, with much drinking of palm wine and eating of Kola nuts, and some excellent use of images from the natural world in conversation or background. Most managed a conversation within a third person narrative quite well, although some students wrote play scripts. Weaker responses seemed uncertain about what content to include or showed a distinct lack of knowledge of events at the end of the novel. Some students did not progress much beyond an exchange of pleasantries with the visitor. Content was a more frequent failing in this answer than form or voice.

Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë

02

This question was slightly more popular than the B question for this text. Most students were able to identify a couple of relevant extracts that showed Heathcliff's attitudes towards Linton, and even weaker responses included some comment on his unpleasantness, his harsh vocabulary, and his desire to use Linton for his own ends. For some students, there was a tendency to range generally over the text rather than focus on specific passages. Some responses contained naive comments about Nelly being an unreliable narrator, with some students spending too long on her description of the boy Linton which they then dismissed as biased and unreliable. Some centres appear to have been addressing students' confusion about the plot by teaching them that some characters are first generation and some second generation as many helpfully explained to the examiner that Catherine and Linton were second generation characters.

12

Examiners reported very mixed responses to this task. There were some excellent diary extracts that captured a sense of Cathy's voice and included well-chosen content. Many diaries conveyed Cathy's feelings appropriately, but said little about Lockwood's reactions to his experiences. A number of responses revealed confusion about the plot and which Cathy was the focus here. Examiners reported seeing the following inappropriate responses: diaries in the voice of Catherine Earnshaw's ghost; a diary in the voice of young Catherine Earnshaw based on her childhood with Hindley; a diary in the voice of Heathcliff discussing his attitudes to Linton (a creative response to the essay question); a diary in which the writer was completely unrecognisable.

The Kite Runner: Khaled Hosseini

03

The question asked students to focus on one specific chapter of the novel. Some sound answers made a series of relevant points about the appearance and atmosphere of Kabul. Most students included relevant ideas, although a minority strayed too far from the focus on Chapter 20. Although it was a good idea to highlight the contrast to earlier in the novel, some students spent too much time on this, and lacked enough close focus on the given chapter. There were many points that could be made about the use of language in this chapter to convey the atmosphere and physical appearance of Kabul. Better answers considered a range of ideas and made good use of a literary/linguistic approach. It was surprising to examiners that a number of students produced answers that were lacking in detailed language analysis. Some clearly able students were handicapped by their lack of close focus on details and by their limited use of appropriate terminology. Others were hampered by a feature-spotting approach. A few centres appeared to be encouraging students to develop interpretations which led them away from the main focus of the task. For example, there was some evidence of over-stretched analysis, with some students arguing at length that the changes in the state of Kabul reflected the state of Amir's soul.

13

This was a popular and well understood task, the best answers incorporating Hassan into the response. Some left him out altogether, perhaps interpreting "Amir's victory" too narrowly. Better responses also included descriptions both of the tournament and of Baba's reflections on his feelings about his sons. Some included only one or the other. More assured responses drew on knowledge of the book for ideas for reflective content, whereas weaker responses tended to repeat over and over again how proud Baba was, often using some Afghan words which were then translated into English (which was inappropriate in a journal written for Baba himself). The best answers achieved a good sense of Baba's voice with a judicious use of Afghan words to add authenticity. Most found the journal form straightforward, although there were quite a few 'Dear diaries' and a sprinkling of 'Yours sincerely, Baba'. Some weaker responses read more like unplanned speech than an exercise in the literary genre of writing a journal for a fictional character. These often tended to turn into an inappropriate type of monologue, complete with ellipses and spontaneous speech features, rather than being securely written mode. Lack of planning caused problems for some students, whose work lacked a sensible structure in terms of the order in which ideas were presented. Some seemed to realise they had not put in enough ideas and then tried to back-track and put in more detail or repeat what they had already said. Some students slipped into using a tense more suitable for third person past tense narrative than for journal form.

Property: Valerie Martin

04

Once again, this was a popular choice of text. The best answers focused on Manon's feelings and were able to select appropriate examples which revealed them. There is so much reflection about earlier life in Part Four that there were plenty of ideas to choose from. It was a sensitivity to the changes she had gone through that marked out the best essays. Weaker responses tended to lack a clear focus on Manon's attitudes to her life and wrote more broadly about what happens in Part Four. Some students found it difficult to select appropriate extracts.

14

The quality of responses to this task varied enormously. There were some excellent letters that skilfully created a sense of Manon's voice and attitudes, integrating well-chosen details from the text to build up a line of argument in favour of slavery. Weaker responses tended to be simplistic and unconvincing, often in the form of rambling rants which were uncharacteristic of Manon. Some were generalised and used very little material from the text. Others included details of Manon's personal life that would have been completely inappropriate in this context, such as her husband's sexual infidelity and her dislike of his sexual advances. Some students had not read the question carefully enough and wrote at a point earlier in the novel, rather than after events at the end. The letter form was mostly well handled, although a number of students seemed to have limited knowledge of how to set out a letter or of appropriate salutation and/or valedictions.

Close Range: Annie Proulx

05

This text is a minority choice; there were 131 answers on 'Close Range', 108 of them in answer to the 'A' question. Examiners reported that some students produced sound answers that commented on a range of relevant ideas. Most showed understanding of the context of the story. In a number of answers the sexuality of the character was studiously avoided, which detracted from the sense of overview. Weaker responses also tended to lack detailed analysis of language and very few students commented on narrative viewpoint in relation to the opinions of Jack's parents.

15

Of the 23 responses to this task, many set the scene in a bar which allowed them to reflect Mrs Freeze's fondness for drink. There were a few very good answers which created an impressive imitation of Proulx's Wyoming speech and included a good balance of narrative and dialogue. Weaker responses struggled to create a convincing sense of Mrs Freeze's voice and showed limited knowledge of how to punctuate direct speech. Very few realised that the spurs were significant and many gave a relatively limited account of the odd behaviour of Car Scope.

The History Boys: Alan Bennett

06

This continues to be a popular text. There were slightly fewer answers to the 'A' question than the production task. The quality of answers to this question varied from centre to centre. There were some very sound answers that included a range of relevant ideas and focused on two or three scenes. Examiners noted that in the better answers Posner was portrayed as having a variety of attributes rather than merely being dismissed as 'the gay boy who fancies Dakin'.

Weaker responses tended to concentrate on the earlier sections of the play. Better responses achieved a fuller range and overview by considering the later Posner as well as the schoolboy.

Some students seemed to find this question difficult. Almost all used the quotation *I'm a Jew* etc but some did not go much beyond that. Most commented on his feelings for Dakin, but in weaker responses there was generally only a limited range of points covered. Some students chose to use a spontaneous speech framework to try to answer the question. Inevitably, this led to some very limited and unhelpful analysis.

16

There were some excellent responses to this task which were entertaining and well expressed. The best responses achieved a wholly convincing sense of the Headmaster's voice in the context of a public speech, and showed very good judgement in their choice of content. Weaker responses tended to suffer from inappropriate content and tone for the given context. These students failed to grasp what the Headmaster would be likely to say in his talk. For example, the Headmaster would not go into detail about the reasons for Hector's dismissal in this context. Using surnames or forenames (e.g. Irwin, Hector, Dorothy) in such a speech (as opposed to Mr. Irwin, Mr Hector, Mrs. Lintott) jarred, while the inclusion of major criticism of Hector's approach to teaching, combined with detailed descriptions of the brothel scene, were unconvincing. Many students, quite rightly, decided to reveal the Headmaster's egocentricity. However, some exaggerated this in an unsubtle and unconvincing way. Some students ignored the text, and wrote speech, referring to ideas about education and general praise for the teaching staff, but which included little to show they had actually read and understood the text. While this question is clearly there to enable students to use their imaginations, responses must be firmly rooted in the text and its ideas. A few students attempted to create a transcript, complete with micro-pauses and non-fluency features, which was not appropriate for this task.

Murmuring Judges: David Hare

07

This is one of the less popular texts. There were slightly fewer responses to the A question than the production task. The quality of answers varied from centre to centre. Examiners noted that answers from some centres were quite well handled, with most effectively picking up on Sir Peter's class, dismissive attitudes and sexism. Other examiners noted that some students produced responses that were surprisingly limited, with simplistic ideas and very few comments on language.

17

There were some good diaries for Sandra, although some tried to cover the whole of Act 2 Scene 3 rather than focusing on the conversation with Barry, with inevitable consequences. Examiners reported that many students do not appear to understand the semtex plot, and also miss the point that Gerard is not entirely innocent.

The Importance of Being Earnest: Oscar Wilde

09

There were some sound, well-structured answers to this question which showed an understanding of the humour of the play and of the presentation of Algernon. Better responses showed Algernon's function in the play as a dramatic device rather than a rounded character and there was useful comment about his wit and essential superficiality. However, many missed Wilde's satirical intentions and took the character at face value which led to some simplistic interpretations. Even so, most picked out his love of food and appreciated the comedy surrounding the cucumber sandwiches. Students from some centres were side-tracked into comments along the lines of, 'Algernon is presented in a camp way because Oscar Wilde was gay'. Some appeared to have been encouraged to write that Algernon was a Dandy and that he was modelled on Wilde himself. They could repeat this and give an account of what a Dandy was, but all too often struggled to demonstrate how the text itself supported this view. Many had also learned that Wilde was satirizing Victorian

society and morals and that the character was involved in this but, once again, all too often could not explain how the text supported their view. There was simplistic comment about 'Victorian' attitudes to marriage. There were some more subtle answers pointing out the contrast with Jack, using close reference, and looking forward to the time when Algy's views on marriage changed. It was clear that some students had been taught about a rather strange theory that eating cucumber sandwiches is a metaphor for repressed sexual appetites. Examiners commented that nobody who mentioned it could argue this point convincingly.

19

Miss Prism's letter elicited many enthusiastic, witty and genuinely enjoyable responses, with really good efforts at voice. The problem here, for many, was the need to be reflective in the use of narrative detail for the period. Better responses dealt with this by including ideas such as, 'I couldn't possibly explain all the circumstances leading up to this moment here; suffice it to say....' or indicated that the addressee already had some prior knowledge so parts could be left out. Weaker responses struggled to capture the appropriate expression. A surprising number did not manage to recount the events surrounding the revelation of Jack's identity and some revealed a lack of knowledge of the text in thinking that either Miss Prism or Lady Bracknell was Jack's mother. The letter form was handled appropriately by most but some responses showed uncertainty over letter form, including the salutation/valediction.

A Streetcar Named Desire: Tennessee Williams

10

This is by far the most popular text on this unit and therefore a wide range of responses was seen. Most found this question accessible and answers were generally well focused on the question, with much use of the terms 'foreshadows' and 'animalistic', but not always used with precision. Some strayed away from Scenes 10 and 11 and discussed much earlier events, sometimes at length. There was often little comment on scene 11 even though it is clearly specified in the question.

Better responses were more balanced and showed a sound awareness of both language and dramatic techniques. The best responses were thoughtful and sensitive and illustrated their ideas with a range of focused language comments. Weaker answers struggled to appreciate the subtlety of the scenes set for discussion and a number thought Stanley was genuinely concerned about Blanche in Scene 11 and sometimes in Scene 10 as well. Many students had a pre-conceived approach to the character of Stanley and were determined to make the evidence fit it. He was perceived as 'drunken, controlling, animalistic', and while there is a good deal of the evidence in the scenes to support this view, too often the argument was lacking in discrimination. A number of students argued that the rape was planned by Stanley from the moment he returns home rather than something which is presented as dynamic and spontaneous that occurs as a result of events within the scene. Students who sought to make the evidence fit their ideas, saw practically every verb as revealing Stanley's animal nature. For example, when he 'laughs happily' towards the beginning of the scene when he is clearly excited by the forthcoming birth, some students saw this laughter as sinister because he was all the time planning to rape Blanche. Other frequent flaws were: the exclamation 'Tiger, tiger' was said to describe Stanley rather than Blanche; his silk pyjamas were an indication ('a foreshadowing') of his plan to rape Blanche; his slamming of the door was said to be done to intimidate Blanche and show his anger/animal nature; the 'few drinks' he had had to celebrate the imminent birth of his child turned him into a drunken animal, etc. The change in his mood after Blanche's insults in Scene 10 was not noted in many cases; nor was the way his attitude to Blanche changes during the scene. Scene 11 was often dealt with sketchily, with comments on his loving and caring relationship with Stella, but failing to see his cynical attempt at manipulating her feelings at the very end.

Examiners commented on a worrying trend towards some meaningless feature-spotting in responses to this question, where students appear to think that they have met the A01 criteria by referring to sentence types such as declaratives, exclamatives and interrogatives in order to try to support their interpretation of the presentation of Stanley. There also seems to be an increasing tendency to comment on drama as if it were spontaneous speech and to talk about adjacency pairs, Grice's maxims, etc. This led some students to regard the characters as real people and dramatic interaction as spontaneous speech. It may be helpful to students to approach the Section A questions by structuring an argument and then supporting it by judicious analysis of language (i.e. A02 followed by A01) rather than the other way round, in order to try to avoid a feature-spotting approach.

20

This task produced a wide range of answers, both in quality and approach. There were some convincing letters from Blanche to Shep Huntleigh, with many trying hard to create Blanche's voice and making good use of ideas from the text. There was more than one valid way of presenting Blanche here, from a Blanche obviously desperate for help and revealing her feelings of distress, to a Blanche who is more secretive and manipulating. Examiners commented that the version of Blanche that was putting on airs for the benefit of her ex-beau was often more successful than the presentation of her as a sobbing victim. Students did better on this task when they decided on a specific strategy in respect of Blanche's approach and stuck to it. There was an issue of how much Blanche would reveal and, of course, how much she would invent and this led to a variety of tones and approaches. Some Blanches clearly *had* had too much to drink, which led to some wild and hysterical outpourings that would make little sense to the recipient. The better letters concentrated on producing a brittle, quietly desperate yet still composed sense of Blanche's voice, while being able to bring in references the recipient could understand. Some students made misjudgements in content as a result of not well considering the scenario, such as having Blanche reveal the many men she had slept with or her undying love for Mitch (not convincing in itself) which were unlikely to be appealing to another lover, and Blanche would have known this. The least successful letters were ones which more or less issued direct sexual invitations to Shep in return for a rescue from what was clearly a hellish situation in which Blanche portrayed herself as completely unattractive, drunken or mad. Some weaker responses included a lot of invention and very little authentic content. Quite a few students did not try to explain her problems (truthfully or otherwise), and some did not ask Shep for help.

The letter form was well handled by a number of students but many included flaws of one kind or another. There were inappropriate addresses, salutations and valedictions, but the main flaw in genre for a number of students was the inclusion of spoken language features. It appeared that many of the latter had forgotten they were writing a letter as their responses had the style of spoken monologues, complete with ellipses and non-fluency features. This was a serious misapprehension about what the question required

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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