



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

**English Language and Literature A ELLA3
(Specification 2720)**

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

Report on the Examination

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There were many diverse and thoughtful answers to the questions on this paper. Students who were equipped with the terms and skills to write analytically performed extremely well; those who had practised writing for different audiences and purposes did well too. There is, sadly, still evidence of a lack of preparation for the unseen analysis, where students rely on a narrative approach or unhelpful reliance on linguistic theory. Similarly, too many students had little or no idea as to how to deal with textual adaptation. Centres are reminded that this is not a creative exercise where there is free rein; the given material must be adapted by selecting the relevant source to the task outlined.

It is pleasing to note that most students follow the advice of the rubric and spend a proportionate amount of time on each section.

Section A

Question 1: Analytical comparison

Successful students:

- displayed close reading skills, underpinned by textual engagement and a thorough understanding of all three texts
- undertook the comparison in a planned and considered manner, often employing the anchor method to help them structure their analysis
- used an integrated approach to produce answers which dealt with relevant features and specific differences between the texts
- used appropriate terminology to make suitable and enlightening comparisons
- found interesting comparative points and angles
- used the three-point critical structure (point – example – comment) to help to structure their analysis.

Less successful students:

- did not read the three texts carefully enough
- showed little evidence of knowing how to organise an analytical answer
- made obvious and simplistic comparisons that avoided the focus of the question
- made few literary, linguistic or stylistic points of interest, instead taking a straightforward narrative view of the texts
- wrote three separate analyses with minimal links being made between the three texts
- hardly mentioned the attitudes of the speakers or narrators or personalities in the three texts
- persistently misspelled basic terms such as “metaphor” and “simile.”

The three texts offered good opportunities for students to display their critical techniques, and many responses were detailed and showed good insights into links between the texts by discussing the nuances of meaning and language use. The ‘anchor’ method again produced good results and offered the kind of structure which was helpful to students in organizing their responses while allowing a balanced reaction to all three texts. Planning was often in evidence and gave reassurance of the careful thought that often goes into each analysis. However, there are still some very lengthy plans at the expense of a detailed essay; some students would benefit from being taught how to plan concisely and effectively.

Terminology was used to good effect, and most students were able to comment on a range of features. It is still true that some students were more confused over basic word classes than they were over speech features, although ‘a scraping and scuffling’ in Text B prompted some students to classify these as verbs rather than looking more closely at the functions of the words in context. Students frequently refer to lexis as either ‘low’ or ‘high’ frequency but confuse which is which, as they do with terms such as ‘high’ or ‘low’ lexical density. Similarly,

students refer to sentence types but rarely manage to find apt examples to illustrate their points, and there is still some doubt as to whether to use asyndetic or syndetic for lists. In all cases, the labels are less important than students' focused explanatory and evaluative commentary

Texts A's context caused problems for some students. It is important to read the contextual information in the question as carefully as the texts themselves. Some unnecessary confusion about mode/audience/purpose was the result of simply not seeing that Text A was a transcript of an interview in preparation for an article in a local paper and not the article itself.

Students offered some good analysis of Text A, and wrote effectively about the relationship between the two characters, the variation in language used, and the range of speech features which were present. There were still some students who feature-spotted, and ignored the need to create points around the three-point critical structure of feature/example/comment. These candidates did not explore the context of the conversation, rather choosing to enter the muddied waters of assertions about 'accent', 'idiolect', 'sociolect', or dialect, or even claiming all of these. Some students found less to say about the spontaneous speech than the other two texts, with an increasing number of students failing to identify many appropriate features in the transcript. Quite a few seemed to lack the vocabulary to name specific features and some were unsuccessful in identifying features listed in the symbol key. It is a shame that some students seem unable to bring what they learned about speech features at AS to bear at A2 level.

Text B gave students the chance to analyse the specific atmosphere created by the author, the extensive use of animal imagery, and the opportunity to compare the use of speech here to various forms of speech used in the other texts. Text B generated some very competent analysis of the highly metaphorical nature of the writing, with clearly recognisable authorial voice and the use of revealing dialogue. Sometimes the short sentences ('I looked out of the window') were compared to similarly short (or even minor) sentences in other texts, and the rhetorical force was evaluated rather well. Most students commented on 'slight sparrowy figure' and this was either noted as alliteration or sibilance. Many students went on to investigate the animal imagery further and built up quite a full picture of the strange woman, commenting on the links between 'slight, sparrowy' and 'scrawny as an alley cat' and the contrast between this picture and that conjured up by a 'rich brown voice.' Her defiance and independence were also picked up by a number of students who noted her physical stance, described in two places.

Text C, perhaps the one which was neglected by some students, offered topical material, and some students were clearly very up to date on the latest celebrity gossip, but overlooked the range of linguistic usage which should have made this extract a useful mine for analysis, such as tripartite structure, use of pronoun forms and some of the more metaphorical language relating to the couple's relationship.

There are still too many students who spend a page and a half, or even more, simply outlining audience, purpose and mode, and offering information which is already given, thereby avoiding the task of analysis which is the real focus of the question. If one considers time spent doing this, plus the inevitable 'summing up' at the end, then the actual time spent on analysis can be minimal. Also, some students spend time debating 'class' issues, and attempt to force this issue into the very limited contexts offered by the chosen texts. There was, however, some thoughtful use of Labov in considering structure, as long as it was grounded in the texts and not just a potted summary of the framework.

One of the most challenging aspects of students' analysis was their attempt to discuss humour in the various texts – some mistaking the tone in Text A as sarcasm or skimming

over opportunities in Text B to comment on elements of bathos, or the potentially comic juxtaposition of intellectual aspirations and poverty. More students made much of the slapstick featured in Text C. Many realized that there was comic potential in each of the texts but lacked the analytical tools to bring it to light. Most found sound territory in exploring the common thread of first impressions in all three texts and how these can be misplaced, ambiguous and can change.

Section B

Successful students:

- showed evidence of textual knowledge by manipulating the material into believable, new pieces which could have been published with only minimal re-drafting
- wrote confidently and stylishly
- made few spelling or grammatical errors
- picked out 4 or 5 meaningful examples from their own writing to exemplify why they had chosen to write in a particular way.

Less successful students:

- quoted widely from the source material and did not ensure textual fluency
- wrote inconsistently, changing voice and tense, and, in some cases, names
- wrote commentaries which were too short or too long and general in their approach
- made many spelling and punctuation errors.

Question 2: *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs*

This text remains the more popular of the two set texts, and there was considerable variation in the format and style offered across the range of students. Some students gave too much space to setting the scene for the piece, and some still see the exercise as an opportunity to invent material. Many successfully provided an opening which established the context of the piece, and then proceeded to go through the material, possibly as an interview, or as a straight magazine write-up, or offered a more 'cookery' style format, presenting the various dishes via lists of ingredients and cooking tips. Naturally the tone of the writing and the chosen register would vary from format to format, and any one of these could be very successful. Some were clearly unacquainted with 'okra' (indeed there was a good deal of 'orka' cooked!) or had problems knowing how to pitch the account of the 'blackbird pie'. Mostly, students seemed fairly comfortable in handling the topic although some students, unfortunately, used an over-generalised approach to adaptation that did not focus on the details of the source material and there were many invented dishes or approaches which were outside the source given. At the very top level, there were some very stylish answers with a rich appreciation of Rawlings's eccentricities, managing to convey this fondly and with confidence.

Question 4: *A House Somewhere*

The answers seen on this were less varied in the kinds of format offered. Tone and register were sometimes inconsistent, as too was length, with students trying to cram in all aspects of the text. Setting the scene for the audience and purpose was often the key to delivering a fluent and convincing adaptation for this question. The more successful students wrote a carefully structured piece, using language in a thoughtful and stylistically consistent manner, often entertainingly, about the three artisans employed by Mayle and included relevant detail. Occasionally, misunderstood elements from the text were introduced into the article. 'Tok', 'crak' and 'boum' sometimes appeared without any context and would have confused a new reader. There was also confusion about the location of the dining table, suggesting that some students were not sufficiently familiar with the original article.

Questions 3 and 5: the commentary

Some students spend too much time commenting on audience, purpose and layout, before commenting on stylistic choices. Some commentaries are too descriptive at the expense of detailed critical analysis of the choices made, or offer lists of features, without clear examples or careful selection of key aspects of their writing. The best commentaries were often a result of careful crafting as the adaptation was being formed, rather than as a hurried afterthought. Length varied considerably, with the best featuring 4 or 5 carefully considered examples which demonstrated range and significance, using the three point critical approach. Again, better commentaries examined points of cohesion rather than merely describing layout and overall format. There were, however, a number of purely descriptive approaches: ‘and then I used a declarative sentence...and then I used a simile’ without any comment on intended effects. A number of students simply listed, in order, the content of their article.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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