



General Certificate of Education

**English Language and Literature
2726**

Specification B

ELLB3 Talk in Life and Literature

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Candidates appear to have responded very well to this new paper, and there is no obvious difference between candidates who are from centres who took NTB5, and those who are new to the unit. Team leaders noted a few “echoes” of the legacy unit bullet points, but overall the transition has been smooth.

Relatively few candidates entered in January 2010, and the increase in numbers in June was predictable and pleasing. The same pattern emerged, however, in popularity of texts for Questions 1 - 4, with *Hamlet* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* far ahead of *Translations*, and *The Rivals* a minority choice. Nevertheless, examiners reported some high quality answers across the board on all texts, with a significant number of full marks awarded. Candidates’ performance at the other extreme was also encouraging in that few papers missed the point entirely: most did badly because they didn’t understand the task or know the play well, wrote in generalisations, or simply told the story.

The introduction of the steer in Questions 1 – 4 has proved to be very successful – candidates seem to welcome the thematic focus, which at best provides a convincing argument framework and at worst adds meaning to the ‘running commentary’ approach. Similarly, the compulsory nature of Question 5 has proved more enabling, giving more time for planning. It was clear that most candidates had allocated enough time to give adequate attention to both unseen texts in Question 5.

In general terms candidates seemed well prepared, and sufficiently confident in their understanding of discourse theory to be able to use concepts like schema script theory, conversational maxims, and performative theory to make sense of discourse. A few terms from media theory such as ‘gatekeeper’ also slipped in. Some candidates’ problem with the language of critical comment actually hindered their argument – i.e. the use of ‘portray’ when ‘convey’ is meant, or confusion about the meaning of ‘connotes’. The nouns ‘elision/ellipsis’ also caused problems, as did the verbs ‘elicit/elicited’ (or even the adjective ‘illicit’).

Question 1

Hamlet

The passage was generally well recognised and placed into context, though less secure candidates did not know whether Claudius had lost Polonius or his body. The best answers referred to the theme of falseness across the play as a whole, and showed how it applied to the masked sparring between the king and Hamlet, with the audience experiencing some relief when the King speaks openly in soliloquy. Focus on plot, character and theme with no serious reference to imagery, power relations, terms of address or prose/verse, scored lower than answers attempting more. It was important to know that Gertrude was not present to make sense of the ‘mother/father’ exchange. Attempts to include prepared themes like appearance /reality could often be made to be relevant.

Question 2

A Streetcar Named Desire

Virtually all candidates were able to locate the extract, and could explain the context. Less able candidates provided a running commentary, whilst the best answers noted the way Williams’s stage directions and physical context showed the difference between sisters brought up the same, but whose lives diverged and how incipient tragedy emerges. Less able candidates were also inclined to write character studies of Blanche particularly, rather than pinpointing the relationship between the sisters.

Question 3

Translations

This can be a challenging text, with ambiguities and contradiction everywhere. Better candidates recognised the positive realities of the love scene whilst noting that each wished for themselves the opposite of what the other wanted. There were some superb answers with wonderful detailed analysis of the exchange.

Question 4

The Rivals

Examiners reported some very pleasing responses from the relatively few candidates who chose this text. The impact of contemporary society's attitudes to parental relationships, to women and to property had to be brought into the picture to make complete sense of the exchange. The comedy of lack of self-knowledge was recognised throughout.

Question 5

Unseen text pairing

Most candidates were able to recognise differences between crafted and spontaneous speech, though less successful candidates spent too much time and effort comparing the use of non-normal fluency features, pauses etc as major differentiation, rather than differences in purpose. The 'entertain'/inform basic differentiation was thought to be enough by many candidates who did not develop the purpose of creating character and furthering the plot in Text A. Attitudes and values were recognised in both texts, and the different insecurities of Frank and Julie's tutor recognised, as was Julie's ambivalent feelings about her tutor. Examiners reported some interesting accounts of the social attitudes of the 80's affecting Russell's views. Many candidates misunderstood the nature of the Open University (described as 'a northern university') and got into predictable muddles about social attitudes and non Standard English usage (dialect and accent) worthy of Bernstein.

Overall, the paper was done well. Candidates have been well prepared, and appear thoroughly engaged both by the set texts and by the unseen passages.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.