



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

**English Language and Literature ELLB3
B**

(Specification 2725)

Unit 3: Talk in Life and Literature

Report on the Examination

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General

The best strategy for success in this paper remains a carefully structured answer **strongly focused** on each task. In the case of Questions 1-4 in Section A, this is discovering how the 'steer' is revealed to the audience through the dramatic effects created by the prompts; in Question 5, it is the instruction to compare the unseen texts, using the prompts to structure the comparison. Successful candidates are those who can utilise these somewhat different approaches, whilst providing consistent text support.

In the January paper almost all candidates answered on *Hamlet* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with only a few centres choosing *Translations* and *The Rivals*. The detailed comments below thus relate mainly to *Hamlet* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with a few more general remarks about the other texts.

Technical problems have been noticeably reduced, thanks to the hard work of the centres. However, some candidates need to be reminded to use an appropriate register ('Hamlet's dad' 'Hamlet lollygags revenging' 'Williams showcases Blanche'), and a few words still cause problems:

Candidates are still muddled when writing about Grice's theory of co-operative speech. When the character Hamlet mocks Polonius with his bizarre responses, Shakespeare intended the audience to recognise Hamlet's deliberate distortion of normal speech expectations. Today we can describe this remarkable dramatic achievement in terms of Grice's maxims – but neither Shakespeare nor Hamlet the character knew anything about discourse theory!

Hamlet

Candidates who structured their answer on the prompts incorporated in the question (see above) did better than those who just wandered round the steer and forgot where they were going by the end. This was particularly obvious in *Hamlet* answers where the final lines show Hamlet's shifting 'state of mind', unnoticed by many candidates. Stronger candidates also noticed his use of grotesque imagery and preoccupation with death, as well as his sharp wit. Those candidates who were unprepared spent much time in generalisation and unsupported assertions, or gave elaborate contexts amounting to plot summaries, or talked more about the play as a whole in purely literary terms. A few candidates lost potential marks by writing about layout and graphology or speculating about possible pronunciation of words. These features are not part of the indicative mark scheme. Some candidates were uncertain whether the passage was prose or blank verse and invented reasons for it to be blank verse. Most candidates noticed the 'fishmonger' reference but offered different explanations, not all of which were convincing. Use of repetition ('honest'), topic shifts and rhetorical devices like *incrementum* were noted, but not everyone realised that the description of old men was a direct hit at Polonius.

A Streetcar Named Desire

The main difficulty for candidates was staying focused on the steer ('the relationship between Mitch and Blanche') rather than spending disproportionate time on Blanche's character. Again, using detailed text reference to support points was essential – generalities can't score many marks. One candidate referred to Williams as 'Tennessee' which was a little misjudged! Better candidates noticed the way in which Williams showed the relationship unfolding quite delicately through shared painful experience, shared pleasure in poetry, and Blanche's attempt to imagine herself as 'an orchard in spring'. Most candidates recognised that this romantic effect was seriously undermined by the unpleasant fact that she lies to him about her drinking and her age.

Translations

Examiners who marked answers on this text commented that the best candidates confidently differentiated between the levels of education explored in the passage, and were also comfortable with the use of different languages.

The Rivals

Those candidates who wrote on this text, examiners report, found the steer particularly useful in structuring their answers, and were able to demonstrate how dramatic effects were achieved.

Question 5 Unseen Texts

The texts in themselves presented candidates with no particular problems. Purpose in Text A was variously identified; however, most candidates sensibly described it as interactional and informative. Text B's purpose was clearly 'to entertain' but not everyone went beyond that to individual purposes of crafting speech, such as creating character, describing the setting and suggesting plot. Nor was narrative voice (the means of achieving the above) always recognised, though some candidates understood the narrative nature of Aunt Polly's monologue in creating character and giving us information. Not noticing narrative voice lost marks, as did too much feature-spotting in Text A. However, most candidates were able to make sensible comparisons between attitudes and values in both texts in relation to the shared topic of children and chores.

When comparing passages, candidates might like to be reminded of the following: *whereas* should always be part of a single sentence comparison, where it either precedes or follows another comparative statement.

Eg Mary votes Green **whereas** Fred votes Independent.
Whereas John supported college policy, Fred disagreed with it.
Text B's purpose is to entertain **whereas** Text A's is informative.
Whereas Text A is full of non-fluency features, Text B has none.

Overview

As always, successful candidates were those who were well prepared and knew their texts thoroughly – this January full marks were awarded to some candidates. Practice in structuring responses both on set texts and unseen texts should help candidates who are still to take the examination this June.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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