



General Certificate of Education

English Literature *Specification A*

LITA2 Creative Study

Report on the Examination *2009 examination - January series*

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General

Entries for this first January session attracted very low numbers, with only 249 students spread across 11 centres submitting coursework folders. All three options were represented: Victorian Literature; World War One Literature and The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature. Thanks are extended to those hardy centres who submitted this work because it enabled the senior moderating team the opportunity of seeing some examples of work very early in the life of this new specification. Whilst there was some excellent work which has been awarded full marks, moderators have also seen folders which would undoubtedly have benefited from further time for reflection, revision and redrafting. For centres, entry in this first January session meant that the coursework titles needed to be agreed, texts read, work completed and folders assessed in only one term. This was a challenging business and though most centres and students managed to negotiate a comparatively successful path through the crowded schedule, the evidence indicated that not every student was able to perform to the highest standards of which they were individually capable.

Much of the very best work appeared to have been the result of individually negotiated tasks. This engaging commitment by students and teachers to the selection of texts and topics enabled students at all levels to produce interesting, and often original, work. It was especially pleasing to read folders in which both the prose and the drama task had been set with the specific intention of liberating all of the Assessment Objectives covered by the LITA2 part of the specification.

Some centres did not manage to set wholly appropriate tasks. In the future, centres and students need to be aware of the dangers of submitting work on tasks the moderator has not approved or which do not cover all relevant aspects of the Assessment Objectives. Though the prose task was generally helpful to students and relevant in terms of meeting the Assessment Objectives, several drama tasks, for example, were set which failed explicitly to invite students to address the second part of AO3. With AO3 being the dominant Assessment Objective for the drama task worth 15/30, Centres needed to ensure that students were given opportunities to cover **both** components of the Assessment Objective:

1. **Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts...**
2. **...informed by interpretations of other readers**

Hence, the most useful drama tasks demonstrated the importance of creating opportunities not only for the students to compare and contrast but also for them to do so against a backdrop of literary debate.

Reference to the mark-scheme for the drama response will show that students who are not “working with the views of other readers” (band 3) or are “comprehensively evaluating and assessing the views of others” (band 4) will be trapped in Band 2 or even Band 1.

Task selection should keep a sharp and manageable focus that will enable students to demonstrate detailed, close reading within the 2,500 word limit. Although moderators were gratified to report that most folders appeared to be the right length, there were a few which were noticeably longer than the word limit printed in the specification. Such students frequently struggled to write “well-organised” and “coherent” work (both band 4 descriptors for AO1) and over-long work often looked weak in comparison to answers which were within word limit tolerances. Those students who were awarded 60/60 were within the word limit and demonstrated organisational skills which will help prepare them for the demands of the non-coursework components, in which being concise will help students achieve the higher grades.

Writing two assignments in one coursework folder makes it especially important that students plan their work carefully. If they have a clear idea of exactly what they are doing and why for each essay, students should be able to negotiate their way around the different Assessment Objectives for the prose and for the drama tasks.

Students who understood the Assessment Objectives invariably performed better than students who were vague about what the prose task and the drama task were asking them to do. For the prose task the break-down of Assessment Objectives is dominated by a combination of AO1 (12/30) and AO2 (15/30) leaving AO4 the comparatively modest total of 3/30. AO3 is not examined on the Prose task but becomes the dominant AO for the Drama task being worth 15/30. AO1 and AO2, so dominant on the Prose task, are only worth 6/30 each on the Drama task leaving the remaining 3/30 for AO4.

At each stage of both tasks, there needs to be a clear sense that the student is aware of the authors at work. The most successful use of quotations is brief but frequent, (what was termed in the legacy specification which preceded this one as “short integrated quotation” or S.I.Q.) enlivened by analytical comments that do not merely paraphrase or present narrative but explore the form, structure and language used by the writers. Achieving all this in two assignments with different Assessment Objectives in 2,500 words requires skill and may require extensive redrafting for some students. This is another reason, perhaps, why some students would have benefited from the extra time permitted by a summer entry.

Successful and helpful questions generated some very interesting variations of the transformational prose task. Among the most memorable work submitted were “long views” from characters in fiction whose vantage points were taken from towards the end of a novel. In this way believable and fascinating transformational voices were articulated and maintained for such characters as Sissy, Gradgrind, Bounderby, Louisa and Stephen in Dickens’ *Hard Times*; Hilliard in Hill’s *Strange Meeting*; Shug, in Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Serena Joy, Moira, The Commander and Nick in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Students were sometimes not quite as successful in their attempts at transformational writing and marks were comparatively low when the “voice” slipped or a student did not show sufficient understanding of the source text or the writer’s style. Generally speaking, students who had made a concerted and deliberate attempt to analyse how, for example, Dickens created a recognisable style and patterning for Gradgrind’s speech or how Hill gives Hilliard idiosyncratic flourishes to his speech did far better than students who went for an attempt to recreate a kind of generic style for the whole novel when attempting to capture the voice of a character. Some interesting work on “missing chapters” or “missing extracts” was also seen. Students who understood narrative structure never failed to do better than students who did not and, not surprisingly, students who did not trip themselves up in relation to the plot of a novel did better than students who struggled to identify, for example, who had died, who was parent to whom, lover to whom or who had said what to whom and when in a novel.

The majority of students opted for a traditional prose essay and a range of enabling tasks were set by centres who were obviously keeping an eye on the Assessment Objectives. These sorts of tasks are very familiar to those centres who were with us for the legacy specification and seem to be working well for the new one:

- Explore the ways Dickens presents the theme of education in *Hard Times* through his construction of the character of Thomas Gradgrind;
- “Poor girl gets her Prince.” Explore Brontë’s use of the Cinderella genre in *Jane Eyre*;
- Analyse Faulks’ presentation of love in *Birdsong*;
- Explore Barker’s presentation of mental breakdown through the characters of Prior and Burns in *Regeneration*;

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- How does Atwood's presentation of rituals and ceremonies in *The Handmaid's Tale* influence your understanding of the novel?
 - Explore Walker's presentation of religion and religious ideas in *The Color Purple*.

The key ingredient in the drama task is comparison as can be seen by the dominance of AO3 and the most enabling tasks were those which took full note of the comparative nature of the task. However, some work submitted on the drama component did not include **any** notion of comparison in the title and at least one student answered on only one text with the question "How does Brian Friel present the character of Hugh O'Neill in *Making History*?" While the student did make very limited reference to a second drama text, because of the fact that the 70:30 recommended weighting between the nominated drama text (70%) and the support text (30%) was ignored, the essay failed to address even the first half of AO3 adequately.

Some successful coursework tasks which generated Band 3 and 4 outcomes for students were:

- Explore the presentation of human weakness in *Journey's End*. Compare and contrast the presentation of human weakness in *Journey's End* with the presentation of the same theme in *Birdsong* and say how far you agree with the view that *Journey's End* presents human weakness more sympathetically.
- Compare and contrast Wilde's and Brontë's presentation of the relationships between different social classes in *A Woman of No Importance* and *Jane Eyre* in the light of the opinion that Wilde scorns only the nobility whereas Brontë scorns only the poor.
- Compare and contrast the presentation of issues of gender and identity in *Top Girls* (selected text) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the light of the opinion that Churchill's characters are driven by rage whereas Williams' are driven by sadness.

Moderators reported that when students entered into a spirit of debate with the opinions of other readers their work was lively and spirited and was often a pleasure to read, showing genuine engagement with texts and task.

Moderators also reported that assessments were usually accurate and that most centres had been conscientious in carrying out internal moderation. Moderators sometimes had problems confirming a centre's grades when the supporting statement made general reference to the band descriptors in the marking grid but failed to provide evidence of these by highlighting and annotating the relevant sections in the body of the work. Teachers should also ensure that weaknesses in written expression are not ignored. Since this is coursework, it is expected that students will take the opportunity to check and redraft their work to a good standard; where this is not the case the weaknesses of AO1 must be reflected in the final mark. The font size and spacing selected by a student should not be cramped; a sensible 12 point font such as Times New Roman or Arial with 1.5 or double line spacing is very easy on the eye and allows the teacher marking the folder to conduct a written dialogue in the margins of a student's work. More importantly, perhaps, this commentary, once done, allows the moderator to see how a mark was awarded in the centre. The Coursework Guidance booklet gives guidance on the presentation of work as well as advice on task-setting and question construction and readers of this report who have not yet done so are advised to consult that document (available on the AQA website: www.aqa.org.uk).

Students should ensure that secondary sources, including internet sites, are acknowledged in their bibliographies. Centres are advised not to make uncritical use of anonymous and potentially error-prone contributor-sourced web-sites.

Readers of this report are advised that it is the intention of AQA to produce more sample material to support this specification in the very near future.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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