



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **English Literature** *Specification A*

**LTA1A      Victorian Literature**

# **Report on the Examination** *2009 examination - January series*

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2009 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

#### COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX  
*Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.*

## General

The first examination of LTA1A, the new English Literature Specification A Victorian Literature option, attracted only a single figure entry this January. This was most welcome, because it suggests that centres are understandably cautious about entering their students for the new examination until they are properly prepared in June. It is strongly advised that students are fully prepared before entering for this examination to enable them to have developed the necessary breadth of knowledge about Victorian literature through a course of wider reading. Generally this will be after a year of study.

Given the very small entry for this January's examination, this first LTA1A report will, admittedly, be somewhat hypothetical. The full range of marks was not covered by the students who sat the paper, so some of the report will serve as a reminder to centres about what their students will be required to do if they are to succeed this summer. The report also offers advice on how centres can most effectively prepare their students for the LTA1A examination. Centres will find the January 2009 LTA1A mark scheme a very useful document here, as it contains not only the assessment grids which will be familiar from the previous English Literature A specification – but also an Indicative Content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful students might adopt in their responses.

To look at the achievement of students question by question:

### Question 1

Centres will notice some slight alterations to the format of this question since the specimen paper was published two years ago. In response to the views of centres, the unprepared passage has been made slightly longer to ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the students and to offer them further scope for the establishment of links to their wider reading. The wording of the generic question has also been adjusted slightly: examiners on the current LTA6 paper (in many ways the model for this question) have expressed their concern that students sometimes become bogged down while trying to address the idea of "typicality", so students on the new specification are directed simply to compare the extract with relevant aspects of their wider reading. Of course, in answering this question, students will still be considering what is typical of Victorian literature, but they will be doing so through the more direct means of exploring the similarities and differences between the extract and the most relevant parts of their wider reading.

Those centres familiar with the legacy specification would do well to bear their current practice at LTA6 in mind when preparing students for the new LTA1A module: the skills which will be required by students to cope with Question 1 are very similar to those necessary to meet the demands of the current synoptic paper. Of course, the contextual linking question is less demanding – students respond to one unprepared extract rather than three and the outcomes will be assessed at AS standard rather than A2 – but the best way to prepare students for Question 1 is by providing them with an extract-based course of Victorian wider reading in the same way that successful centres currently offer their students a broad course in the literature of World War One. Although centres have already identified three wider reading texts (one from each literary genre) and submitted details of these to their coursework advisers, students would certainly gain from extending their reading beyond the three compulsory texts. Students whose wider reading only stretches as far as their centre's three nominated texts may well find themselves at a disadvantage in the examination if their opportunities to establish relevant links to the extract are limited by the narrowness of their reading: this was certainly evident in the response of the January candidature.

---

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 1 will relate to at least one of the four key areas identified to help centres focus their studies in the vast area of Victorian Literature. These areas are:

- Ideas of progress: industry and empire
- The position of women in Victorian society
- Social problems: urban poverty and the working class
- Evolving attitudes: culture, religion and science.

The wording of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to students as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract: hence “the poverty he saw in the working class districts” in this January’s Question 1. Centres should use these topics when planning their course of wider reading; they may also refer to the wider reading list on pages 16 – 18 of the specification, although the list is not exhaustive: the best centres will introduce their students to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that students’ wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: students are required to refer to at least one example of their wider reading in each genre when answering Question 1 and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded.

In attempting Question 1, students are advised to split their time evenly between the two parts of the question. It is perfectly acceptable for students to focus on the extract for thirty minutes, then spend the next thirty minutes writing about their relevant wider reading; however, more confident and sophisticated students may be able to produce integrated responses in which the extract and the wider reading comparisons are interwoven throughout the answer. Contrasts will also be an important part of successful responses, but their inclusion should be coherent: arbitrary, bolted-on texts with no obvious connection to the extract will not help students reach the higher bands of the mark scheme. However, this is most likely to occur in the responses of students whose wider reading has been limited to three texts: it should not be a problem for those students who are able to draw on a truly wide experience of Victorian literature.

The Hawthorne passage featured in this January’s paper produced an engaged response and caused no obvious problems. The ambiguity of Hawthorne’s attitude to the Liverpool slums was the cause of some comment (“He finds their living conditions repugnant and yet at the same time fascinating.”) and his use of the phrase “sky-roofed saloon” reminded one candidate, appropriately, of *The Wild West*. Attention was given to Hawthorne’s ironic use of the word “regally” and to the effects created by his choice of the verbs “creep”, “stumble” and “scramble”. At least one close-reading candidate began to explore the extract’s spiritual undercurrents, commenting that “The author feels that their moral goodness can never flourish, as it is buried in ‘filth’ and ‘plunged’ into a ‘cesspool’.”

One candidate perceptively linked Liverpool’s “sombre canopy of coal-smoke” to another smoky northern metropolis: Coketown in Dickens’ *Hard Times* with its “interminable serpents of smoke”. Among the interesting contrasts featured in these responses were the idyllic living conditions enjoyed by the workers at Talbothays dairy in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and the lives lived at the other end of the social scale in Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. Unfortunately, one candidate made no reference to any poetry when linking the extract to the wider reading: this deficiency would be far less likely in a June entry when students will have completed their full programme of wider reading and will be properly prepared to cover all three literary genres in their answers.

Students are, of course, able to refer to their prose and drama coursework texts too: indeed as these texts are liable to be very well-known to them, they are likely to be able to refer to these in some depth and detail.

Centres are reminded that there is further guidance on how to prepare students for Question 1 in the “Contextual Linking” advice which was issued in the summer of 2008.

In June, successful students will:

- explore the ways the writer’s thoughts and feelings about aspects of Victorian life are presented in the extract
- establish a range of links between the extract and their wider reading
- refer to all three literary genres when writing about their wider reading, commenting on the writers’ choices of form, structure and language, as well as subject matter.

### **Questions 2 -7**

The new poetry set text questions should be recognisable to centres with experience of the legacy specification: just as Question 1 is modelled on the current LTA6 paper, Questions 2 – 7 operate in the same way as the post-1900 questions for the LTA3 module. This will be familiar territory for many centres: although the number of the Assessment Objective has changed (AO3 is the new AO4), the expectations of the AS students remain the same – they are required to produce a balanced debate in response to the given critical opinion, supporting their arguments with an analysis of the poetry they choose to use as evidence.

On the basis of this January’s, admittedly limited, entry, Hardy seems likely to be the most popular of the Victorian poets and it is clear that some students have already begun to develop a secure knowledge of his writing. ‘The Blinded Bird’ featured among the poems felt to confirm the Victorian critic’s “harsh and strange” assessment, while ‘The Shadow on the Stone’ provided an effective counter-argument. Examiners were pleased to see that students already understand the need to balance their debate about the poetry, although, once again, it was felt that a more detailed knowledge of the poetry will be evident in the responses of students answering these questions at the end of Year 12, rather than half way through it.

In June, successful students will:

- create a balanced debate in response to the critical opinion given in the question
- select appropriate poems to support their argument and counter-argument
- explore the poetic effects created by the writer’s choices of form, structure and language.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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