



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **English Literature** *Specification A*

**LITA2      Creative Study**

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

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## LITA2 CREATIVE STUDY

Entries for this first June examination attracted 14,649 candidates which was a huge increase from the 249 candidates who entered coursework folders for the January series. In terms of popularity the Victorian Literature option attracted about 3,500 candidates; World War One Literature had approximately 5,600 entries and The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature drew around 5,700 candidates. The examination team reported that they had seen a wide range of work across all four bands from excellent work which was awarded full marks (60/60) to folders which would undoubtedly have scored more highly had candidates been able to give their work further time for reflection, revision and redrafting.

As in January a great deal 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 candidates at all levels to produce interesting, and often original, work. It is exciting and invigorating for a moderator to discover that there is an intriguing medley of tasks and texts contained within a sample of students' work as it indicates that a commitment has been made to each candidate's individual potential and that, consequently, the work in the sample reflects individual ideas, opinions, interests and analyses. By extension, some candidates struggled when the Centre had set only one title for all candidates. This was particularly noticeable in 'traditional' prose tasks and in drama tasks: less successful students were often happy to follow a 'party line' presumably laid down by the Centre and such candidates, therefore, could not make an entirely valid individual response. Such work, though often worthy in intent, has a predictable air about it and often does not enable candidates to achieve to the top of Band 4 which in AO1 calls for the demonstration of a "confident, challenging and original personal voice". 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.

Again, replicating the pattern set in January, some Centres did not manage to set wholly appropriate titles for the drama task, even when that drama task was the same for all candidates within the Centre. In the future Centres and candidates need to be aware of the dangers of submitting work on tasks which do not cover all relevant aspects of the Assessment Objectives. A number of drama tasks, for example, were set which failed explicitly to invite candidates to address the second part of AO3. With AO3 being the dominant Assessment Objective for the drama task, worth 15/30, Centres need to ensure that candidates are 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 in this examination sequence demonstrated the importance of creating opportunities not only for the candidates 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 candidates 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 for AO3. The vast majority of mark adjustments made by moderators occurred on the work of those candidates who did not address AO3ii in their drama answer but where this oversight had not been picked up by the Centre.

Task selection should keep a sharp and manageable focus that will enable candidates to demonstrate detailed, close reading within the 2,500 word limit. Although moderators were gratified to report that the vast majority of folders appeared to be the right length or within 5% of the word limit, there were a few folders which were much longer than the word limit printed in the specification, some outrageously so. Candidates who exceed the word count frequently struggle 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 candidates who were awarded 60/60 by moderators were within or very close to the word limit and demonstrated organisational skills which will help students prepare for the demands of the non-coursework examination components where being concise and organised will be an invaluable asset.

Writing two assignments in one coursework folder makes it especially important that students plan their work carefully. If candidates have a clear idea of exactly what they are doing and why for each essay, they should be able to negotiate their way around the different Assessment Objectives for the prose and for the drama tasks. The early pattern established in January was repeated in the June sequence whereby candidates who understood how the Assessment Objectives worked and exactly where the AOs fitted into the assessment methodology invariably performed better than candidates 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 with 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. Candidates who understood these important ratios produced work whose quality exceeded the work of those candidates who did not.

At each stage of both tasks, there needs to be a clear sense that the candidate is aware of the authors at work. The most successful use of quotations is brief but frequent, enlivened by analytical comments that do not merely paraphrase or present narrative but **explore the form, structure and language used by the writers**. Some candidates who understood that they needed to use quotation rather spoilt their work by relaying the plot and narrative of their chosen texts via the use of “hanging” quotation which did not move into analysis or evaluation of writers’ techniques. Other less successful candidates used quotation but then felt the need to paraphrase or ‘translate’ the quotation in the belief that the moderator would not be able to understand the quotation without the candidate’s help.

Successful and helpful questions generated some very interesting variations of the transformational prose task. As in January, 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. Other memorable efforts included letters and diary entries written in the voice of important characters in candidates’ chosen novels. In this way, believable and fascinating transformational voices were articulated and maintained for such characters as:

- Jane Eyre, Rochester, Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*;
- Doctor Grogan, Ernestina, Charles and Sarah in Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*;
- Tess, Angel and Alec in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*;
- Sissy, Gradgrind, Bounderby, Louisa and Stephen in Dickens’ *Hard Times*;
- Catherine the elder, Catherine the Younger, Heathcliff and Nellie Dean in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*;
- Hilliard and Barton in Hill’s *Strange Meeting*;
- Rivers, Prior, Sassoon and Sarah Lumb in Barker’s *Regeneration*;

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- Stephen, Weir, Jack Firebrace and Elizabeth in Faulks' *Birdsong*;
  - Robert Ross in Findley's *The Wars*;
  - Birkin and Moon in Carr's *A Month in the Country*;
  
  - Stephen, Keith, Barbara Berrill, Uncle Peter and Mrs. Haywood in Frayn's *Spies*
  - Shug and Sofia in Walker's *The Color Purple*;
  - Offred, Ofglen, Serena Joy, Moira, The Commander and Nick in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*;
  - Frank in Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory*;
  - Hortense, Gilbert and Queenie in Levy's *Small Island*.

Successful extra passages or alternative endings were written for all of the above texts as well as *English Passengers* by Matthew Kneale, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, *The Return of the Soldier* by Rebecca West, *A Long, Long Way* by Sebastian Barry, *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh, *Vernon God Little* by DBC Pierre and *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson.

Candidates were sometimes not quite as successful in their attempts at transformational writing and marks were comparatively low when the "voice" slipped or a candidate did not show sufficient understanding of the source text or aspects of form, structure and language. Generally speaking, candidates who had made a concerted and deliberate attempt to analyse how, for example, Hardy constructs Alec's language in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to be laced with mild oaths, exclamations and unnecessary use of the word "Why" as a filler did far better than candidates 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. Furthermore candidates who understood narrative structure never failed to do better than candidates who did not and, not surprisingly, candidates who did not trip themselves up in relation to the plot of a novel did better than candidates 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. Candidates need to consider the mechanics and structure of their set texts when writing additional scenes.

The majority of candidates 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 AQA on the legacy specification and seem to be working well in the new one:

- Analyse (Emily) Brontë's presentation of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*;
- Explore Hardy's presentation of ideas concerning purity in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*;
- 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 (Charlotte) Brontë's use of the Cinderella genre in *Jane Eyre*;
- How does Fowles' presentation of women in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* influence your understanding of the novel?
- Analyse Faulks' presentation of love in *Birdsong*;
- Explore Barker's presentation of mental breakdown through the characters of Prior and Burns in *Regeneration*;
- Explore the ways Findley presents the themes of love and sex in *The Wars* through his construction of Robert Ross;
- Analyse how Carr in *A Month in the Country* presents ideas about healing and reconciliation;
- Explore how Hill presents the relationship between Barton and Hilliard in *Strange Meeting*;

- “Our past never leaves us, even when we think we’ve left it.” Explore the ways in which Andrea Levy presents the importance of the past in *Small Island*;
- 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*;
- Explore how Winterson adapts the fairy tale genre to reflect Jeanette’s struggle for identity in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*;
- Analyse how Frayn presents relationships between adults and children in *Spies*.

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 three Centres allowed students to answer on only one text. Because of the fact that the 70:30 recommended weighting between the nominated drama text (70%) and the support text (30%) was ignored, such essays failed to address even the first half of AO3 adequately and were moderated downwards on the grounds that the candidates had only covered a single text. This was, in essence, a rubric infringement.

Some successful coursework drama tasks which generated successful outcomes for candidates were:

- 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 sex and sexuality in Stoppard’s *Arcadia* and Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* in the light of the observation that women are always in control of sexual relationships in both texts and that all the men will “as tenderly be led by th’ nose As asses are”;
- Compare and contrast the presentation of female characters in *Arcadia* (selected set text) and Wilde’s *A Woman of No Importance* in the light of the opinion that whereas Stoppard’s females are cleverer than Wilde’s, Wilde’s females are ultimately more successful;
- Compare and contrast the presentation of human weakness in Peter Whelan’s *The Accrington Pals* with the presentation of the same theme in *The Wars* by Timothy Findley and say how far you agree with the view that *The Accrington Pals* presents human weakness more sympathetically;
- Compare and contrast the presentation of the relationship between Stanhope and Raleigh in *Journey’s End* with the presentation of the relationship between Jack and Stephen in *Birdsong* in the light of the opinion that all relationships in war are doomed and no lasting good comes out of human contact;
- How does R.C. Sherriff present the ways Stanhope copes with his surroundings in *Journey’s End* to create dramatic effect? How far do you agree with the view that Stanhope’s surroundings are more traumatic than Chris’ in West’s *The Return of the Soldier*?
- Compare and contrast the ways Williams and Fitzgerald present the importance of the past in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Great Gatsby* in the light of the opinion that “the beautiful dreams of the past only ever become the nightmares of the present”;
- Compare and contrast the presentation of issues of gender and identity in *Top Girls* (selected set 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;
- Compare and contrast the ways Shaffer in *Equus* and DBC Pierre in *Vernon God Little* present the influence of parents. How far do you agree with the view that the influence of parents is far more destructive in *Equus* than it is in *Vernon God Little*?
- “The fragile relationship between the sexes is a dominant theme of modern literature.” Evaluate this opinion by comparing and contrasting how relationships between the sexes are presented in Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

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

Moderators also reported that assessments were usually accurate and that the majority of centres had been conscientious in carrying out some form of internal moderation. Where two or more teachers have been responsible for a candidate's folder, it is always most gratifying for the moderator to see the comments of at least two teachers at the end of each essay in the folder. This is pleasing evidence that internal moderation has been conducted within the centre. 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. Centres are advised against the unhelpful practice of merely recording AOs in the margins of a candidate's work. The best and therefore most accurate marking occurs when teachers underline (with a straight line) or tick good features of a candidate's work and also clearly indicate less successful, contentious or erroneous features of a candidate's work. Teachers who undertake a written commentary within the margins of the essay are demonstrating that attention has been paid to the candidate's work, that the marking has been rigorous and that every attempt has been made to be fair and accurate. Most importantly, perhaps, this commentary, once done, allows the moderator to see how a mark was awarded in the centre.

Weaknesses in written expression should not be ignored. Since this is coursework, it is expected that candidates 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. This is especially important for the prose task which carries a higher AO1 weighting than the drama task.

The font size and spacing selected by a candidate 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 the written commentary (mentioned above) in the margins of a candidate's work. The Coursework Guidance booklet which supports this coursework unit gives advice on the presentation of work as well as steerage on task-setting and question construction and readers of this report who have not yet the LITA2 Coursework Guidance Booklet are advised to consult that document (available on the AQA website: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)).

Candidates should ensure that secondary sources, including internet sites, are acknowledged in their bibliographies and that the accurate word count is always included at the end of each essay. Centres are strongly advised to encourage candidates not to make uncritical use of anonymous and potentially error-prone contributor-sourced web-sites.

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

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