



General Certificate of Education

English Literature *Specification A*

LTA1B World War One Literature

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – June series

This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)

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General

This is the first time the examination has been sat by a full-size cohort of Year 12 students who have studied the complete course. In the words of one senior examiner: 'This has proved an enabling paper which encouraged all students to make meaning of literary texts. Both sections offered fairly-worded, open questions which invited students to make meaning in their own way'. Another writes: 'The paper has been well-received by both centres and examiners alike. The questions are deemed to be challenging, yet accessible and straightforward in their demands. There are opportunities for candidates of all levels to achieve and the most able could demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and skills'.

The relatively small proportion of students who sat the examination in January meant that the majority of centres and students heeded the advice of waiting until the end of Year 12 before sitting the examination to ensure that:

- students were widely read
- examination and coursework texts had all been taught so that students could access these effectively as wider reading
- students had the chance to practise examination technique in timed conditions
- the key messages about examination priorities had been absorbed and acted upon by centres and students.

These key messages are that:

- all three genres, poetry, drama and prose (fiction and/or non-fiction), should be included in the Contextual Linking question
- the Contextual Linking extract should be properly considered both in terms of thoughts and feelings and in terms of form, structure and language
- links to wider reading include similar to **and** different from and these should be sufficiently developed so as to be convincing and illuminating
- the poetry questions all involve a debate that should be considered in a balanced way.

It seems that the vast majority of candidates had assimilated these messages and, in particular, examiners found relatively few examples of contextual linking answers that did not consider the three genres and relatively few that did not look at all beyond the given view in the poetry debate. Once these minimum requirements were covered, the discriminators were, of course, **how** the three genres were used and **how** the debate was balanced.

It is always good advice to plan and consider answers and these measures are fundamental in constructing a quality answer. Consequently, it is always worth reminding centres and students that whatever the AO weightings of particular questions, quality of expression and the need to shape responses appropriately are always paramount.

With this option in particular, it is important to remember that although the theme and the concept of wider reading and contextual linking clearly derive from the success of LTA6, this is not LTA6! It is a new and distinct AS course in its own right, and teachers with LTA6 experience need to be able to draw on that experience but, at the same time, make all the necessary adjustments to the new specification and a new approach. Please remember that pre-World War One War texts such as 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'Vitai Lampada' are now not relevant.

Question 01

The extract itself

The Owen letter worked very well in the sense that there were many aspects of subject matter and style with which to engage and with which to create links to wider reading texts. The extract was able to support different interpretations about Owen's thoughts and feelings. For example, many candidates were of the view that Owen was being honest and open with his mother. These candidates tended to cite other letters from the correspondence and/or the discussion about Owen and his mother from *Regeneration*. Conversely, and often with equal success, many argued that, as a responsible and considerate officer, Owen was subtly editing and censoring his own letter to minimise his mother's concern. Some perceptive candidates noticed that Owen was indirectly telling his parents of his current position by referring to the village his father had mentioned previously.

Candidates were quite right to see variation in Owen's mood and tone. He begins in a straightforward, business-like mode of military reportage; his account then begins to convey almost a relish for adventure and recounts his experiences with some pride; the elegaic and sardonically euphemistic reflection on Gaukroger is worth exploring; and finally the bitter irony of the 'reward' and all its ramifications leads Owen to express resentment towards the politicians at home. As ever with a text extract, it was capturing the mood and tone that proved the key to getting to the heart of Owen's thoughts and feelings and his use of form, structure and language.

Many candidates noticed the date and placed the letter in time, referring to post-Somme writing. This tended to be a persuasive line of argument, particularly when exploring the latter half of the passage. Some less attentive readers tried to link the excitement Owen displays with early naive writers such as Brooke and Jessie Pope but struggled to sustain this convincingly and found evidence scarce.

Wider reading

Most students selected readily from their prose fiction and drama coursework texts to evidence wider reading. The most popular prose texts by far were *Regeneration* and *Birdsong*, whereas *Journey's End* dominated the drama. The Owen letter was well-served by *Regeneration* and many referred to the conversation when Owen and Sassoon discuss what they would and wouldn't tell their mothers about their lives at the front. Some drew a parallel between Owen's experiences and those of Burns. Candidates were keen to make links with descriptions of intense combat and graphic suffering as well moments of close comradeship from *Birdsong*. Poetry wide reading references were predominantly from the set coursework text and candidates had no trouble in creating a whole variety of links.

Centres will obviously choose the best texts to suit their students and many will draw on the expertise and familiarity with texts and built up over the legacy years and teaching LTA6. Texts may be familiar to teachers but are new and fresh to each cohort of students and this was apparent in responses to the tried and tested texts. At the same time, it is good to see centres exploring less travelled roads; responses to *A Long, Long Way* and *Not About Heroes* were often very engaged. It is clear to examiners when a centre has achieved wide and independent reading. It was exciting to see autonomous wide readers referencing individually chosen wide reading texts and clearly having a breadth of reading on which to draw. Some centres remain on a restricted diet, and this shows in the similarity of candidates' responses and range of wide reading references. This strategy may be practical in teaching terms and may be reassuring to

less confident candidates, but it can hold back some candidates from the higher reaches of the mark scheme. Similarly, over-teaching a particular kind of point, even down to key words and phrases, can be restrictive. For example, teaching that the Edwardian attitudes to war that prevailed in 1914 were derived from the 'muscular Christianity' of the public schools is not enabling when all the candidates from a centre assert this in the same words.

It was interesting to see the range of non-fiction texts brought in for wider reading. Some were clearly very familiar with the letter genre and could reference in detail, for example, other letters in the correspondence between Owen and his mother and/or letters by Sorley, Grenfell, Ford Maddox Ford, Vera Brittain and specific letters from lesser-known combatants. This ability to engage with genre was enabling. Given the fact that the non-fiction extract is likely to be taken from a relatively small range of possible genres (letters, journals, memoirs, reports, etc.) genre study might feature as part of the wider reading course provided by centres. There is perhaps an issue with poetry wide reading and the danger is that the anthology becomes the candidates' sole poetry source in the examination. Many candidates did manage to reference two poetry anthologies effectively. It is very useful to be able to refer to poetry by women (for students of Gardner or Stallworthy) and poetry by men (for students of O'Reilly). Gardner and Stallworthy students were often able to cite Jessie Pope or Vera Brittain. O'Reilly students had no problem referring to male poets. At the same time it would be good to see more widely read candidates when it comes to poetry.

To maximise their candidates' chances of success in answering Question 01, centres are advised to develop a programme of wider reading, such as the one in the AQA-endorsed Nelson Thornes publication, *AQA English Literature A: Literature of World War One* (ISBN 978-0748782949). Of course, centres are not obliged to use this supporting textbook, but they may find it useful as a model when constructing their own programme of wider reading. Centres are reminded that there is further guidance on how to prepare candidates for Question 01 in the 'Contextual Linking' advice which was issued in the summer of 2008.

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 01 will relate to at least one of the six key areas identified to help centres focus their studies in the rich area of the Literature of World War One. These areas are:

- The realities of war
- 'Man's inhumanity to man'
- Patriotism
- Politics
- Physical/mental/spiritual consequences
- The role of women and the Home Front

The introduction to of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to candidates as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract. Centres should use these topics when planning their course of wider reading; they may also refer to the wider reading list on pages 18 – 20 of the Specification, although the list is not exhaustive: the best centres will introduce their candidates to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that candidates' wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: candidates are required to refer to at least one example of their wider reading in each genre when answering Question 01 and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded.

More successful candidates:

- Engaged with mood and tone as aspects of thoughts and feelings

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- Kept returning to Owen rather than leaving the extract behind
 - Referred to all three genres in wider reading
 - Made secure links of similarity and difference and explored at least some of them in detail
 - Made meaningful analytical comments about form, structure and language to support similarity and difference
 - Understood that despite its brevity and lack of explicit structure, the extract has variety and layers of meaning
 - Referred to contexts (literary, historical, military, social, cultural, etc.) where appropriate and used this knowledge to illuminate the extract
 - Planned their answers and shaped them accordingly
 - Were clear, fluent and precise in expression
 - Selected from coursework texts and beyond as evidence of informed and secure wider reading
 - Selected the very best prose, poetry and drama cross references and looked at them and the ways in which they link to the extract in some detail.

Less successful candidates:

- Wanted to pigeon-hole the whole extract and the author's entire output as one thing or the other (pro-war, anti-war; 'positive', 'negative'; typical, atypical, etc)
- Mistook the Colonel's words for Owen's
- Asserted that Owen had only critical views of those in command
- Thought that Gaukroger was indeed Owen's brother! (Surely he would be called 'Owen'?)
- Asserted that the extract wasn't as exciting as others they had read and that the events described must be 'normal', 'everyday' or 'boring'
- Asserted that because of the phrase 'of course' Owen did not care about the casualties and had become immune to death- therefore totally ignoring the poignant Gaukroger episode and Owen's use of 'brother'
- Failed to make clear, specific links to wider reading (whether it be at the level of content, genre, author, form, structure, language, or whatever); asserted links; or sometimes did not attempt to link
- Imagined that Owen had a wider readership in mind and this affected his choices as a writer- therefore failing to consider the extract as an example of a specific genre
- Asserted that because it was a personal letter and one of many in a correspondence the text had few or even no notable features and proceeded to sweep the extract aside so as to concentrate on wider reading
- Repeated information from the introduction to the extract
- Failed to cover poetry when they had the text in the examination!
- Failed to mention prose and/or drama when surely they had studied these as coursework texts and hopefully knew them very well
- Covered too many wider reading texts in too little detail and/or to little effect.

Section B

Gardner is perhaps the most popular text, but Stallworthy is not far behind and an encouraging number of centres had taught O'Reilly to good effect. In the broader questions (i.e. 02, 04 and 06) it appeared easier for some candidates to engage with a clear debate. However, in the

questions that name poems (i.e. 03, 05 and 07) the debate is just as crucial so candidates need to take time to identify the debate before they proceed to planning and writing. The latter question sometimes showed a lack of clear and/or deep understanding so it was puzzling why some candidates had chosen these questions. Candidates should be equally able to do both questions. Ideally, candidates should be able to look at the two question options in Section B and think: "I can do either of these questions well, but which one can I do best?" Centres need to ensure that candidates have a clear choice in this section by clarifying that the debate is the main issue in both questions. Students should be practised in both questions and the skill of co-ordinating a debate should be central to both.

Question 02

A very popular choice that candidates seemed to find accessible and enabling.

More successful candidates:

- Kept 'ordinary soldiers ... as ... heroes' in focus and kept referring to these key words
- Chose poems carefully guided by the word 'heroes'
- Balanced the given view to show that Gardner has anthologised poems that show soldiers in different ways too
- Spent a substantial amount of time considering both sides of the argument.

Less successful candidates:

- Struggled with or ignored 'ordinary' soldiers and did not define what they understood by this. If candidates chose officers and/or public school educated writers and voices then they needed to argue the case for how these writers and voices could capture the experience of ordinary soldiers
- Did not balance the argument by looking beyond the given view, or tried to balance hastily at the end
- Could not clearly co-ordinate a debate so ended up contradicting themselves.

Question 03

A popular choice but there were some disappointing responses.

More successful candidates:

- Kept 'death in battle' in focus and kept referring to these key words
- Understood Graves' purposes behind: his title; the ironies of the fable of the two soldiers; his presentation of Sergeant Smith; the choices of form, structure and language he adopts
- Looked beyond the given view to others ways in which death in battle is presented
- Spent a substantial amount of time considering both sides of the argument.

Less successful candidates:

- Did not appreciate the title's reference to death and the process of levelling. (Are there other possibilities for who or what 'the leveller' may be?)
- Re-told the story
- Made vague, unconvincing assertions about Graves' choices of form, structure and language

- Looked at 'battle', rather than 'death in battle'.

Question 04

A popular question for students of O'Reilly and often done very well. The debate was particularly accessible and enabling here it seems.

More successful candidates:

- Kept 'individual suffering' and 'the wider war' in focus and kept using these key words
- Chose very good examples from the plethora that could be said to convey individual suffering
- Balanced the debate in imaginative ways to access references to the wider war
- Spent a substantial amount of time considering both sides of the argument.

Less successful candidates:

- Struggled with 'the wider war' and were vague and/or ignored it

Question 05

Equally popular with students of O'Reilly.

More successful candidates:

- Kept 'captures the mood' and 'soldiers going off to war' in focus and kept referring to these key words
- Read the poem with reference to its date of composition without over-simplifying its mood, tone and message
- Explored the poet's choices of form, structure and language, in particular the evocative imagery and carefully poised tone
- Spent a substantial amount of time considering both sides.

Less successful candidates:

- Wanted to make the poem either pro-war or anti-war:

Question 06

A very popular question for Stallworthy candidates. Again, the debate appears to have been particularly accessible and enabling.

More successful candidates:

- Kept 'grim realities' and 'no hope' in focus and kept referring to these key words
- Used 'grim' to good effect
- Used 'hope' when balancing the debate
- Spent a substantial amount of time considering both sides.

Less successful candidates:

- Neglected 'hope'

Question 07

'The Volunteer' was handled well on the whole and many handled the poem sensitively and thoughtfully.

More successful candidates:

- Kept the poem and 'soldiers killed in battle' in focus and kept referring to these key words
- Considered the time context of the poem
- Noticed structural devices
- Engaged with the romantic and chivalrous vocabulary and imagery
- Engaged with the presentation of the clerk's civilian life in contrast with the heroic and euphemistic account of his military experience
- Spent a substantial amount of time considering both sides of the argument.

Less successful candidates:

- Left the named poem behind too early on and did not return to it
- Looked at soldiers in battle, rather than killed in battle

Finally, there were some examples, albeit relatively few, of candidates choosing a question that did not match the poetry text they had been taught and that they had with them in the examination. Examiners were instructed to ignore this error where possible and credit the answer from the generic aspects of the mark scheme. However, centres should be careful in future to prepare their candidates to locate the two questions relevant to the centre's chosen anthology.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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