



General Certificate of Education

English Literature

Specification A

**LTA1C The Struggle for Identity in
Modern Literature**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT: June 2010

As with her sister papers on The Victorians and Literature of World War 1. The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature is gaining in popularity and once again has attracted the largest entry of the three AS Specification A units. The increased uptake across all three units is probably attributable to the overarching spirit of the Specification: it attracts confident well-read teachers able to nurture the enquiring minds of their students who, together, through practice in controlled conditions, can hone the skills of focused responses to both deep and broad reading. Feedback from Centres suggests that this option is stimulating debate in the classroom and encouraging the uptake of independent reading especially where, through time constraints, the classroom material has relied upon extracts from key texts. It is discernible in the quality of the linking candidates are able to make that the handling of whole texts does allow for more developed and mature links to be established in Section A responses.

This summer's LTA1C paper has been extremely successful and examiners have reported improved balancing between focus on the extract and linking to the wider reading in Section A as well as more focused and relevant responses to the poetry of Section B. One examiner stated that King's final Mountaintop speech managed to bring tears to her eyes not only in the poignancy of its content but from the eloquence of the many thoughtful engagements with it from this year's cohort. Another commented that the questions on the poetry "were consistent with those set in previous papers and allowed students to engage with lively debate as well as show off their critical abilities". Once again, as testimony to the hard work and creativity of teachers and students alike many perceptive and mature responses were seen confirming that this option encourages informed independent thinking and privileges those who are not afraid of the varied reading they have been judiciously guided through by their teachers or may have undertaken as part of their individual, paired or small group contribution to the course: this specification is very much about participation and active learning.

On the whole examiners were pleased with the many and varied ways in which students forged links between the King extract and their wider reading but it is still pertinent to emphasise that those links do need to be developed in some way that demonstrates the significance of the text, for example, in its features, themes or context rather than offered as a mere reference or 'name-drop'. Some candidates created ingenious links and were keen to show they could sustain those links across all the wider reading genres at the same time. Whilst this sometimes led to a dazzling display of synthesis it is not necessary in general and can encourage more focus on the prestidigitations of the conjuror rather than the workmanlike crafting of developed, relevant comment. Another examiner commented that "candidates were sometimes over-keen to set up complex opening paragraphs that showed off a general knowledge of the themes of the Struggle for Identity when they would have been better employed in dealing with the specific struggles occasioned by the extract in front of them". Whilst it is heartening to think that candidates are taking time to compose their thoughts (after all writing is a very different skill from speaking and does need to be formal and controlled) there is no need to contrive artificial introductions or, for that matter, over-elaborate conclusions that in many instances merely repeated what has already been demonstrated in the body of the essay. One examiner commented on the improved range of texts being offered in the links and it is encouraging to note that centres seem to have heeded advice about the need for diversity and the students' own choices of texts that make refreshing complements to the classroom-taught texts or extracts that can sometimes characterise a whole Centre. Pleasingly, there were fewer reported instances of the all-purpose answer although candidates really do need to think about how they can exploit the differences of contexts and struggles between the extract and their wider reading and articulate these more confidently. It is perhaps pertinent also to note that candidates can

usually do this more successfully if they have a reasonable understanding of the historical and social background to the era in which the texts are set or are about. It was increasingly evident that some candidates had no idea of the difference in connotation and context between, for example, segregation and apartheid as terms in themselves. In addition, whether referring to their wider reading or selecting appropriate set poems, it is essential that candidates consider each question afresh, rather than trying to twist inappropriate material prepared in advance to fit the keywords. Another technique to avoid would be the “box-ticking approach” as one examiner termed it. This does not lead to success and denies candidates the opportunity to develop the skills which become crucial at A2 as well as often leading them away from vital areas of interest in the extract or the wider reading. The best way to prepare candidates for this examination is through a full course of exposure to the literature of the modern era (loosely equated to texts written during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), examples of which abound in the Specification Literature and the AQA-provided support materials.

Candidates should also bear in mind that their Wider Reading references should be specific, as well as relevant: quotations from the Wider Reading texts and analysis of their form, structure and language take candidates into those higher bands of the mark scheme which are denied to candidates whose references are generalised or merely narrative. Similarly, all candidates need to remember that references to all three literary genres are required in their answers to Q1: omitting a single genre will limit the mark that can be awarded and failing to refer to two or even all three genres is potentially catastrophic. Careful planning should help candidates to avoid these serious errors and it was often in evidence in the best responses. Judicious budgeting of time between the two questions would also enable candidates to achieve of their best: it is futile to spend disproportionately longer on one response when each carries the same marks. Concerns are still being expressed about the use of inappropriately colloquial expression and the difficulties caused by thoughtlessly illegible handwriting: these are serious issues which some centres and candidates need to address as a matter of urgency. Similarly, it is regrettable that, for example, the difference in spelling between ‘woman’ and ‘women’ causes so many problems when there are few who find it hard to correctly spell and differentiate between ‘man’ and ‘men’!

Examiners noted the huge popularity again of Carol Ann Duffy in Section B and the massive enthusiasm for the question based on the named poem, this time, the opener, ‘Little Red Cap’. With Maya Angelou and Sheers the named poem question proved less popular with candidates preferring to opt for the broader, opinion-based questions. It is important to note, however, that the poem-based question, particularly where it invites candidates to comment on its position within the anthology or collection does require links to be made to other poems and is never an opportunity to write exclusively, and often irrelevantly, about the named poem. On the whole candidates wrote confidently and well about the poetry they had studied, although there were some persistent problems. Some candidates over-loaded their responses with biographical information; others simply agreed with the given view and overlooked the necessity of debate; some treated the poetry as prose and made no reference to the verse itself: candidates are strongly advised to avoid these approaches as they seriously limit the possibility of accessing the higher bands mark for Section B.

Pleasingly, there were few rubric infringements but it should be noted that centres must check that they do not disadvantage their candidates by erroneously focussing on proscribed poems where Angelou is concerned. For example, clear directions were given in the specification and support materials that Angelou’s poems in the separate collection *Shaker Why Don’t You Sing* would **not** form part of the study and therefore should not have been referred to in answers in Section B. It is also contrary to the spirit of the examination and the rubric for candidates to refer to their Section B poetry as the only evidence of that genre in Section A. This section tests Wider Reading and that does not mean Section B poetry. Centres should also be aware that

more specific and direct addressing of the four Assessment Objectives in Question 1 and the three in Questions 2 to 7 would enable candidates to achieve better marks, especially when considering form, structure and language. Whilst recognising that mechanical ‘trawling through’ the terminology in order to feature-spot is an unproductively sterile process, form, structure and language choices are part and parcel of a writer’s repertoire and merit informed comment. Many candidates were able to recognise and engage with interesting linguistic choices and features but were neglectful of observations and analyses of form and structure both in the extract and in the poetry: a limiting omission. After all, as stated above, poetry is a very different genre from prose and its craft should be appreciated in any sound Section B response.

Although the main purpose of this report is to summarise the ways in which this summer’s candidates responded to the demands of the LTA1C paper, as is already evident it also offers advice on how centres can most effectively prepare their candidates for future examinations. Centres should use the report in conjunction with the June 2010 mark scheme which contains not only the relevant assessment grids but also an Indicative Content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful candidates might adopt in their responses.

When responding to Question 1 candidates do need to apply themselves to both the directed tasks but there does not need to be a sharp division between the two areas of response and answers certainly do not benefit from being subtitled as 1a) and 1b) or 1(i) and 1(ii). It is also not unreasonable to expect candidates who ignore the information offered in the preamble to Question 1 to disadvantage themselves.

Section A: Contextual Linking

Question 1

This year’s LTA1C examiners found that the extract from the conclusion to Dr Martin Luther King’s final speech provided an effective starting point for Question 1, enabling candidates to analyse the writer’s/speaker’s stylistic and rhetorical effects, to explore the issues he presented and to make relevant connections to context of the Struggle for Identity. It was clear, as several examiners remarked, that candidates were at the very least able to respond at surface level to the personal struggle of Dr King. Surprisingly, some found it harder to articulate the exact nature of the wider, collective struggle and were confused or lacked the relevant knowledge to comment on the Movement for Civil Rights in 1960’s USA. Most students were able to discern Dr King’s thoughts and feelings although some found the sneezing and the earlier attack that he referred to distracted them from exploring the contrasting collective struggles that formed the majority of this extract. A differentiating element was their approach to and engagement with the soaring rhetorical features and the impressive metaphorical language. There was, however, a pleasing general ability and willingness to comment relevantly on the structure of the extract, noting its contrasts and illustrative detail. Considering Dr King is such a prominent figure in the Civil Rights Movement of America and knowing candidates’ interest in biographical details, very few responses commented on the remarkable prescience of the speaker in prophesying his own death which followed hard upon this almost valedictory speech. Alarming, one examiner reported “some candidates seemed to think Dr Martin Luther King Junior was the son of the assassinated Minister and Civil Rights Campaigner” with some strange construction therefore placed on the extract. Other examiners failed to be impressed by candidates penchant for abbreviating Dr King’s name to just ‘Martin’, ‘Luther’ or even ‘Jr’! More discerning readers were able to appreciate the wide range of emotions expressed in the extract, from the subtle self-deprecating and inclusive humour of the victim who “too” was pleased that he did not sneeze, to the disarmingly modest acceptance of a man who was only hours from death and clearly loved his life and what he had done and witnessed in its all too brief span.

Most candidates were able to appreciate the unifying zeal of Dr King in his magnanimous acceptance of the one family of the race although it was perhaps only the more discerning readers who were able to appreciate that that meant the human race and not solely the struggle of black people. Where weaker candidates latched onto the 'American Dream' with the tenacity of a drowning man in some instances, deeper readers of both the extract and their Wider Reading texts, were often more able to explore the intricacies and paradoxes of that dream when dreamt by all of America's peoples. Those who saw the reference Dr King made to his own 'Dream Speech' of 1963 simply as an opportunity to write about that well-documented piece of oratory to the exclusion of the extract were conferring themselves to the lower bands. Similarly, those who approached the extract merely as a feature-spotting exercise were blind to the opportunities to explore relevant contexts and deaf to the tonal shifts and cadences of this masterly piece of public speaking.

Once again, in crafting valuable links to the extract, poetry was the least well-represented genre despite many candidates noting that Dr King used poetic language. Drama was diversely evidenced and often explored to good effect in developing the differences and similarities but, as one examiner expressed it, "it would be helpful to see candidates exploring dramatic effects more carefully as it is a very different genre from novelistic prose or non-fiction". This shortfall is perhaps evidence that with time constraints and other issues in our schools, fewer students seem to have had the opportunity to see their drama texts enacted and have come to them solely via a classroom reading where, perhaps, stage directions and staging effects might be overlooked. Other candidates made it quite clear that the novels they claimed to have read were in fact film versions and, whilst the visual medium can and frequently does, enhance and enliven any course of study (as acknowledged above in the reference to stage productions), this option is still very much focused on the primacy of the written text, explored and reviewed by close, critical study. On the other hand, it was pleasing to see confident students making excellent references to texts in translation particularly in the genre of modern drama. Less welcome was the over-reliance in some instances on texts cited from previous LTA1C examination papers which had clearly been used as practice pieces.

As in previous papers, the candidates who did least well in this examination were often those unable to establish any sort of convincing connection between the extract and their wider reading: their use of arbitrary, bolted-on texts with no obvious relevance to the extract resulted in narrowly assertive answers. In many cases these unsatisfactory responses appeared to be the consequence of very limited wider reading or of the candidate's determination to twist some sort of all-purpose, pre-written material to fit whatever the extract happened to be about. Fortunately, the vast majority of candidates did not approach the examination in this manner: those with a broad knowledge of the literature of the modern era pertaining to the struggle for identity were able to select the most relevant examples from their wider reading and build a persuasive and cogent argument.

Successful candidates:

- Explored the extract with confidence and insight showing they could discern the struggles for identity of all relevant individuals as well as fully focusing on the thoughts and feelings of the writer/speaker
- Made effective links between the extract and their wider reading and were able to explore across poetry, drama and prose
- Paid attention to the form, structure and language of the extract as well as those of their wider reading.

Less successful candidates:

- Wrote general paraphrases of the content of the extract, wrote very short responses or responses that paid too little attention to the extract
- Made few or 'forced' links to their wider reading, sometimes ignoring the breadth of genres and often inadequately developing that link
- Struggled to engage with form, structure and language choice in the extract or in their wider reading examples.

Section B: Poetry

Examiners were once again impressed by the ways in which many candidates responded to their set poetry texts; the most successful were closely engaged and wrote about the poems in a sensitive, balanced way. Less successful answers were often characterised by either a superficial approach, featuring explanation rather than analysis and paying little attention to a poet's technique, or by simple agreement with the question's given view, rather than the development of a balanced debate. It is imperative that candidates keep the text at the forefront of their responses and make every effort to construct an informed, balanced debate rather than a biographical narrative.

And Still I Rise by Maya Angelou

Ms Angelou attracts a passionate following and it is clear that many students studying her poetry are fascinated to learn more about her life and achievements. Many of these students may well read her autobiographical work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. There should, however, be as firm a line as possible drawn between her life and the content of her poetry as one feature of poetry is undoubtedly the persona that is crafted by the poet providing an often anonymous or neutral platform from which to express thoughts and feelings. Biographical detail should therefore be used very sparingly as it can cloud criticism and skew responses. This seems to afflict students of Angelou most particularly. Nevertheless there seemed to be an increased uptake in centres studying Angelou this year with some very pleasing responses seen where Angelou's craft was most definitely under the microscope, eliciting some informed and highly articulate responses. It should be noted that some editions of the collection *And Still I Rise* are still available with the section *Shaker Why Don't You Sing* affording candidates opportunity to reflect on those poems **in their wider reading** but were not set for specific comparison and should not have been cited except by way of the wider reading introduced in Section A responses only. It is painful for candidates to use proscribed poems in Section B responses because this material cannot be rewarded and invariably limits attainment. There was however on the whole, evidence that candidates had been well taught, showing an ability to deal with the specific terms of each question, when selecting and shaping an appropriate response. Each of the questions attracted roughly the same number of responses.

Question 2

Maya Angelou's own words framed the question's central issue of 'the necessity of love' and candidates were invited to debate its centrality or otherwise. Many responses were seen that did just this, debating to a high standard and evaluating Ms Angelou's intent wherever discernible. Others were neglectful of the 'necessity' element in the phrasing and provided comparatively flat narratives about poems selected for their superficial references to love. This proved limiting as Angelou's poetry provides ambivalence towards this emotion and many of her poems show perseverance in the face of 'lovelessness' both in personal relationships and in the wider context of life. Whatever the approach, candidates were required to consider the statement in a broadly philosophical way to make best progress, extending and exploring the situations depicted in the poems more widely. It was not intended to open the floodgates to irrelevant biography. Many candidates determined to use 'Still I Rise' regardless of the phrasing

of a question, struggled to broaden the ideas in the poem beyond simply and erroneously paraphrasing that Angelou was 'saying' she loved herself! Others spent valuable time and skill in exploring the darker language of poems such as 'A Kind of Love Some Say', 'The Lesson', 'Ain't That Bad?', 'Just Like Job' and even 'Thank You, Lord' constructing illuminating discussion of the necessity and dignity of acceptance as well as the relief of self-expression. Counter-arguments were often fuelled by references to 'The Memory', 'The Traveler' and even 'Kin'. Clearly the format of the question required an evaluative and argumentative approach and candidates who saw it merely as an opportunity to write about experiences Angelou may have had during her long and varied life were taking their eye off the crucial elements of exploration of theme and analysis of technique. As ever, beneficent selection from the prescribed poems was intrinsically rewarded. Candidates who chose their resources carelessly made the job of arguing their case much more of a struggle whichever side of the debate they were intent on fuelling.

Successful candidates:

- Chose appropriate poems for the exploration of Angelou's ideas about love, life, acceptance and self-determination
- Analysed Angelou's use of form, structure and language choice
- Carefully integrated only strictly relevant contextual material while maintaining focus on the text.

Less successful candidates:

- Wrote narrow biographical responses that may have used proscribed poems from *Shaker Why Don't You Sing* or failed to discern critical, provocative elements within Angelou's poems
- Remained at the surface of their chosen poems
- Paid scant attention to Angelou's use of form, structure and language and/or the key words of the question

Question 3

Candidates who barely mentioned the named poem disadvantaged themselves because an element of appraisal and evaluation was helpful to providing a framework for the exploration of 'the important ideas' contained within the collection. Where the named poem was explored and appreciated in some depth before diversifying into poems that reflected similar or different themes some lively and informed responses were seen: Angelou is clearly able to evoke strong and vociferous comment and it was very pleasing to see integrated appreciation of her form, structure and language choices as plausible evidence of Angelou's passion and skill in conveying her central or preoccupying ideas. Those who could comment on the commonality of experience, gender solidarity or otherwise, and attitudes through time to gender and race were often able to produce the most interesting responses. The quality of the links made to other poems was a key discriminator here and many were able to make pertinent agreement or disagreement with the idea of 'centrality' of importance when linking to poems with similar subject matter such as 'Arkansas' and 'Phenomenal Woman' or to themes and elements not found in the named poem by reference to poems like 'Lady Luncheon Club', 'The Traveler' and even 'Woman Work'. Strongest of all were the responses that seamlessly explored technique as part and parcel of Angelou's phenomenal skill, warming to her rhythm and musicality. Candidates who saw this as an opportunity to swiftly relegate the named poem down the pecking order and write a possibly prepared and often unshaped response on another poem

(once again the preferred default being 'Still I Rise') were missing the chance to show synthesis. The ideas expressed in the collection as a whole did need some reference.

Successful candidates:

- Produced a debate which considered the idea that the named poem provided an 'central importance' or otherwise and validated those views through dextrous linking to other poems and illustrative detail. Alternatively, they suggested, with recourse to well-chosen detail, why another named poem might better demonstrate central importance again with a lively validation of viewpoint.
- Linked 'Kin' to a range of other relevant poems
- Explored Angelou's choices of form, structure and language with confidence.

Less successful candidates:

- Simply dismissed the idea that 'Kin' could be of central importance and offer insights into the collection
- Wrote basic accounts of the poems with little reference to form, structure and language
- Were unable to engage with ideas expressed in the poems about gender, class and racial pride.

The World's Wife by Carol Ann Duffy

This text is proving by far the most popular of the poetry choices and will be a sore loss to centres when it ceases to be offered after 2012. It again attracted by far the largest number of responses from the cohort and some of the lengthiest individual answers. A little more in evidence this year were responses that cited Duffy's poetic techniques more readily than offering sociological theses but even these did not always explore those techniques in sufficient detail. Unfortunately, perhaps because Duffy has been so much in the news since becoming poet laureate or because she is prolific and enthusiastic in writing for the nation, much more seems to have crept into candidates' responses of a broadly biographical nature. As this trend was invariably at the expense of much more pertinent analysis of her wit and particularly the structure and form of her verse, it did candidates little service. Evidence of engaged readings was clear in the better responses but also still evident was a tendency to resort to loosely assimilated ideas about feminist writing in general ascribing some of these to Duffy, especially where candidates were less sure of their own thinking or were taking a tangential route away from the focus or key words of the question.

Question 4

This was the less popular option. Focus on the key words 'provocative poet' with particular emphasis on 'poet' proved critical and a discriminating factor in many of the ensuing debates but it was noticeable that in the enthusiastic responses candidates were not as attentive as they might have been in differentiating between Duffy's view and that of her female speakers, or as assiduous as they needed to be in explaining what it was she was provoking. Many candidates seemed to have paraphrased the word 'provocative' into 'promiscuous' and set off blissfully unaware of its limitations. Some of these responses enthusiastically trawled through Duffy's poems to pick out what they then went on to explain were examples of language chosen solely for its vulgarity or its reference to male genitalia, acts of bestiality and wanton sexuality. An orgy of decadent language and behaviours indeed! Despite the vehemence of the argument it did not usually detract from the fact that they were still missing the point of the question and were not focused on what it was that Duffy was perhaps trying to achieve with regard to the impact on the reader and her ability to make audiences think. It was not an opportunity to make

generalised points about Duffy's characters' choices of language but rather a chance to deal with the effect that language has upon the reader in a specifically articulated way. Poems that candidates felt were particularly provocative were 'Mrs Beat', 'Mrs Tiresias', 'The Devil's Wife', 'Little Red Cap', 'Medusa', 'Queen Kong', 'Queen Herod' and 'Mrs Quasimodo' but one of the most eloquent and engaged arguments about what was being provoked came from paradoxical but highly relevant interpretations of 'Anne Hathaway' that much-loved standby of the counter-argument. It was refreshing to see it being pressed into more controversial use as evidence of Duffy's radical feminism rather than as example of her 'softer side'.

Successful candidates:

- Engaged with the view expressed in the question and challenged readers' assumptions about what constitutes 'provocative' and what Duffy's intents might be
- Used a range of poems to produce a balanced debate
- Explored Duffy's poetic technique with confidence

Less successful candidates:

- Simply agreed with or limited the question's premise by narrowing the interpretation of 'provocative poet' or equating it to mean 'promiscuous' or 'shocking'
- Wrote general answers or ignored the need to evaluate
- Paid no attention to Duffy's choices of form, structure and language.

Question 5

This was the more popular choice of Duffy questions, enabling well-informed candidates to write about the way whole-text themes are reflected in a focal poem. Most candidates were able to enumerate the named poem's typical and, more interestingly, atypical features and similarly were able to make a range of valid connections to other poems in the collection. A crucial discriminator in responses was how well candidates could validate Duffy's decision to place it as the opener as this inevitably meant that some sort of review of the overall structure of the anthology would be relevant. Many candidates were able to show off great confidence in discussing the running order of the poems and most were able to make interesting remarks about how well 'Little Red Cap' worked with 'Demeter' to 'book end' the collection and achieve some sort of cyclical structure, which incidentally worked well with Duffy's use of the moon and all its female, mythological, pagan and mystical connotations. All manner of reasons were put forward as to why 'Little Red Cap' was generally important or even typical in its form, structure and content but that was to rewrite the question and ignore the need to debate how and why it forms an appropriate or inappropriate opener. Weak responses were characterised by a narrative approach to the content of the named poem and no or very limited reference to any other poem. The very weakest offered regurgitated references to Duffy's relationship with an older male writer and simply claimed that because it was 'autobiographical' it was somehow important to place it first. That would be to ignore the idea that most of any writer's work could be construed as autobiographical particularly in the genre of poetry. That would lead inevitably to finding links to her life in all of the poems of the anthology: something candidates would be advised to steer well clear of.

Successful candidates:

- Explored the focal poem with confidence and overview of Duffy's repertoire and technique
- Established a range of relevant connections between 'Little Red Cap' and the rest of the collection
- Analysed Duffy's choices of form, structure and language with confidence.

Less successful candidates:

- Wasted time on offering poor explanations of the relationship between Duffy and a former partner or made other vague references to the sources of Duffy's subject matter
- Wrote general answers about whole-text themes but failed to focus on why 'Little Red Cap' was chosen to head the collection
- Paid little attention to Duffy's poetic technique.

Skirrid Hill by Owen Sheers

Skirrid Hill continues to attract an enthusiastic if still surprisingly small following with Sheers' vigorous style clearly able to engage and challenge. His anthology presents a reflective, careful reader with many themes that align with the struggle for identity in ways that can be visceral as well as delicate, broad as well as extremely personal. It is important to a successful study of the anthology that centres do not pigeon-hole Sheers as simply a nationalistic poet who looks inwards to issues of Welsh identity but one is looking outwards too, taking in those moments in life which can seem paradoxical and bizarre, addressing moments where there is a complex interfacing of life, death and relationships. Despite his growing published work across all the genres, Sheers remains a relatively enigmatic, restless poet clearly embarked upon a journey of discovery and about whom, significantly fewer biographical studies have yet been made. This works to candidates' advantage because their focus more clearly rests on the language, form and structure of his verse rather than on the man himself. That said, candidates this time were keener to explore the question that invited a measured, argued response to a general theme rather than the one that began with a focus on a specific poem and invited validation and repudiation of its centrality. A little disappointingly, in response to either poem, some candidates offered little by the way of balanced debate and saw the question as a way of simply explaining the content of two or three poems, broadly linked to a theme.

Question 6

This was by far the more popular of the questions on *Skirrid Hill*, offering candidates the opportunity to explore their own choice of poems from this broadly diverse collection. Whilst there were many strong responses, one examiner wrote that some candidates who had been offered "a gift of a question" then "proceeded with ingratitude and uncertainty, attempting to explore different themes in a perfunctory, generalised counter-argument" or they "wallowed in a morass of loss" without ever really explaining what had been lost and with what consequences. Perhaps these candidates were truly "spoilt for choice" and could not arrive at satisfactory evaluative comments because of this. The poems that lent themselves most readily to the argument were 'Border Country', 'Mametz Wood', 'Y Gaer', 'The Hill Fort', 'Marking Time' and 'Amazon' although the poem that received most attention from candidates, interestingly, was 'Keyways'. Counter-arguments usually cited examples of more celebratory poems such as 'The Equation', 'Inheritance' or 'Stitch in Time' with better responses developing insightful comment or challenging the idea of loss at all. Certain confident candidates were able to convince that Sheers' depiction of loss really to revealed what was gained in terms of experience, understanding of self, others and the world. There was evidence that some candidates were trying to shape responses to past papers to fit the requirements of this year's question with inevitable loss of focus. To this effect some candidates offered plenty of examples of Sheers' treatment of separations suggesting either directly or by inference that separation equated to loss. Those who were able to suggest in their extension or counter-arguments that Sheers also dealt with moments of elision, repair and coming-together, were to be commended, especially where these moments were expertly pinpointed, analysed and evaluated.

Successful candidates:

- Chose highly appropriate poems for the exploration of Sheers' treatment of loss and its effects or chose equally appropriate poems to validate their counter-argument
- Analysed Sheers' choices of form, structure and language
- Explored a wealth of Sheers' poetic techniques and articulated his intent in order to create interesting lines of argument and counter-argument

Less successful candidates:

- Simply offered broad agreement with the statement and struggled to even illustrate loss effectively
- Ignored the question's key words
- Made broad generalisations about the effects produced by Sheers' choice of form, structure and language often asserting rather than illustrating their points

Question 7

This question had relatively few takers despite the comparatively comforting prospect of exploring a superficially straightforward poem. Interestingly too, there were some responses that neglected the punning title, missing an obvious way into Sheers' musings on relationships between father and son and their relationship with their environment. Most problematic, however, was the interpretation of the phrase 'key to this collection'. The metaphor of the key should suggest an unlocking of something or a focus on some feature so fundamental as to be indispensable to a clear understanding of the anthology. Few such insightful readings were apparent with candidates, instead, suggesting typicality of theme, technique, intent or features. In some respects the named poem is a testament to the permanence of life despite its frailty and smallness, set against a backdrop of the awesome grandeur of natural world. To validate the idea of 'key', links needed to be made to the rest of the collection and here it was obvious that some candidates had a very hazy knowledge of the structure and content of the collection as a whole. The named poems' central themes of identity, contrasts, endurance, loss and the natural world should have been fundamental to a balanced argument and counter-argument, where the choice of at least one suitable substitute 'key' poem should have been possible.

Successful candidates:

- Produced a balanced debate which considered, developed and agreed or refuted the idea that the named poem is "the key to this collection" in a thoughtful, engaged, incisive manner
- Linked 'Farther' to a range of other relevant poems and/or made an arresting case for another poem being the 'key'
- Explored Sheers' form, structure and language choice with confidence always citing examples relevantly and with analytical significance.

Less successful candidates:

- Simply dismissed the idea that 'Farther' could be the key to the collection
- Wrote basic accounts of the poem and/or others in the collection, with little relevant or developed reference to form, structure and language choice
- Were unable to move beyond generalisations and assertions.

To maximise their candidates' chances of success in answering Question 1, 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: The Struggle for Identity in Modern*

Literature (ISBN 978-0-7487-8292-9). 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 1 in the 'Contextual Linking' advice which was issued in the summer of 2008 and has been updated with additional support material including annotated examples of candidates' work.

Centres are thanked for preparing so thoroughly their candidates to work with the new numbering system and the new style answer book. The majority of candidates responded well to the changes to the June 2010 exams, but where difficulties were experienced, centres are asked to draw candidates' attention to the comprehensive range of guidance material that is available on this subject in order that they are confident about what is required of them in future examinations. Support available on this issue includes Guides for teachers and students, and specimen question papers and mark schemes showing the changes in action. All documents published in support of the changes to exams can be accessed via notices published on all qualification homepages, all subject notice boards, and on the parent and student area of the web.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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