



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

English Literature A

LTA1C

(Specification 2740)

Unit 1: Texts in Context

The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature

Report on the Examination

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The entry was around 1600 candidates, compared to nearly 7000 last summer, but even so examiners saw the full range of marks and approaches. Centres will find the January 2011 LTA1C mark scheme a very useful document here, as it contains not only the assessment grids which will be familiar from the previous series but also an Indicative Content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful candidates might adopt in their responses. In addition, Centres will also find it useful to refer to subsequent reports going back to January 2009.

As a preamble centres should remember that although Assessment Objective 4 is tested in Section A but not in Section B, Centres would do well to advise their students to note the specific contexts of the extract set in Section A and to adapt their comments accordingly. Candidates find the whole course more engaging and satisfying if they can understand the importance of central events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in respect of the Struggle for Identity. It is also a good idea to consider how attitudes to ethnicity and gender in particular vary in different parts of the world and to avoid using terminology that is inappropriate to different cultures, eras and situations, for example 'apartheid' and 'segregation', 'the women's suffrage movement' and 'the women's liberation movement'.

As this January saw the fifth outing of this paper it would be hoped that Centres and Candidates alike were, by now, used to the format and requirements of the Specification and examination procedures. In the main, this has been the case but there remain a few areas of concern that will receive special commentary in this report.

Overall, the paper functioned very well and its content enabled candidates to perform to the best of their abilities, demonstrating the skills they had acquired during the course. It was evident that some Centres had entered students early and this was reflected in the comparative immaturity and underdevelopment of their wider reading links in the contextual linking. The January paper should be seen as an opportunity for re-sitting, rather than a 'mock' because candidates' understanding and confident control of their material invariably matures in the months up to May and the time spent on modules in the January examination 'window' heavily erodes valuable teaching time.

The best way to prepare candidates for Question 1 is by providing students with non-fiction extracts from Modern Literature that deal with a full range of identity issues. Although Centres have already identified three wider reading texts (one from each literary genre) and submitted details of these to their coursework advisors, it is vital that candidates' wider reading extends beyond this minimum required by the QCDA regulations governing every new A-Level English Literature specification. This point is emphasised on page 7 of the Specification: "These three texts may be supplemented with a collection of relevant extracts and shorter pieces of writing." Candidates 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. Candidates 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. 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 Thorne's publication, *AQA English Literature C: The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature* (ISBN 978-07487-8292-5). The title of this text and the title of the unit also reminds candidates that the focus of their reading should be texts of the modern era, loosely defined for these purposes as twentieth and twenty-first century texts. 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.

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 1 will relate to at least one of these key areas of Struggle for Identity:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Cultural Diversity
- Class
- Discrimination
- Alienation and Dislocation
- Issues of Inequality caused by all or any of the above

The wording of the question will provide a ‘steer’ towards one of these areas, offering further guidance to candidates as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract. Centres should consider coverage of all these areas 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 1 and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded. It is not advisable to use a very narrow range of centre-chosen texts and extracts (or readings of those texts and extracts. It is not helpful for candidates if all those entered by a centre restrict themselves to exactly the same texts and extracts and exactly the same points and interpretations. Instead candidates should be encouraged to develop their own repertoire of wider reading and *readings* so that their responses are individual and so that they can choose the most meaningful links relevant to the given extract.

In attempting Question 1, candidates are advised to split their time evenly between the two parts of the question. It is perfectly acceptable for candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates reach the higher bands of the mark scheme. However, this is most likely to occur in the responses of candidates whose wider reading has been limited to three texts: it should not be a problem for those candidates who are able to draw on a truly wide experience of texts about identity struggle.

Section A Contextual Linking

Question 01

This January’s piece for contextual linking came from a Minute Paper, written in 1963 by an Australian Trade Commissioner. Whilst this particular form of internal departmental ‘letter’ (as most candidates chose to classify it) might be uncommon, it was a perfectly legitimate choice of material as an historical, non-fiction document, expressing very clear thoughts and feelings about women in the workplace and the home. One examiner stated, “this brilliant extract offered students the opportunity to appreciate Taysom’s opinions offered as facts...with some implicit readings of his own inadequacies.” Its highly structured layout with roman numbered bullet points, its post script offering another viewpoint skilfully included to bolster Taysom’s biased view of female competition and its clipped, formal prose that occasionally slipped into colloquial misogyny, yielded engaged, detailed responses to form,

structure and language choices. Even weaker students found plenty to note about Taysom's views although perhaps found it hard to credit, from their enlightened 2011 perspectives, that Taysom's tone could be serious rather than ironic. Some (predominantly female) candidates were incensed into assertive comments about Taysom's bigotry and another examiner noted that "too many saw no distinction between Taysom's Australian 1960s context and The American Dream/suffragettes and so on". The passage offered unambiguous examples of prejudice against women that included sexist stereotyping and blatant ageism, all within the cosy context of one male of considerable power and influence, sharing his ideas, masquerading as a balanced debate, with a male superior who presumably already shared them. Whilst Taysom's tone was studiously "straight", the perceptive reader should have been capable of discerning the irony of the closed, male world where female subordination is seen as the norm and where women are barred from socializing with male colleagues in the very environment (the club) where legislation even today cannot penetrate to bring about openness and transparency between the sexes. Interestingly, as candidates were sitting this paper, the media was full of the row about the abilities of a female assistant referee to correctly interpret the off-side rule in English Premiership football. A reminder, if any were needed, that the context of reception still provided examples of bigotry and 2011 did not necessarily provide the platform of enlightenment from which to view Taysom's thoughts and feelings as the myopia of a bygone age.

Most candidates were able to appreciate the formality of Taysom's style and analyse it appropriately, although some responses inclined towards the purely paraphrasal or alternated between short quotations with simple, straightforward explanation of content that soon became descriptive and narrative rather than analytical. Taysom's use of statistical material to render more convincing his argument against the appointment of female Trade Commissioners was disingenuous to say the least. The reference in the Postscript from a colleague in External Affairs drew attention to the persistence of women, in the face of prejudice and their determination to break through the glass ceiling. More careful readers, who persisted in reading the extract thoroughly to its conclusion, remarked on the harsh figurative language that perhaps epitomized the need for female applicants to be resilient when they might encounter a door slammed against them. The final sentence of the extract also hinted at the turning tide of opinion, albeit not Taysom's, of legislation and lobbying to change the status quo. Such detail is a gift to candidates who seek to make relevant references to contexts of production, noting the 1963 dateline and the waves of militant female protest that were about to seep across the western world. With other references, earlier in the extract to "Islamic attitudes towards women" and well developed "publicity media" candidates might have made many interesting contextual comments or seized opportunities to forge meaningful links to their wider reading. The language of the piece, in general, was dry and clipped in its tone but that only made more obvious Taysom's nearly apoplectic recourse to terms such as "battleaxe" and "spinster lady" yet some candidates failed to discern these shifts in tone or note the interesting juxtapositioning of the emotive term "mellows" when Taysom referred to the male ageing process. Taysom's choices of personal pronouns to create a clear sense of insiders versus outsiders was apparent and should have been noted as was his imperiously proprietorial reference to "his household" and "his wife".

Candidates should guard against inventing content and ascribing to the writer things that he did not express. For example, nowhere in the extract does Taysom comment on women's need to become mothers and nurture infants despite his metaphorical/literal use of the words "marry at any time and be lost to us". Interpreting this as a way to explore the effect of child-rearing upon a woman's struggle for identity should be seen for what it is, an awkwardly engineered link to an area of wider reading rather than something specifically referenced by Taysom.

As ever, the quality of the response in Question 1 depended largely on the quality of the links made to the wider reading texts (AO3) and on the candidates' abilities to develop AO2 and AO4 detail. The extract should have afforded ample opportunity to craft such links and, in the main, these were apparent. It is a little worrying however to see *Othello* or *Hamlet* being offered here and a continued reliance on the 19th century texts *A Doll's House* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Whilst, in general, better references to the genre features of texts were seen, especially in the drama choices, poetry was once again often given a very cursory treatment with little exploration of form, structure or language but a heavy reliance on similarity of theme. Some Centres still have not prepared their students to use any poetry other than their Section B material. This is against the spirit of wider reading that is at the core of this specification and will have led to a depression in the marks that were awarded.

One examiner offered this further advice to Centres:

- Students need to consider **genre** in Q1. They must prepare by analysing a range of non-fiction pieces in relation to their wider reading so that they can point out the differences in the ways in which choice of genre will shape the writing.
- It is most likely that looking for **differences from** as opposed to **similarities to** wider reading will lead to genuine exploration of how writers work. While it is right to point out thematic links, it is essential to be able to show how differently authors treat these themes.
- Listing literary devices is not analysis. Pointing out that other authors use the same devices is not analysis and can lead to some strained if not downright silly links.
- Beware of lazy assertions about context. Beware of unloading context only loosely linked to the given passage.

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
- Made effective links between the extract and their wider reading and were able to explore across poetry, drama and prose of the Modern era
- Paid attention to 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, especially its Postscript and conclusions
- Made few or 'forced' links to their wider reading, sometimes ignoring the breadth of genres and often inadequately developing links
- Struggled to engage with form, structure and language choice in the extract or in their wider reading examples; made inadequate reference to the different contexts of the extract and their wider reading; generalised about context in an inappropriately narrow way.

Section B Poetry

Questions 02 -07

The expectations of AS candidates in this section are three-fold. Candidates should: select and then analyse appropriate poems in detail; closely explore the key words of the question; and co-ordinate a balanced response to the debate. A blend of these priorities ensures success, but the debate remains primary.

To some extent, the effectiveness of the poetry questions in differentiating between candidates is intensified by the simple fact that some candidates have a secure understanding of the relevant Assessment Objectives and the best ways to meet them, whereas other candidates seem to think it will be sufficient to write simple accounts of the few poems they happen to have skimmed through during the evening before the examination. Candidates need to remember that Assessment Objective 3 is dominant here: the questions invite candidates to construct a balanced debate in response to a given opinion, supporting their arguments by detailed analysis of relevant poems. Many candidates do exactly this and are rewarded with appropriately high marks. However examiners reported a range of unsatisfactory approaches which inevitably restricted candidates to the lower bands of the mark scheme. Some less successful candidates often spend much of the poetry question's allocated hour going through one or two poems line by line but paying scant regard to the opinion up for debate; others write whole paragraphs about the importance of individual words (or even individual punctuation marks!) but fail to show any understanding of the whole poems from which the words have been extracted. Less confident candidates often use up precious minutes explaining the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases rather than analysing the effects produced by their use; others make no reference whatever to the poetic forms and techniques used by the writers. As one examiner commented, "these candidates seem over-cautious: they avoid absolute failure by playing it safe and stating the obvious, but it deprives them of the opportunity to explore literary effects and develop their own personal voice". Centres would do well to remember that it is those candidates who are prepared to explore the poetry and respond to it in an informed personal manner that this Specification seeks to reward.

***And Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou**

Very few responses were seen to Questions 1 and 2 on this text. Fortunately, those seen did manage to avoid reference to irrelevant poems from the proscribed section *Shaker Why Don't You Sing*, so it is to be hoped that the message has finally got through to Centres. Strong responses scored on candidates' abilities to balance their arguments and to maintain excellent focus on the key words of the question. There is a good deal of biographical information available on Maya Angelou's long and colourful life but Section b questions should not be seen as the appropriate place to offer extensive references to such material; on the whole, this was observed or, as in Question 2 in particular, specifically shaped to inform the debate.

Question 02

The question invited some exploration of suitable poems to support and refute the asserted view with freedom to choose whether to interpret "haunted" negatively, positively or both. Critical to success in the balancing of the debate was a prudent selection of poems with support coming mainly from 'Men', 'Bump D'Bump', 'Kin', 'The Memory', 'My Arkansas' and 'To Beat the Child' amongst others. Counter-arguments often cited poems where there was no explicit reference to childhood or poems that celebrated or commented upon some other sources of inspiration or trauma in life such as relationships, work, religious beliefs and

travel. Poems that helped the debate were 'The Traveler', 'Call Letters', 'Mrs V.B.' and the much utilized 'Still I Rise'. Where the latter was cited, a critical factor was the sharp focus maintained on the key words of the question's given view and how the words of this poem helped to dispel depression and rectify false opinions and stereotyping. Candidates who tried to re-hash responses to previous papers' questions or who offered only superficial readings of any of their choices, damaged their chances of scoring highly in AO2 and those who offered little reference to the breadth of Ms Angelou's repertoire neglected AO3.

Successful candidates:

- Chose appropriate poems for the exploration of Angelou's ideas about childhood and life's journeys and pathways
- Analysed Angelou's use of form, structure and language in a meaningful way that avoided 'feature-spotting' and integrated focus on style with her success as a poet
- Carefully integrated only strictly relevant contextual material while maintaining good focus on the key words of the question and key features of their chosen material.

Less successful candidates:

- Wrote narrow biographical responses, very short, underdeveloped responses or failed to construct a convincing debate
- Remained only at the surface of their chosen poems or selected inappropriate poems on which to base their arguments
- Paid little attention to Angelou's use of form, structure and language and/or the key words of the question.

Question 03

Once again, candidates who barely mentioned the name of the poem disadvantaged themselves as an element of appraisal and evaluation of 'Just Like Job' was helpful to providing a framework for any exploration of the themes and ideas that are contained in the collection. It was for candidates to establish what these were and to offer some sort of effective corroborative evidence. Where the named poem was explored and appreciated in some depth before diversifying into poems that may have provided a better focus on Angelou's key themes and ideas, some informed and valid responses were seen. It was clear in some instances that this poem was not particularly familiar to candidates with some even managing to misunderstand her profound faith in her God and her irrepressible optimism for whatever the future might offer. Curiously, some interpretations insisted on the predominance of Angelou's negativity of tone and cynicism; claims that are very hard to validate in the collection in general and in 'Just Like Job' in particular and which reveal a weakness in understanding the nuance of language and more subtle shades in Angelou's tone. Foremost of all the positive points a sound response might note would have been Angelou's insistence on keeping the faith, albeit with some noting of the rhetorical questions that occasionally belie the optimism. Perhaps the Biblical references would be harder to explore if coming unprepared to this poet but those who had studied her to any depth should have been able to comment meaningfully on the references and the effect of the religious cadences, repetitions and chorus effects. Poems cited as suitable links to or developments from the named poem often included 'Thank You Lord', 'Still I Rise' and 'One More Round'. Once again, 'Still I Rise' claimed the lion's share of attention sometimes to the extent of skewing lines of argument and running the risk of sounding like eulogies. Counter-arguments were constructed largely on the basis that there were elements of great importance that were not to be found in the named poem and the most popular choices to fuel these debates were 'Refusal', 'Just For a Time' and 'Through the Inner City to the Suburbs'. Where the poem, 'Just Like Job' featured in the collection, its position relative to others and as part of a wider more philosophical train of thought in Angelou's life journey was, for some, a rich vein to be

explored and allowed candidates to express some understanding of the importance of structure in a wider sense.

Successful candidates:

- Produced a debate which considered the idea that ‘Just Like Job’ summed up important themes and ideas in the collection and came to convincing well-evidenced conclusions. Alternatively, they suggested, with recourse to well-chosen detail, alternative poems that better demonstrated these themes and ideas but avoided dismissing the named poem as irrelevant or being largely without merit.
- Linked ‘Just Like Job’ to a range of other relevant poems in order to develop the debate.
- Explored Angelou’s choices of form, structure and language with confidence, integrating such features into smooth, seamless lines of argument.

Less successful candidates:

- Simply dismissed the idea that ‘Just Like Job’ could be of much interest when exploring Angelou’s themes and ideas in the collection.
- Wrote basic accounts of the poem or alternatives with little reference to form, structure and language.
- Were unable to engage with ideas expressed in the named poem and in others that broadened the debate of Angelou’s interest in finding peace and acceptance and in maintaining optimism and faith.

The World’s Wife by Carol Ann Duffy

This text again attracted the majority of all the Section B responses and shows that Duffy maintains her popularity. Fortunately, in most cases, candidates managed to refrain from extraneous biographical references but a characteristic of weak answers was an inability to differentiate between the voice of the speaker of the monologue and Duffy’s own voice or views. Weaker responses also showed much more reliance on references to poems that had been at the centre of the previous year’s questions, in particular, ‘Little Red Cap’, usually in an inappropriate and irrelevant way. Much more positively in evidence, however, was an increased facility to debate in a more balanced way. One examiner noted with regret “a reliance upon ‘Anne Hathaway’ as the default text for balancing and counter-arguing in a blanket way that often precluded any real attempt to shape the points to the specific requirements of the question”. It did seem unfortunate that candidates could not in many instances, be sufficiently bothered to explore the potential of ‘Demeter’, ‘Elvis’ Twin Sister’, and ‘Queen Kong’ as much more interesting counterweights. It was also evident that some candidates chose poems that were woefully unsuited to their arguments and counter-arguments. Foremost amongst these was ‘Salome’ being used as evidence of an angry voice when a more informed reading of that poem could not escape Salome’s highly developed apathy. Evidence of engaged reading was clear in better responses and, in the main, inappropriate grumbings about feminist writing in general was kept to a minimum although some candidates showed remarkably little understanding of the difference in meaning between ‘feminist’ and ‘feminine’ in some instances.

Question 04

This was by far the more popular of the Duffy questions. The question’s assertion was intended to be provocative and more confident candidates were happy to explore the idea of ‘scorned’ women in the collection as well as deliberating on the alternative emotions to anger and fury. The notion that Duffy included the voices of ‘only angry women’ fortunately had few supporters and most managed to construct some sort of debate and counter-argument. Where these counter-arguments explored a range of emotions and offered well-substantiated

evidence of the causes, either of the anger or of the alternative emotions, mature, detailed and cogent debates were in evidence. Subtler arguments picked apart the perception of anger to reveal layers of suppressed feeling backed up with perceptive and sensitive interpretation of language choices, perspectives, structure and form. Less articulate responses often laboured biographical features about the speakers or sought to impress with unfocused explanations of the original stories behind Duffy's monologues. Those who chose 'Little Red Cap' as an example of a scorned and angry child becoming an embittered and dangerous woman were missing the delicacy of Duffy's detail and her colourful allegorical style to offer only a superficial, inaccurate response. It would be encouraging if more candidates could explore the effect of features of form in more detail rather than just noting that 'Demeter' and 'Anne Hathaway' are examples of sonnets.

Successful candidates:

- Engaged with the views expressed in the question's quoted prefatory remark and the view expressed in the question, moving on to challenge and qualify views with careful exploration of tone and prudent choice of examples.
- Used a wide and discerning choice of poems to produce a balanced and informed debate.
- Explored Duffy's stance and poetic techniques with confidence.

Less successful candidates:

- Simply agreed with the given view and failed to focus on the diversity of emotions expressed by women in the collection.
- Wrote general responses with very little consideration of their need to evaluate and validate their views with precise detail and analysis.
- Paid little or no attention to Duffy's choices of form, structure and language, often describing rather than analysing a poem's features.

Question 05

This was the less popular choice with a surprisingly modest uptake. Most answers seen consisted of an exploration of the content of 'The Kray Sisters' often in a mechanical way that paid little attention to the twin adjectives 'articulate' and 'witty' that should have steered candidates to consideration of the quality of language Duffy gives her speakers. Some evaluation of the language's superficial humour, with an exploration of its more sinister undertones was a key discriminator, even before a detailed exploration of types of power seen in the named poem and elsewhere across the collection. How Duffy subverts male stereotypes and allows her speakers to betray their own limitations in the way they ape male values and ideals could have produced interesting lines of argument but all too often candidates resorted to descriptive and narrative accounts of the content, missing, in some instances, that the music of Sinatra referred to Nancy and her boots designed for walking all over male egos rather than Frank. Better responses were characterized by an appreciation of irony and Duffy's ability to be critical of females as well as males. Counter-arguments of quality often revealed Duffy's interest in more subtle definitions and examples of female power and depended on well-selected detail drawn from, amongst others, 'Queen Herod', 'Little Red Cap', 'Mrs Rip Van Winkle', 'Penelope' and 'Mrs Lazarus'.

Successful candidates:

- Engaged with the views expressed in the question, specifically challenging or qualifying the adjectives used there and offering well-founded consideration of Duffy's intentions, avoiding the purely narrative and descriptive; explored the focal poem with confidence.
- Used a range of less common but nonetheless relevant poems to produce interesting counter-arguments that balanced the debate.
- Analysed Duffy's considerable poetic prowess with confidence and skill.

Less successful candidates:

- Offered simple agreement with the question's premise and/or narrowed the debate by ignoring the key adjectives 'articulate' and 'witty'.
- Wrote very general responses about strength and strong women in an indiscriminate way and/or ignored the need to evaluate.
- Paid little attention to Duffy's choices of form, structure and language.

***Skirrid Hill* by Owen Sheers**

Very few responses were seen to this collection in January but it is to be hoped that Sheers will maintain his appeal in the summer examination. Sheers does not fit neatly into any pigeon-holing approach to the Struggle for Identity and that should be seen as liberating rather than a deterrent. His range of subjects and techniques makes him a very exciting poet especially for those who enjoy word puzzles and minute attention to detail. Candidates, in general, remained well-focused on that detail but in doing so sometimes neglected the key words of the questions with the result that generalisation and superficiality crept in and any attempt at analysis went underdeveloped.

Question 06

This was marginally the more popular of the questions, offering that opportunity for candidates to explore their own choice of poems. One examiner remarked that the question "allowed candidates to offer their own interpretations of the words 'clinical' and 'forensic' which they did with some skill especially in their interpretations of 'Mametz Wood' and 'Keyways'." Too many, however, gave no interpretation and, in consequence, provided very superficial accounts of two or three poems showing little inclination to shape their content to the suggestion in the question that Sheers explores things, people, relationships and emotions in minute detail. There was also a hint, in the question, that this type of analytical technique might uncover and lay bare but at the expense of sensitivity to pain and with little or no empathy. Had these considerations been more to the forefront of the argument there may have been more successful evaluation of the poet's intent rather than recourse to narrative and descriptive accounts. Some of the more unusual and successful poems used to support the given view included those that explored probing language such as 'Night Windows' and 'Four Movements in the Scale of Two' or those in which Sheers takes an analytical approach to some quite prosaic events such as 'Trees', 'Shadow Man' and 'The Steelworks'. Counter-arguments were ably constructed in the main, with recourse to 'Swallows' and 'Late Spring'.

Successful candidates:

- Chose highly appropriate poems to explore Sheers' style of analysis of the natural world, people and emotions, choosing equally appropriate poems to validate insightful lines of counter-argument.
- Paid close attention to the choices and effects of form, structure and language, offering sensitive interpretation and analysis.
- Explored a wealth of poetic techniques in an attempt to more clearly articulate Sheers' intent, offering some confident criticism of any areas where it could be shown that sensitivity had been sacrificed to the desire to simply lay bare but often also showing how something more interesting could be constructed by the conclusion.

Less successful candidates:

- Simply offered broad agreement with the given view and struggled even to exemplify the techniques Sheers used.

- Ignored the question's key words and failed to evaluate their agreement or disagreement with them.
- Made generalisations about Sheers' choice of form, structure and language, often asserting rather than illustrating their points.

Question 07

Most candidates were able to give a clear exploration of the named poem and explain why it was interesting or even typical of Sheers' style and techniques, however, this did not usually satisfy the need to explore the idea of the poem being 'the key' to the collection. Some were able to explore the metaphor of books and link these to Sheers' propensity to use similar bibliocentric features across his collection that explore parts of speech and linguistic features, both in a literal and metaphorical way. Those who were able to extend from this and see how Sheers synthesized such parts into a satisfying celebration of nation, culture and humanity were showing perception. Some were able to explore Sheers' interest in underlying patterns and how close observation of these allows us to learn lessons from the past, as well as offering impressive analysis of the named poem. 'History' could be linked very successfully with poems on similar themes such as 'Inheritance', 'Flag' and 'Skirrid Fawr' or with those that shared 'History's' unusual form, structure and language choices. Above all was the need to shape these observations into an argument that clarified why 'History' unlocked or opened up deeper understanding of Sheers as a poet, a philosopher, a technician or all three. Counter-arguments were often fuelled by convincing references to a wide selection of poems in which Sheers tackles diverse subjects, other than cultural and national identity, from unusual angles, such as 'L.A. Evening', 'Stitch in Time' and even 'Drinking With Hitler'.

Successful candidates:

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

Less successful candidates:

- Simply dismissed the idea that 'History' could be 'the key to the whole collection'.
- Wrote basic accounts of the named poem and/or others in the collection with little relevant or developed reference to the impact of form, structure and language.
- Were unable to move beyond generalisations and assertions in respect of 'History' being 'the key' or any other poem being a more suitable choice.

To Summarise:

In general, across Questions 2 to 7 there was a good deal of engaged and intelligent analysis that was not clearly relevant to the question or to the candidate's line of argument. Care should be taken to select appropriate poems and to select from those poems only the most relevant aspects, rather than offloading all they know about a particular poem or poems. One of the answers to this issue is planning; time spent planning is crucial. Many candidates begin writing too soon (and the same can be said of responses to Section A). Once candidates are writing, they should make frequent reference to the key words of the question and the central debate so as to ensure that the answer remains on track. Some candidates perhaps try to cover too many poems for their own good. They should remember that there are two perfectly acceptable choices: ranging more widely, or choosing to

concentrate on two or three poems in more detail. If they choose the latter they must be careful to cover depth and closeness of reading. If they choose the latter, then ‘two or three’ means just that; covering two poems is fine and can still enable candidates to gain the highest marks.

- Exploring poetic effects created by writers’ choices of form, structure and language.

This remains a difficult area for many candidates. Exploring aspects of form, in particular, such as rhyme, metre and stanza form can lead candidates into empty feature-spotting with little relevance and/or asserted and unconvincing links to meaning. Such features, it is claimed, are chosen by writers to “make them stand out” (?) or to create vague effects such as “flow” and “pace”. For examiners the key questions when faced with these assertions are “How?” and “Why?” Candidates should also ask these questions themselves and use them to shape their responses when it comes to AO2.

The odd numbered questions naming a poem need just as much attention to the debate, to choice of material and poems and to planning. One examiner from last summer offered the following comment which applies to this examination: “Students must avoid merely ‘going through’ a given poem or a list of chosen poems without linking them to each other within the framework of a clearly developing argument. This seems to have been more evident in the answers to the second question on each poetry text”.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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