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# Student responses with examiner commentary

A-level English Language and Literature

Paper 2: Exploring Conflict 7707/2 Section B

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For teaching from September 2015

For assessment from June 2017

## Introduction

This collection of resources gives examples of student responses to questions from our A-level English Language and Literature specimen materials, with accompanying examiner commentaries. The student responses are extracts from full answers that exemplify the kinds of approaches students ought to take and the analytical frameworks with which they should be familiar.

The responses in this resource relate to A-level Paper 2: Exploring Conflict, Section B (Dramatic Encounters). Please see the separate resources for examples of student responses, with accompanying examiner commentaries for A-level Paper 2 (Section A) and A-level Paper 1.

## Paper 2: Exploring Conflict (7707/1)

As detailed in the specification (4.2), the area of study examined in this paper focuses on how language choices help construct ideas of conflict between people and between people and their societies. Students learn about how the language choices writers make are used to express relationships, drive narrative and construct views about the nature of different societies. Students are required to apply their knowledge to the study of texts about individuals in situations in conflict.

## Section B: Dramatic Encounter

In Section B, students answer one question from a choice of eight (one question for each set text). Students will be expected to apply their knowledge of how playwrights; represent natural speech features, use language to create distinctively different characters; show characters asserting power and positioning others via their language and behaviour and use the idea of conflict to create dynamic narratives and address the wider themes of the play they have studied.

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### Question 11: *All My Sons* – Arthur Miller

Refer to Act 2, beginning 'Then why'd you ship them out' and ending 'My Chris'.

This interaction occurs near the end of Act 2. Keller's part in the decision to ship faulty parts to the American Air Force has just been revealed.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Miller presents conflicting ideas about responsibility throughout the play.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO1 (15 marks)

AO2 (20 marks)

AO3 (10 marks)

Total marks available: 45

#### Student response

Miller presents the theme of responsibility through the different characters' conflicting views concerning the subject. Towards the end of act two, when the truth about Keller's actions during the war is revealed, many different ideas about responsibility are expressed. On hearing that Keller did ship faulty parts to the war, Chris feels Keller himself should take responsibility, whereas Keller excuses his actions as a way of protecting his family financially. In Act 3, even more conflict arises from the differing ideas of responsibility especially between Chris and Keller.

Both Keller and Chris use monologues towards the end of Act 2 to display their ideas about responsibility, with Keller using the economics of business to excuse his actions during the war. He says 'I'm in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business'. The constant repetition of the abstract noun 'business' connotes the idea that to Keller, responsibility is less to do with his own humanity but rather to do with money. To Keller, all human choices are sprung from their economic consequences, a rule he firmly believes all men abide to. He initially says 'I'm in business' but changes from a personal pronoun to the noun 'a man is in business' which shows how Keller believes his choices were not just his own, but are the same choices any man would have made in his position. They are but a result of the system he works and lives in. He does not make the decision 'a man' does, the depersonalised noun man being applicable to anyone in the same situation.

Moreover, Keller often relates his decision not simply to his business, but to his family. He says 'For you, a business for you!'. The exclamatory utterance here presents a level of enthusiasm to Keller's tone, and matched with the personal pronoun 'you', the utterance demonstrates how Keller is attempting to appeal to Chris. In this sense Keller is shown to believe that responsibility always falls second to the needs of a family, as he disregards the deaths of the soldiers when compared to his sons' livelihood. Throughout the scene, Keller constantly repeats the vocative 'Chris', again affirming the idea that Keller more than anything wants to appeal to Chris, to show him that he values protecting his family over his own responsibility. However, this idea the Keller surrenders responsibility for the good of his family is dubious. His retained semantic field of economics (through repetition of nouns such as 'contracts' and 'business') connote the idea that at heart, Keller is simply a greedy man who uses his family as a scapegoat to hide his true nature. This is supported by Miller's stage directions, describing Keller with 'movements now are those of subtle pursuit and escape'. Keller doesn't truly want to defend his action, he doesn't really feel that what

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he did was for the good of his family, and he simply plays to Chris's emotions to escape his 'overwhelming fury'. In this sense, concerning responsibility, Keller is tremendously selfish. He, even when confronted by his own son, will not even regard the possibility of taking responsibility of his actions, and instead tries to divert the situation away from himself. Keller attempts to avert responsibility by lying to Chris, and even himself, that it was all for the good of family when really, it was to protect his own financial attributes.

### **AO1**

The student comments on a range of linguistic features, and offers thoughtful analysis and exploration of these. She makes detailed comments on the use and effects of types of nouns and pronouns and distinctive registers for communicating ideas, repeated lexical patterns, sentence varieties, and the use of particular semantic fields to emphasise important ideas and to provide cohesion across the text. These are explored well within the context of the question.

### **AO2**

The student is tightly focused on responsibility and is able to demonstrate how conflicting notions of responsibility provide an important backdrop in the play. Aspects of characters' belief systems are explored and evaluated, drawing carefully on how these are shaped and presented on stage. She selects and refers to relevant examples from the text to support her points.

### **AO3**

The student starts with a good awareness of the dramatic function of monologues and the combined effects of dialogue and stage directions. Throughout this extract she shows a good understanding of the dramatic potential offered by the setting up of various types of conflict (eg the opposition of family and business).

## **Question 14: *A Streetcar Named Desire* – Tennessee Williams**

Refer to Scene 7, beginning 'What's all this stuff for?' and ending 'Some lily she is.'

This interaction occurs at the beginning of the scene. Stella is preparing Blanche's birthday party.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents tension between characters throughout the play.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO1 (15 marks)

AO2 (10 marks)

AO3 (5 marks)

Total marks available: 30

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In '*A Streetcar Named Desire*', the tension seems to arise from the contrasting and conflicting qualities of Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski. Their relationship is a fragile and tempestuous one, held together only briefly by their mutual affection for Stella. The huge contrast between them and their close proximity throughout the play act as a catalyst for the build-up of tension. In Scene 7, Stanley's commitment to ensuring Blanche's swift undoing creates a tense atmosphere as Blanche's secrets finally come to light.

The opening stage directions create an immediate dramatic irony. Williams describes a scene that should be a light-hearted and enjoyable event, a 'birthday supper', complete with 'cake and flowers'. This use of setting creates an image of happiness and celebration, which is highly ironic considering the fact that the supper is about to be made disastrous due to Stanley's vindictive and feral behaviour. As soon as Stanley enters the set, he begins to fire short, snappy interrogatives at Stella: 'What's all this stuff for?', 'She here?', 'How long she been in there?'. This portrays his naturally aggressive and suspicious attitude towards Blanche, instantly creating tension by showing his intolerance of her seemingly inconsequential behaviour.

Stanley continues to behave in an irritable and forceful manner as he uses the imperative 'Set down here a minute' towards his wife, and then repeats it (at presumably a louder volume) as an exclamatory when she refuses: 'Set down!'. This creates tension between them both due to the fact Stanley appears to be in a hostile mood, which is likely to cause further problems later on, and the fact he is so insistent that Stella listens to him suggests he has something important to say. The tension rises further as Stanley asks: 'You know she's been feeding us a pack of lies here?' suggesting they've been readily accepting everything she's been saying at great cost, and through the idiom 'now that cat's out of the bag'. This is an incredibly dramatic point as this moment has been built up to throughout the course of the play. Blanche's past was always a subject of debate from the moment she arrived (for example in Scene 2 when Stanley questions how Blanche has acquired such expensive clothing and accessories). The tension between Stanley and Stella is clear as Stanley is in possession of a great amount of knowledge, and therefore holds the power in this conversation.

### **AO1**

The student applies methods in a systematic way to the analysis of the text, focusing closely on exploring specific language features and their effects, for example the use of interrogatives, markers of politeness and impoliteness, and the pragmatics of speech including comments on types of knowledge that characters hold.

### **AO2**

There is a close focus on the ways that meanings are shaped and the student shows that she is able to select relevant sections in response to a specific focus, for example the comparison she makes to Scene 2. There is also an awareness of the characters' contrasting identities that contribute to the tension; this is explored and evaluated throughout the extract.

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**AO3**

The student understands some of the contextual factors within the text, in the chronology of events leading to this point, as well as the wider contexts of the dramatic genre, such as the significance of setting, and considers the audience reception of the scene. There is understanding of how aspects of the genre (eg stage directions) help to shape meaning, and in this instance are used for an obviously ironic effect, which as she points out, is significant in our interpretation of the opening sequence in this scene.

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