**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

English Language and Literature A   ELLA3

(Specification 2720)

Unit 3: Comparative Analysis and Text Adaptation

Report on the Examination

Some candidates produced fascinating, conceptualised scripts this series and had clearly become adept at dealing with the analytical challenge of the unseen comparison. They also demonstrated expertise in textual adaptation. Such scripts were a delight to mark.

Sadly, however, some candidates were not fully prepared for the examination; they lacked the relevant vocabulary for analysis and the requisite skills for recasting. Their answers were dull at best and sometimes below the standard expected of A2 candiates.

Most candidates now follow the advice in the rubric and spend a proportionate amount of time on each of the three questions on this paper. This has resulted in examiners seeing fewer scripts with unbalanced answers. Some candidates underperformed on the commentary question of Section B, however.

Section A

Question 1: Analytical comparison

Successful candidates:
- planned their answers, however briefly
- demonstrated close analytical skills
- compared the unseen texts wisely, applying either the "anchor text" method to help navigate their way their way through the question, or an integrated approach in which the focus fell equally on all three texts
- employed appropriate terminology to help illustrate the points they wanted to make resulting in interesting, confidently expressed answers, often focussing on differences of lexis, grammar, style and context
- found interesting comparative points which helped them to engage with the meanings generated within the texts
- focused on the attitudes conveyed within the texts and made clear comparative points
- used the three point critical technique of point/example/comment throughout their analysis.

Less successful candidates:
- did not read the three texts carefully enough and made unwarranted assumptions about the meanings of the texts or the speaker in Text A
- did not structure their answers logically
- made obvious and superficial comparisons that contributed little to their textual interpretation
- commented on individual words without regard for their contextual significance
- generalised about the texts, without adequate analysis of and comment on specific textual features
- wrote three separate accounts of the texts, with few or occasionally no comparative links between them
- rarely mentioned the attitudes and feelings of the speaker or writers in the three texts.

The three texts proved accessible to most candidates and provided plenty of material to comment on. The themes of pain and suffering were well exemplified and candidates were generally able to find relevant material for their answers.

Most candidates understood the context of Text A and commented on the relationship between the speaker and the implied audience as suggested by many of the informal speech features. The swear words were variously referred to as 'taboo', 'demotic' 'expletives' and, on occasion, 'cursing'. Many candidates referred to the build up of tension during the narrative, pointing to the short utterances punctuated by brief pauses. It was common for weaker candidates to refer to any indication of a phonological feature as 'accent' or, less accurately, as 'dialect'. Many assumed from the context that the speaker was rural, and he was often placed in the north of England.

Text B was sometimes seen as a historical work, although candidates from some centres clearly recognised the it and were able to use the given information to place it in its historical context. There was frequent identification of methods for creating horror and tension, particularly with the use of short declarative sentences and the rather matter-of-fact tone used by O'Brian to talk to Winston.

Similarly, there was frequent understanding of juxtapositions in Text C: the lyrical writing to describe the mother's beauty set against the harsh description of breaking bones and rotting flesh. Many candidates were clearly shocked by the association of this form of torture with the erotic. The deceptively simple style of writing was compared to a similar technique in Text B. Some candidates expressed this well and looked carefully at the way language choices and imagery were used to develop this contrast. Weaker candidates showed they were aware of the contrast but often lacked the linguistic vocabulary to show how the effects were achieved.

Overall, there were many examples of simple comparisons of isolated features across two or three texts (e.g. 'Text A uses intensifiers, so does Text B') followed by one example of each with little sense of context or engagement with meaning of the chosen examples. There was frequent use of narrow frameworks such as: 'in Text A adjectives are used to show the pain of the speaker; similarly in Text C adjectives are also used.' Again, these observations were often unassimilated and had little to commend them because of the lack of examples or the use of extended quotation without any part being identified for analysis.

In some scripts candidates focused on isolated vocabulary and provided only broad comments. It needs to be emphasised that those scripts which do not pursue analysis beyond word level will not achieve marks above the top of Band 2. Similarly, no consideration of textual context means that marks are unlikely to rise beyond lower Band 2.

At the higher levels some sophisticated comparisons of narrative techniques were carried out; weaker candidates merely noted that the speaker in Text A and the grandmother in Text B both passed out.

Some centres clearly taught linguistic terminology and concepts carefully, and most of their candidates were able to refer accurately to word classes, while better candidates went much further than merely identifying features. Sometimes the knowledge of terminology worked as a distraction as candidates laboriously referred, for example, to the 'dynamic verb *exploded* used to refer to the concrete noun *arm*' but neglected to apply this to the question of 'how the writers and speakers convey their feelings about pain and suffering'. Needless to say, the very best answers worked analytical terminology seamlessly into a cogent and thoughtful exploration of the texts, developing some subtle and interesting distinctions.

Section B

Question 2: *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs*

This was the more popular question on the two set texts, and it was tackled with varying degrees of success.

There were some well-structured pieces using appropriate tone and making good use of source material. However, approaches varied somewhat between those candidates who provided clearly constructed pieces with headings and sub-headings throughout to those who wrote in continuous prose, often in a very sensitive manner. Either approach was acceptable, as long as a sensitive and supportive tone was employed. The source material was rich, and some candidates focused on the psychological problems of bereavement and how to cope with them (with friends and family) while others focused on more practical advice.

However, there were some candidates who ignored the word limit and produced rather rambling pieces where the advice was often masked by overblown language or embellishment of the source material. Some candidates also neglected to check their adaptation for technical accuracy; many spelling errors of words and ideas from the original text appeared and centres are reminded that all errors are noted in this answer.

Question 4: *A House Somewhere*

This was the less popular question on the two set texts.

Many candidates who attempted the Mrs Puri re-cast found it difficult to decide on the audience and purpose for their piece. It was not uncommon to find narrative or descriptive approaches, sometimes recounting the writer's experiences at the house, with some limited advice tacked on at the end. Some candidates invented further unflattering details about the Puri household and some even added details about Delhi, even though little was given in the original. Some candidates wrote from the point of view of Mrs Puri, on occasion attempting to reproduce her fractured English.

One very successful approach was to put a positive spin on all the potentially discouraging details in the source material by producing a welcoming, but nevertheless realistic, advice leaflet.

Some candidates also neglected to check their adaptation for technical accuracy; many spelling errors of words, names and ideas from the original text appeared and centres are reminded that all errors are noted in this answer.

Questions 3 and 5: The Commentaries

There were very few candidates who consistently focused on their language choices or used a linguistic framework to support their comments. Too often answers were either vague or they simply described the content choices that had been made without the necessary explanation. All too often, language comments centred on the use of various linguistic or stylistic points such as the use of 'the personal pronoun *you* to appeal to the audience' but then failed to relate this to authorial intent or discuss the specific effects achieved. Word limits were ignored by some candidates too; some candidates suffered from the fact that this piece is the final task of the examination and had left insufficient time to produce a focused and purposeful answer.

The most successful commentaries deal with particularities and incorporate focused explanatory comment. The best answers are those that focus on four or five distinct and well-chosen examples from the candidate's own new text, which is then discussed and analysed as an exemplification of what was done at that point and, implicitly, in other parts of the answer. Careful choice of different areas – lexis, grammar, style, cohesion and mode – proved the basis of the best answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.

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