



General Certificate of Education

English Literature
Specification A

LITA2 Creative Study

Report on the Examination
2010 examination – January series

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General

LITA2 CREATIVE STUDY

Entries for this examination (the second January exam and the third in all since the new specification started) attracted considerably more students than the 249 entries in January 2009. In this examination sequence there were 1678 candidates spread across 280 centres and all three options Victorian Literature; World War One Literature and The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature were well-subscribed.

As with earlier examinations a lot of the very best work appeared to have been the result of individually negotiated tasks. This engaging commitment by students and teachers to the selection of texts and topics enabled candidates at all levels to produce interesting, and often original, work. It was especially pleasing to read folders in which both the prose and the drama task had been set with the specific intention of liberating all of the Assessment Objectives covered by LITA2. Occasionally there was an air of predictability about some answers, especially where a centre had elected to offer only a couple of questions or sometimes only one question per option. Candidates frequently struggled to find anything interesting or original to say in response to a question they had evidently been given and which had also been given to everyone else in their group. This was particularly noticeable in 'traditional' prose tasks and in drama tasks: less successful students were often happy to follow a 'party line' presumably given by the centre and such candidates, therefore, could not make an entirely valid individual response. Such work, though often worthy in intent, has a predictable air about it and often does not enable candidates to achieve to the top of band 4 which in AO1 calls for the demonstration of a "confident, challenging and original personal voice." Sometimes centres would claim that AO1 was band 4 for candidate after candidate when the same opinions and sometimes even the same phrases were being rehearsed over and over again. Moderators could not always agree with Centres about the merits of such work which is more correctly categorised as clear, appropriate, well-structured and secure work and whose natural home is band 3.

Some centres did not manage to set wholly appropriate tasks and following Principal Moderator consultation with the senior moderators and their teams it became clear that some centres had neither attended Area Standardisation Meetings nor had they had their coursework titles approved by moderators. Almost invariably it was these centres whose marks were moderated down most frequently. Centres are therefore reminded to be aware of the dangers of submitting work on tasks the moderator has not approved or which do not cover all relevant aspects of the Assessment Objectives and of the absolute necessity to attend Area Standardisation meetings within the consortium structure.

Though the prose task was generally helpful to candidates and relevant in terms of meeting the Assessment Objectives, several drama tasks did very little to help candidates achieve all relevant Assessment Objectives. This problem, a carry-over from last year, still remains in some centres: for example, questions were set which failed explicitly to invite candidates to address the second part of AO3. The advice here laid out is identical to the advice given in the last two examiner's reports and which is also available in a number of other documents and web-sites: with AO3 being the dominant Assessment Objective for the drama task worth 15/30, centres need to ensure that candidates are given opportunities to cover **both** components of the Assessment Objective:

Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts...

2. **...informed by interpretations of other readers**

Hence, the most useful drama tasks in the January 2010 examination sequence demonstrated the importance of creating opportunities not only for the candidates to compare and contrast but also for them to do so against a backdrop of literary debate.

This next point is also a re-iteration of earlier advice: reference to the mark-scheme for the drama response will show that candidates who are not “working with the views of other readers” (band 3) or are “comprehensively evaluating and assessing the views of others” (band 4) will be trapped in Band 2 or even Band 1.

The Principal Moderator is pleased to report that he did not see a single example of work submitted on the drama component which did not include any notion of comparison in the title. This little battle appears to be now won and it pleasing to record that every candidate had the opportunity of being assessed against at least the first part of AO3.

In previous examination sequences some candidates in their drama answer had struggled to write essays which followed the 70:30 recommended weighting between the nominated drama text (70%) and the support text (30%). This was far less of a problem this January and a clear majority of candidates ensured that the correct proportion of their drama answer was spent in analysing and responding to drama. There is a lingering problem with some drama responses, however, in that not all candidates are able to respond with confidence and success to the dramatic and theatrical resonances of the plays under analysis. Many answers wrote about drama as though it were no different to prose and made little or no attempt to explore the significance of stage directions, acting potentials, directorial possibilities or the theatrical experience.

Folder length remains a problem here and there. As has been said in previous communications, task selection should ensure a sharp and manageable focus that will enable candidates to demonstrate detailed, close reading within the 2,500 word limit. Although moderators were gratified to report that the vast majority of folders appeared to be the right length, there were a few which were noticeably longer than the word limit printed in the specification. Such candidates almost always struggled to write “well-organised” and “coherent” work (both band 4 descriptors for AO1) and over-long work often looked weak and out of focus in comparison to answers which were within word limit tolerances. Those candidates who were moderated at 60/60 were within the word limit (or about 5% of it) and demonstrated the sort of organisational skills which will help prepare them for the demands of the non-coursework examination. Planning remains as important as ever: writing two assignments in one coursework folder makes it especially important that students plan their work carefully with the Assessment Objectives in clear focus throughout.

Understanding how the Assessment Objectives fit together and how they are weighted in each part of the folder is of vital importance to candidates’ chances of achieving the higher grades. Candidates who understood the Assessment Objectives invariably performed better than candidates who were vague about what the prose task and the drama task were asking them to do. Though this detail is laid out in the Specification itself it is, perhaps, worthwhile to include a break-down and advice in this report too. For the prose task the break-down of Assessment Objectives is dominated by a combination of AO1 (12/30) and AO2 (15/30) leaving AO4 the comparatively modest total of 3/30. AO3 is not examined on the prose task but becomes the dominant AO for the drama task being worth 15/30. AO1 and AO2, so dominant on the prose task, are only worth 6/30 each on the drama task leaving the remaining 3/30 for AO4. Centre commentaries on prose assignments rang alarm bells in moderators’ minds when assessors in a centre had written such observations as, “AO3 comparison. Good” or “Aware of other readers’ views.” AO3 is irrelevant in the prose assignment as it is not examined there: a candidate can score no marks in the prose response by writing to cover AO3 as no marks are available for it.

Similarly if a centre commentary marked up AO4 as a particular strength of the Drama response but neglected to mention AO3ii a moderator would begin to feel uneasy as the candidate could only get a maximum of 3/30 for AO4 on the Drama essay and AO3 is worth 15/30. When centre marks were moderated down it was frequently due to a misapprehension about how the Assessment Objectives worked across both components of the LITA2 folder.

In general, candidates seemed to be more aware of writers at work than they were last January. Literature is a construct. Writers make choices about form, structure and language; candidates who were alive to writers' decisions could not fail but to impress. Candidates who could use text selectively and with aplomb always performed well. The most successful use of quotations is brief but frequent, ("short integrated quotation" or S.I.Q.) enlivened by analytical comments that do not merely paraphrase or present narrative but explore the form, structure and language used by the writers. However, some candidates who understood that they needed to use quotation rather spoil their work by relaying the plot and narrative of their chosen texts via the use of "hanging" quotation which did not move into analysis or evaluation of writers' techniques. Other less successful candidates used quotation but then felt the need to paraphrase or 'translate' the quotation in the belief that the moderator would not be able to understand the quotation without the candidate's help.

Moderators reported that assessments were usually accurate and that most centres had been conscientious in carrying out internal moderation. Moderators sometimes had problems confirming a centre's grades when the supporting statement made general reference to the band descriptors in the marking grid but failed to provide evidence of these by highlighting and annotating the relevant sections in the body of the work. An unwelcome feature of some of this year's work was where centres had tried to second-guess or predict what grade a candidate might be given. Comments like, "Looks like an A so go to 53" are not really welcome or useful. Centres' responsibilities are to award a numerical mark attached to a particular band as printed on the mark schemes. It is the job of the AQA Awarding Committee to decide the grades after the examination sequence has ended. In terms of marking, teachers should also ensure that weaknesses in written expression are not ignored. Since this is coursework, it is expected that candidates will take the opportunity to check and redraft their work to a good standard; where this is not the case the weaknesses of AO1 must be reflected in the final mark. Poor formal control of English will have a bigger detrimental impact on the prose task where AO1 is worth 12/30 than the drama task where it is only worth 6/30.

Presentation of folders is also important. The font size and spacing selected by a candidate should not be cramped; a sensible 12 point font such as Times New Roman or Arial with 1.5 or double line spacing is very easy on the eye and allows the teacher marking the folder to conduct a written dialogue in the margins of a candidate's work. More importantly, perhaps, this commentary, once done, allows the moderator to see how a mark was awarded in the centre. The Coursework Guidance booklet gives advice on the presentation of work as well as suggestions on task-setting and question construction and readers of this report who have not yet done so are advised to consult that document (available on the AQA website: www.aqa.org.uk). A model marked script is also available for perusal in the Coursework Standardisation Material for 2010, pages 105 – 107.

Candidates should ensure that secondary sources, including internet sites, are acknowledged in their bibliographies. Centres are advised not to make uncritical use of anonymous and potentially error-prone contributor-sourced web-sites. All candidates are reminded that they need to include an accurate word count at the end of each essay in the folder.

Commentary on Prose Assignments

Successful and helpful questions generated some very interesting variations of the transformational prose task. As in last January and June 2009, among the most memorable work submitted were “long views” from characters in fiction whose vantage points were taken from towards the end of a novel. Other memorable efforts included letters and diary entries written in the voice of important characters in candidates’ chosen novels. In this way believable and fascinating transformational voices were articulated and maintained for such characters as: Doctor Grogan, Ernestina, Charles, Sarah and (fascinating new developments for January 2010) Mrs. Poulteney and Sam in Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*; Potter in Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers*; Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

Rivers, Prior, Sassoon and Sarah Lumb in Barker’s *Regeneration*;
Stephen, Weir, Jack Firebrace and Elizabeth in Faulks’ *Birdsong*;

Offred, Ofglen, Serena Joy, Moira, The Commander and Nick in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*;

When the “voice” slipped in the transformational writing or when a candidate did not show sufficient understanding of the form, structure and language of the source text, the work generally struggled to be impressive. Furthermore candidates who understood narrative structure never failed to do better than candidates who did not and such candidates invariably did better than candidates who failed to master the basic plot mechanics of their prose source text. Less successful answers could be awash with unintentionally comic anachronisms and often revealed a lack of research and a sort of ‘hit and hope’ attitude on the part of the candidate (and sometimes of the centre too). To cite an example based on Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* a candidate wishing to write a sequence of the novel based on Stephen Wraysford’s experiences in 1919 has Stephen listening to Edith Piaf on the radio in a Parisian café. This may sound plausible to some readers but these are not mistakes a novelist of Faulks’ stature would make: French radio did not start until 1922 and in 1919 Piaf was only four years old anyway. (She did not get a recording contract until 1936.) The candidate compounds these early errors by making references to the Vichy police and even inserts a section about the Luftwaffe a full thirteen years before its inception. That a candidate would not know these things before starting work on a transformational section of *Birdsong* is unsurprising but that the anachronisms were still there in a finished piece of coursework is disappointing. Research is, if anything, even more vital to the transformational prose assignment than it is to the more traditional prose essay and candidates are here reminded of its central importance.

The majority of candidates opted for a traditional prose essay and a range of enabling tasks were set by Centres who were obviously keeping an eye on the Assessment Objectives:

Analyse (Emily) Brontë’s presentation of the narrative voices in *Wuthering Heights* and comment on their importance in the novel;
Explore Hardy’s presentation of the natural world in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*;
How does Fowles’ presentation of Charles Smithson in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* influence your understanding of the novel?
Analyse Faulks’ presentation of Isabelle, Jeanne and Elizabeth in *Birdsong*;
Explore Barker’s presentation of conflict in *Regeneration*;
Explore Barry’s presentation of ideas about nationalism in *A Long Long Way*
Analyse Winterson’s presentation of Jeanette’s mother in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*;

How does Mc Ewan's presentation of Joe Rose influence your understanding of the struggle for identity in *Enduring Love*?

Commentary on Drama Assignments

Already the Principal Moderator has noticed that there are a number of favourite combinations of texts beginning to emerge. As long as centres remember to write tasks which will liberate all the available and relevant Assessment Objectives there is no problem in using text combinations with a proven track record. The following list features text combinations from both previous examination sequences, though this particular set of questions has not been published before:

Compare and contrast Wilde's and Brontë's presentation of the relationships between men and women in *A Woman of No Importance* and *Jane Eyre* in the light of the opinion that only Wilde's men are shallow whereas all of Brontë's characters have a little shallowness in them;
Compare and contrast the presentation of the relationship between Stanhope and Osborne in *Journey's End* with the presentation of the relationship between Stephen and Weir in *Birdsong* in the light of the opinion that "it is only the combination of duty and fear which brings men together as friends in war."

Compare and contrast the presentation of ideas concerning love in *Top Girls* (selected set text) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the light of the opinion that "both playwrights only ever portray the pain of love and never the beauty of it."

Once again, moderators reported that when candidates entered into a spirit of debate with the opinions of other readers their work was lively and illuminating and was often a pleasure to read, showing genuine engagement with texts and task.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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