



General Certificate of Education

English Literature

Specification A

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

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT: January 2010

LTA1C: The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature

This January's paper saw a significantly higher entry compared to the previous January (1500 entrants compared to fewer than 100). The general quality of the entry suggests at least that the cohort comprised mainly re-sitting candidates whose response to the demands of the paper was generally robust and composed. The January paper is always aimed at such students and Centres are well-advised to refrain from entering Year 12 students early as this can be demoralising for them after only one term of a demanding course that requires wide reading and reflection as well as comparative coursework. It has proved very successful in testing candidates' abilities to think for themselves and to broaden their own understanding of The Struggle for Identity through linked but independent reading across the modern period. The numerous and varied ways of putting together a successful course were well-evidenced via the enormous range of wider reading texts cited in Section A. Whilst confident understanding was also evident in many responses to the Section B poetry there was some avoidance of strict and supported focus on the key words of questions leading to generalisation and a neglect of debate with clear counter-argument. That said, responses to the Angelou and Sheers texts made up about one third of all responses, with Duffy still attracting significantly the largest proportion of candidates, perhaps attributable to Duffy's pedigree at GCSE and her enduring high profile. She certainly seems to be relishing her appointment to poet laureate and has not suffered the 'writer's block' some previous holders cited as the cause of their modest output. Nevertheless, candidates do not need to explain Duffy's recent achievements in their examination responses.

Students relished the breadth of the paper and, as testimony to the hard work and creativity of teachers and students alike many perceptively mature responses were seen confirming that this option encourages informed independent thinking and privileges those who have experienced a range of independent reading. Some, perhaps too clearly, have been guided through by their teachers; many have undertaken their reading as part of their individual, paired or small group contribution to the course: this specification is very much about participation and active learning. In some Centres' approaches the teacher's voice was a little too evident in rehearsed set piece introductions that failed to address the question and in poorly assimilated contextualised comments, much of which used the same phrasing and liberally-scattered technical terminology. Such 'guidance' is unnecessary with articulate students and can be counter-productive with those who are less so, as the examiner is often painfully aware of two very different voices that talk over and across each other.

Some centres seem to have prepared candidates by placing excessive emphasis on a very limited number of texts with little breadth of reading, resulting in almost every candidate from these centres relying on very similar references to the same texts, even using the same quotations. Centres should avoid this restrictive approach: it makes differentiation between candidates very difficult and denies them access to the higher bands of the mark scheme which require a display of confidence, maturity and sophistication. Similarly, candidates are advised not to prepare all-purpose answers as they get in the way of the clarity of focus and lively debate that is so prized in Assessment Objective 3. 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. The best way to prepare candidates for this examination is through a full course of exposure to the literature of the modern era. For centres who seem unsure of this era it should be noted that literature written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the focus. Once again, this January, students have cited *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *On Dover Beach*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *A Doll's House* to name but a few. Whilst elements of a search or even a struggle

for identity can clearly be recognised in these texts and possibly in any text the course's remit is **Modern Literature** and there is no need to encroach on the material of LTA 1A.

Students need to pursue a balanced course across all genres. Once again poetry suffered from least representation in Section A. This was particularly limiting since it is the genre where students can, arguably, most readily demonstrate engagement with form, structure and lexis meeting AO2 requirements. It is NOT sufficient for candidates to rely upon their Section B prepared poetry in Section A responses. Whilst additional poetry by any of the three set text poets that is not from the named collections may be relevantly cited, it might be better practice to show breadth through the study of other poets who address different aspects of SFI in a variety of ways or help to demonstrate different areas of context. A balanced course might well initially begin by introducing students (even if in extracted poems only) to the works of all three Section B poets because there, in condensed form, are so many of the areas of the Struggle for Identity. Pleasingly, however, most students were able to write in adequate length to address the challenges of the questions and to budget their time wisely between the two questions. Short responses were not widely in evidence but relevantly shaped responses sometimes were, in both sections A and B. Focus on the key words of any question must be maintained.

This LTA1C paper was effective in testing the Assessment Objectives. It enabled the full range of abilities to demonstrate their textual knowledge and understanding, as well as affording numerous opportunities to explore, link and develop responses in illuminating arguments. Handwriting, pleasingly, seemed less of a contentious issue and, as many of the cohort were re-sitting, there seemed to be more skill evident in planning the direction of an argument and in judicious choice of textual detail. Candidates need to have practised writing to time as the skills tested here are substantially different from those demonstrated in coursework. Where necessary, procedures exist which enable candidates with serious handwriting difficulties to access an amanuensis or a word processor for the examination: centres are advised to make full use of these opportunities.

The general quality of some candidates' written expression remains a cause of some concern to examiners this January. Paragraphing is crucial to the clear structure of any argument; they are not an optional extra, for aesthetic purposes only, rather than a vital requirement in meeting Assessment Objective 1. It is also disappointing that many candidates cannot spell the names of writers, even those given on the examination paper and remain vague about the title of texts and poems. It would be encouraging to see the features of formal writing maintained and an end to reference to writers by just their first names. Whilst just 'Friedan' is acceptable, 'Betty' is over-familiar. Similarly, some candidates continue to struggle to spell simple but important words such as "woman" or "liberation" and colloquial expression still intrudes. Students, quite rightly, enjoy talking about their studies but when called upon to write about them, should be equipped to respond in an appropriately formal register.

Pleasingly, there were relatively few rubric infringements but it should be noted that centres must check they do not disadvantage their candidates by erroneously focusing 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. Section A responses require students to demonstrate contextual understanding but biographical detail and context is **not** rewarded in Section B where AO4 is not tested. 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 but 'feature-spotting' should be discouraged as a usually sterile process. Form and structure remain the more difficult elements of a writer's repertoire for candidates to explore meaningfully

but perseverance, linked to the focus of the question, can be an indicator of clearer overview and discerning analysis.

Candidates should continue to be reminded to comply with all rubric instructions, especially that of entering the numbers of the questions they have answered in the relevant box at the top right of the examination answer booklet's front page. It is not reasonable to expect examiners to complete this clerical task on their behalf and it can sometimes result in examiners having to make educated guesses about which option the candidate has exercised.

In Section A, responses that work between the extract and the wider reading material, comparing and contrasting in an integrated fashion are often more interesting to read and usually indicate a confident, mature approach. There is, however, no set or prescribed way of shaping a response although lengthy, over-generalised introductions to the themes of the struggle for identity if not directly linked to the extract's focus, should be avoided. Candidates do need to apply themselves to both directed tasks but there does not need to be a sharp division between the two areas of response. 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 but to overplay it is similarly damaging. One significant observation to add is that this January's responses were characterised by a general paucity of reference to explicitly relevant context. Candidates were sometimes oblivious to differences in era and the evolutionary nature of SFI issues. Whilst no one wants 'bolted-on' or otherwise inappropriate contextual references, it should be noted that AO4 carries most weight in the mark scheme and should not be neglected.

The subsequent sections of this report deal with the responses to each of the questions in detail. This introductory section has been kept deliberately brief in order to avoid lengthy repetition of the advice offered in the introduction to last summer's report. That detailed guidance, however, still holds good and centres are advised to refer to it as required. Other helpful sources of information are also available from AQA: the January 2010 mark scheme ("very clear and easy to apply", as one examiner reported) will appear on the website in due course, featuring the relevant assessment grids supplemented by an Indicative Content section for each question. Future candidates may well wish to adopt the approaches and frameworks offered in these sections. The AQA-endorsed Nelson Thornes supporting textbook, *AQA English Literature A: The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature* (ISBN 978-0-7487-8292-9), is also still available.

Contextual Linking Question 1

Once again, candidates who did least well in this examination were 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, such responses were rare.

The extract from *A Woman's Civil Right* by the feminist author Betty Friedan was selected for its interesting and engaging approach to the genre of rhetorical speech-making and the way struggling for identity impacts on both genders as well as society and family life. It employed some rich choices of persuasive vocabulary such as hyperbole and emotive language as well as passionate, thought-provoking imagery and visionary prose to create a stirring polemic with some excoriating social criticism. Its subject matter was clear on gender equality but also

offered subtler expression of harmony, cohesion and love. As such, there were infinite areas of connection and comparison, by way of subject matter, language, form, structure and genre, with candidates' wider reading. Ms Friedan's status within the Women's Movement, alluded to very briefly in the preamble, created an opportunity to show understanding of era, context and the developmental 'waves' of various issues of self-determination, gender stereotyping, oppression, dislocation and discrimination, set against a backdrop of family, community and wider social factors. Her tone was clearly discernible as was the dynamic structure of the extract (albeit just that- an extract from a longer speech) ending in a rallying call for peace, not war, between the genders. An informed, thorough and sensitive reading of the extract yielded much material for appreciation, comment, analysis and comparison across all genres. Candidates who skimmed the surface and offered paraphrased versions of the content would not be able to offer responses perceptive of **the writer's** thoughts and feelings. Without recourse to observations on form, structure and language choices, much would be missed in terms of the ways writers express themselves both in the extract and in candidates' wider reading. The 'similar to/different from' phrase allows candidates to comment on well-chosen wider reading drawn from all three genres but the answers of better candidates are characterised by the quality and development of those links. Weaker candidates also seemed to take comfort in 'off-loading' information of a general nature loosely pertaining to context and SFI issues, without anchoring their points into close textual references or features of structure, form and language choice. Whilst, to a degree, the extract is chosen to act as a 'springboard' into relevant exploration of candidates' wider reading, it does require some careful comment and analysis in its own right and stronger responses showed this attention to the detail of the piece as well as clear recognition of its form and impact upon an audience, at that particular point in the struggle for gender equality.

It was pleasing to note a good variety of centre choices of wider reading cited in candidates' responses. Most candidates seemed happiest when exploring prose, whether it was non-fiction or fiction with poetry and drama sometimes being eclipsed by this. It was, however, pleasing to see well-made links to non-fiction prose and other examples of stirring speech, the most frequently cited being Dr Martin Luther King's Dream Speech. No text should have been merely 'name-dropped' as appropriate evaluation requires specific engagement with aspects and features of those texts and how they might be similar to or different from the extract.. It is relevant and valuable for candidates to discern differences and contrasts as well as similarities. The quality of their articulation of these differences, with close textual reference to provide substance, would be a key determining measure of worth.

Successful candidates:

- Explored the extract with confidence and insight showing they could discern the struggles for identity of, at least, both genders as well as fully focusing on the thoughts and feelings of the writer. Extension to other areas of the SFI were made possible by skilful contrasting where appropriate
- Made effective links between the extract and their wider reading and were able to explore across poetry, drama and prose with non-fiction prose and oratory featuring prominently
- 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
- Made few or 'forced' links to their wider reading, sometimes ignoring the breadth of genres and often inadequately developing that link. Ignored the genre, purpose and audience of the extract
- Struggled to engage with form, structure and language choice in the extract or in their wider reading examples.

And Still I Rise

There was evidence that candidates had been well taught on the themes of Angelou's poetry, less well prepared to discuss features of her poetic technique and perhaps over-taught on some details of her extraordinary life (**there is no opportunity within the mark scheme to credit extensive biography in Section B questions**). Less prominent was an ability to deal with the specific terms of each question, when selecting and shaping an appropriate response. Some candidates seemed intent on rewriting a version of what was perhaps their 'mock' or practice questions with consequent loss of focus and some inevitable irrelevance. Question 3 was more popular than Question 2 with some candidates erroneously believing that the echoing of its name in the title of the collection gave them very little to do in arguing the case.

Question 2

The statement was intended to provoke debate and provide a valuable way into their essays for many candidates. It was unsurprising that most responses ultimately agreed with the statement after some vigorous exploration of poems that proved the case. This should not have been an opportunity to offload irrelevant biography however. The format of the question required an evaluative and argumentative approach and candidates who saw it merely as an opportunity to write about Angelou's feelings rather than those evoked in the reader or audience were taking their eye off the crucial elements of exploration of theme and analysis of technique. There were some very insightful additional explorations of Angelou's powers as a performance artist and some highly relevant, analytical evaluation of worth of Angelou's poetic technique, in order to qualify or justify the 'good' of the question. 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 on.

Successful candidates:

- Chose appropriate poems for the exploration of Angelou's skills as a poet who can move a reader or audience and raise the consciousness of a world-wide audience
- Analysed Angelou's use of form, structure and language choice
- Carefully integrated only strictly relevant contextual material while maintaining focus on the text and evaluating Angelou's skill

Less successful candidates:

- Wrote narrow biographical responses that may have used proscribed poems from *Shaker Why Don't You Sing* or failed to discern why elements within Angelou's poems move or fail to move audiences
- Remained at the surface of their chosen poems and gave little hint of any possible counter-argument
- 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 anything other than the named poem disadvantaged themselves because some breadth of exploration is vital to any argument that seeks to show the central importance of the named poem or refute claims that it is such. Some appraisal and evaluation of the named poem was helpful to providing a framework for the exploration of its importance to the collection. Strongest of all were the responses that seamlessly explored technique as part and parcel of Angelou's skill, appreciating her lexis, rhythms and musicality, carefully showing how these were amplified in other poems too. Ideas expressed in the named poem and across the collection as a whole did need some reference. Arguing what was of

central importance to Angelou naturally gave rise to informed comment on her motives and intent.

Successful candidates:

- Produced a debate which considered the idea that the named poem was of ‘central importance to the collection’ and demonstrated how, through dextrous linking to other poems and illustrative detail. Alternatively, they suggested, with recourse to well-chosen detail, why another named poem might provide central importance even more clearly.
- Linked ‘Still I Rise’ 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 ‘Still I Rise’ could be of central importance to the collection
- Wrote basic accounts of their chosen poems with little reference to form, structure and language
- Were unable to engage with ideas expressed in the poems about Angelou’s motives and intent.

The World’s Wife

Again this text attracted by far the largest number of responses from the cohort and some of the lengthiest individual answers. There was evidence of informed comment and awareness of the multiple readings produced by Duffy’s ambivalent stance and deliberately ambiguous choices of form structure and language. Question 4 was the more popular choice perhaps because of the very dark source of ‘The Devil’s Wife’. The best responses to both questions showed candidates could explore feminist critique as well as appreciate Duffy’s linguistic skills with some authority. They also demonstrated respect for the key words and constructed real debate. As Duffy has attracted huge amounts of published critical comment it was pleasing to see candidates prioritising their own readings and articulating some confident evaluations.

Question 4

The triple of key words ‘witty’, ‘uncomfortable’ and ‘liberating’ proved exciting to many who gave passionate and detailed responses in the lively debates that ensued. Best of all were those responses that argued all three were inextricably linked and evidenced and were able to do so with deft analysis rather than assertion or loose comment. Counter-arguments should have been aware of the darker or lighter tones of many of Duffy’s poems and it was still noticeable that in the enthusiastic responses candidates were not as attentive as they might have been to differentiating between Duffy’s view and that of her female speakers. It was not an opportunity to make generalised points about Duffy’s imagery but rather a chance to deal with the effect her imagery has upon the reader in a specifically articulated way. More confident or better informed candidates would have tackled the ‘yet’ qualifier of the statement to explore Duffy’s ability to liberate more than the women of the poems.

Successful candidates:

- Engaged with the view expressed in the question and challenged its assumptions as well as exploring its truth
- Used a range of poems to produce a balanced debate
- Explored Duffy’s poetic technique with confidence

Less successful candidates:

- Simply agreed with the statement or tackled only one or two elements of it
- Wrote general answers or ignored the need to evaluate
- Paid no attention to Duffy’s choices of form, structure and language choices.

Question 5

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. However, few of the responses seen were confident in their articulation of the poem's key qualities. The word 'key' connotes an unlocking with subsequent revelation of ideas or images. Some, legitimately, offered other poems as more illustrative of that 'key' but still experienced difficulty in explaining what was unlocked, how and perhaps even why. A clear line of argument and counter-argument was most difficult to find in answers where numerous 'keys' were proffered. The word is not interchangeable with 'interesting', 'important' or 'main theme' although a thoughtful, focused response might include elements of all of those. It proved essential to a reasoned confirmation of the poem as 'key' to expand on why, with recourse to other well-selected poems and how they developed themes or messages evident in 'The Devil's Wife'.

Successful candidates:

- Explored the focal poem with confidence and overview of Duffy's repertoire and technique and/or offered reasons with evidence as to why another named poem could be the 'key' to the collection
- Established a range of relevant connections between 'The Devil's Wife' and the rest of the collection
- Analysed Duffy's choices of form, structure and language relevantly in detail and with confidence.

Less successful candidates:

- Wasted time on offering poor explanations of the entire content of the poem with lengthy biographical references to Myra Hindley and Ian Brady
- Wrote general answers about whole-text themes but failed to focus on 'The Devil's Wife' to at least provide some anchorage point for those themes
- Paid little attention to Duffy's poetic technique.

Skirrid Hill

Skirrid Hill is gaining in popularity as a Section B choice for centres. Sheers continues to arouse curiosity and lively debate with his varied subject matter and technique. Students appear to enjoy interpreting Sheers' undeniably powerful metaphors and responded in about equal numbers to each question. The subtle ways in which Sheers employs perspective is perhaps part of his appeal.

Question 6

This question offered candidates the opportunity to explore their own choice of poems from this broadly diverse collection. The quotation of the opening statement was glossed in the ensuing task as 'exploring difficult issues' thus hinting to candidates that this was not solely linked to painful physical and emotional matters but could encompass the trauma created by national identity, the workings or failings of relationships as well as far-reaching historical, sociological and political divides. Candidates offered plenty of examples of Sheers' treatment of this range of difficult issues and usually managed to link them to some sort of evaluation of its effects. 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 clearly showing Sheers' skill not only in his presentation but also in his offering of some philosophical or abstract answers, with really confident candidates able to criticise any tendency Sheers might have for over-explanation.

Successful candidates:

- Chose highly appropriate poems for the exploration of Sheers' exploration of difficult issues and how he characterises their effects
- 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 those difficult issues effectively
- Ignored the question's key words or made unsubstantiated cases for Sheers' inability to explore effectively
- Made broad generalisations about the effects produced by Sheers' choice of form, structure and language often asserting rather than illustrating their points

Question 7

Where a poem is positioned within a collection is clearly a matter of authorial autonomy and of great relevance to an informed overview of any poet's work. The positioning of 'Skirrid Fawr' at the conclusion is no exception. Unfortunately, some answers revealed little understanding of the structure of the collection as a published work; some potential areas for comment were therefore overlooked. The word 'fitting' is of fundamental importance in necessitating some sort of evaluation of the named poem's appropriateness in its position with a view to reiterating or offering valedictory review. The named poems' central images of anatomy, gender, sexuality, striking topography, the harsh beauty of the natural world and renewal should have been fundamental to a balanced argument. Another named poem could be offered as a better end-marker but a cogent and persuasive argument should accompany that.

Successful candidates:

- Produced a balanced debate which considered the idea that the poem makes a "fitting conclusion to the collection" in a thoughtful, engaged, incisive manner
- Linked 'Skirrid Fawr' to a range of other relevant poems and/or made an arresting case for another poem's superior claims to more fittingly conclude the collection
- Explored Sheers' form, structure and language choice with confidence, always citing examples relevantly and with analysis.

Less successful candidates:

- Simply dismissed the idea that 'Skirrid Fawr' could be a fitting conclusion
- Wrote basic accounts of the named poem or other poems, with little relevant or developed reference to form, structure and language choice
- Were unable to move beyond generalisations and assertions.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

