



General Certificate of Education

English Literature

Specification A

LITA2 Creative Study

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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General

LITA2 CREATIVE STUDY

Entries for this examination sequence attracted 15,289 candidates spread across 773 Centres and all three options of Victorian Literature; World War One Literature and The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature were well-subscribed.

In this examination sequence, as in previous years, much of the very best work appeared to have been the result of tasks individually negotiated between the student and the Centre. This engaging commitment by students and teachers to the selection of texts and topics enabled candidates to produce interesting, original work. It was pleasing to read folders in which both the prose and drama tasks had been set with the specific intention of liberating all of the Assessment Objectives covered by LITA2. When a Centre had elected to offer only a couple of questions or sometimes only one question per option there was an air of predictability about the answers. Candidates frequently struggled to find anything interesting or original to say in response to a question they had evidently been made to do and which had also been the only one given to everyone else in their group. This, of course need not be a problem with the transformational prose option which will always generate a highly individualised response but can certainly be problematic with '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 a convincing individual response. Such work 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." Occasionally Centres would claim that AO1 was band 4 for candidate after candidate when the same opinions and sometimes even the same phrases were being rehashed over and over again. Moderators could not always agree with Centres about the merits of such essays which are more correctly categorised as clear, appropriate, well-structured and secure work and whose natural home is band 3.

A few Centres did not manage to set wholly appropriate tasks and following Principal Moderator consultation with the senior moderators and their teams it is 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, once again, 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 the first year of the examination, still remains in a handful of 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 three 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:

1. **Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts...**
2. **...informed by interpretations of other readers**

Hence, the most useful drama tasks in the June 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 for the AO3 component of the task.

It is pleasing to report that a clear majority of candidates ensured that the correct proportion of their drama answer was spent in analysing and responding to their selected Drama text (70%) and that their non-drama text (where a second play was not offered) only occupied 30% of their answer. However, there is a lingering problem with some drama responses, 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 in some Centres. Task selection should ensure a sharp and manageable focus that will enable candidates to demonstrate detailed, close reading within the 2,500 word limit. In June 2010 there were folders which were a great deal longer than the word limit: the Principal Moderator read one folder which was 7,000 words in length and had been awarded 58/60 in the Centre! This mark was adjusted down considerably on the grounds that such prolix work was neither “well-organised” nor “coherent” (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. Candidates need to be encouraged to write to the recommended word length so that they are able to demonstrate 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.

Though this has been said before, it needs to be repeated: 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 a higher grade. 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. For the prose task the breakdown 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 alarmed moderators when assessors in a centre had written such observations as, “AO3 comparison. Band 4. “Excellent.” or “Clearly aware of other readers’ views.” AO3 is not examined on the prose assignment and a candidate can score no marks in the prose response by writing to cover AO3. 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 where 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. It is a good idea to give candidates a copy of the Assessment Objectives and their relative weightings as soon as they start their coursework.

Candidates in general are becoming happier with the notion that Literature is a construct. Writers make choices about form, structure and language and candidates who are alive to writers' decisions cannot fail but to impress. Successful candidates, similarly, who can use text selectively and with judgment, always perform better than candidates who do not. 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. Work was weakened by candidates 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. This unhelpful technique can be described as "narrative with text" and is only marginally better than when candidates relay narrative alone. Another feature of work using quotation which can still go awry is when successful candidates quote the text but then feel the need to paraphrase or 'translate' the quotation in the belief that the moderator will not be able to understand the quotation without the candidate's help.

Most marking in Centres was accurate and the best Centres had obviously carried out careful internal moderation. Our thanks are extended to those Centres. However, there are still Centres who appear to do no internal moderation with teachers evidently marking only the work of candidates they have taught. Moderators are always gratified when they can see two or more different sets of handwriting in the marginalia and at the end of an essay, knowing that moderation has occurred. Occasionally Centres will sign the relevant form to say that internal moderation has taken place when there is no evidence of it in the sample. Most Centres fully engage the process of marking but some still do not: it is not an uncommon sight for page after page of candidates' work to have nothing from the teacher written on it other than a cursory tick at the bottom of the page or in the left hand margin. Model marked scripts have been available since the inception of the examination and Centres are asked when assessing candidates' work to utilise the marking conventions and levels of engagement detailed in the Model Marked Scripts. In this examination sequence 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 June's work was a carry-over from January: 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" or "scrapes an E" are neither welcome nor 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. Once again, this is due to the relative weighting of the two tasks at LITA2.

Presentation of folders is still 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 easy to read 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)

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

The transformational prose task continues to be a fascinating challenge for students and a very interesting assignment to read for moderators. As in previous examination sequences 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 diary entries and letters written in the voice of important characters in candidates’ chosen novels. In this way believable and fascinating transformational voices were articulated and maintained for many characters in a wide variety of novels.

John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* continues to be fertile ground for transformational prose assignments; Doctor Grogan, Ernestina, Charles, Mrs. Poultney and Sam were all utilised to good effect. However it needs to be stressed that candidates who endeavoured to recreate an accurate voice for Sarah Woodruff usually struggled. This is largely due to Fowles’ construction of her as an enigma who has “several voices” all of which are difficult to place. The real Sarah is elusive as Charles painfully discovers and a believable voice for her is beyond all but the very best and most-organised candidates. There was also some excellent work written in the voices of Jane Eyre, Rochester, Bertha Mason, Blanche Ingram and Miss Temple in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Tess, Angel and Alec in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* were often portrayed very convincingly though it needs to be pointed out that some candidates struggled to be convincing with Tess’ voice. This was often a consequence of the task. If a candidate was asked to write a letter in Tess’ voice and then proceeded completely to yokelise Tess’ diction it did not ring true. In Chapter XLVIII (48) of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* Hardy helpfully gives us an example of Tess’ written English. She does not write like a half-witted pirate or a demented pig-herd. Therefore candidates who made Tess’ written English full of constructions such as “Ar! That name D’Urberville do send shivers down me spine” and “I be not a woman crazed or mazed but I do be like a gallied swine to whose food it do be a slave!” are not successfully capturing Hardy’s construction of Tess. Catherine the elder, Catherine the Younger, Heathcliff and Nellie Dean in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* all attracted a range of successful and interesting responses. There was one particularly memorable and brilliant transformational piece written in the voice of Joseph: deliciously deranged and judgmental! From Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* successful use was made of the characters Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian himself.

The presentation of Rivers, Prior, Sassoon and Sarah Lumb in Barker’s *Regeneration* all attracted high quality responses as did Stephen, Weir, Jack Firebrace, Isabelle, Lisette and Elizabeth in Faulks’ *Birdsong*. Once again Sebastian Barry’s *A Long Long Way* was a successful World War 1 text. J.L. Carr’s *A Month in the Country*, Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, Susan Hill’s *Strange Meeting* and Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* all attracted high quality answers for both transformational and traditional prose responses.

Some first class response were written about Offred, Ofglen, Serena Joy, Moira, The Commander and Nick in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*; once again D.B.C. Pierre’s *Vernon God Little* made a distinguished appearance but Walsh’s *Trainspotting*, Banks’ *The Wasp Factory* and Roddy Doyle’s *The Van* and *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* produced work of more variable quality. Some candidates believe all they have to do to recreate a believable register for Walsh, Banks and Doyle is use the F word a lot. They are mistaken. There is a lot more to these writers than swearing. Candidates who understood the range of their modern

literature texts invariably fared better than candidates who believed they were reading one-dimensional fiction. Early clues are that Centres who offered transformational tasks on Joan Lingard's *The Kiss* have unearthed a very interesting examination text indeed. Those of us old enough to remember with affection her 'Kevin and Sadie' Northern Ireland quintet of novels for young adults from the 1970s are very happy to welcome Ms. Lingard into the world of A Level transformational writing.

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 one example based on *The French Lieutenant's Woman* a candidate writing in the voice of Grogan compared Charles' behaviour to that of Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's classic novella *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. True, Fowles does cite Stevenson's classic but it was not published until 1886 making it impossible for Grogan in 1867 to be aware of it. That a candidate would not know these things before starting work on a transformational piece based on *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is not unusual but that the anachronisms were still there in a finished piece of coursework is disappointing. Other anachronisms were Grogan referring to the role of Miss Allen the English maid in the Morell household. Grogan could have no idea of Miss Allen's part in the events of Morell versus de la Roncière as the truth did not emerge in print until 1969. Fowles knows the truth but it is an error to imagine that Grogan could be aware of it in 1867. That such glaring infelicities were not obvious to the Centre is perhaps the most disappointing feature of all. Research remains a vital component of the transformational prose assignment just as it does for the more traditional prose essay and candidates are here reminded of its central importance. Control of AO4 allows a candidate to demonstrate fluency and panache in AO2.

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 Ellen Dean/ Catherine Earnshaw/ Isabella Linton/ Catherine Linton in *Wuthering Heights* and comment on her importance in the novel;
- Explore Hardy's presentation of male-female relationships in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*;
- How does Fowles' presentation of Charles Smithson/ Sarah Woodruff in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* influence your understanding of the novel?
- Analyse Faulks' presentation of women in *Birdsong*;
- Explore Barker's presentation of mental illness in *Regeneration*;
- Explore Barry's presentation of ideas about conflict in *A Long Long Way*
- Analyse Winterson's presentation of Jeanette's mother/ Jeanette/ Pastors Finch and Spratt/ Elsie Norris/ Miss Jewsbury in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*;
- How does Mc Ewan's presentation of Joe Rose/Jed Parry/ Clarissa influence your understanding of the struggle for identity in *Enduring Love*?

Commentary on Drama Assignments

The Principal Moderator noticed last year 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 short list features favourite text combinations and successful questions from the last three examination sequences. These questions have not been published previously. The titles are offered as models for similar work.

- “Sex is always far less interesting than the world of ideas.” Compare and contrast the presentation of sex and sexuality in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* and *Arcadia* in the light of this opinion.
- 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 all of Wilde’s men are unthinking fools whereas all of Brontë’s women are calculating cynics.
- Compare and contrast the presentation of the relationship between Raleigh and Stanhope in *Journey’s End* with the presentation of the relationship between Stephen and Weir in *Birdsong* in the light of the opinion that “War makes some relationships but ruins others.”
- Compare and contrast the presentation of female desire in *Top Girls* (selected set text) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the light of the opinion that “both playwrights only ever portray the destructive nature of female desire.”

Once again, moderators reported that when candidates entered into a spirit of debate with the opinions of other readers essays were engaged, relevant, lively and illuminating.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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