



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

English Literature A

LTA1B

(Specification 2740)

**Unit 1: Texts in Context
World War One Literature**

Report on the Examination

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The entry was around 1000 candidates, compared to in excess of 5000 last summer, but even so examiners saw the full range of marks and approaches. Centres will find the January 2011 LTA1B mark scheme a very useful document here, as it contains not only the assessment grids which will be familiar from the previous series but also an Indicative Content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful candidates might adopt in their responses. In addition, Centres will also find it useful to refer to subsequent reports going back to January 2009.

As a preamble centres should remember that although Assessment Objective 4 is tested in Section A but not in Section B, it is a crucial foundation to a well designed course in this option, which is so bound up with one historical event. Key historical and biographical facts are fundamental to a proper understanding of changing attitudes and contexts within World War One. Candidates find the whole course more engaging and satisfying if they can understand the importance of central events in World War One. It is also a good idea to consider how and why attitudes to World War One have changed and developed so as to shape how we view the war and read its literature today in 2011.

To look at the achievement of candidates question by question:

Section A Contextual Linking

Question 01

Centres will now be very familiar with some slight alterations to the format of this question since the specimen paper was published over three years ago. The wording of the generic question was adjusted slightly: examiners on the predecessor LTA6 paper (in many ways the model for this question and this option) expressed their concern that candidates sometimes become bogged down while trying to address the idea of “typicality”, so candidates on the new specification are directed simply to compare the extract with relevant aspects of their wider reading. Of course, in answering this question, candidates will still be considering what is typical of the Literature of World War One, but they will be doing so through the more direct means of exploring the similarities and differences between the extract and the most relevant parts of their wider reading.

The best way to prepare candidates for Question 1 is by providing them with non-fiction extracts from the Literature of World War One as part of their wider reading. Although centres have already identified three wider reading texts (one from each literary genre) and submitted details of these to their coursework advisors, it is vital that candidates’ wider reading extends beyond this minimum required by the QCDA regulations governing every new A-Level English Literature specification. This point is emphasised on page 7 of the Specification: “These three texts may be supplemented with a collection of relevant extracts and shorter pieces of writing.” Candidates whose wider reading only stretches as far as their centre’s three nominated texts may well find themselves at a disadvantage in the examination if their opportunities to establish relevant links to the extract are limited by the narrowness of their reading. Candidates are, of course, able to refer to their prose and drama coursework texts too; indeed, as these texts are liable to be very well-known to them, they are likely to be able to refer to these in some depth and detail. To maximise their candidates’ chances of success in answering Question 1, centres are advised to develop a programme of wider reading, such as the one in the AQA-endorsed Nelson Thorne’s publication, *AQA English Literature A: Literature of World War One* (ISBN 978-0748782949). Of course, centres are not obliged to use this supporting textbook, but they may find it useful as a model when constructing their own programme of wider reading. Centres are reminded

that there is further guidance on how to prepare candidates for Question 1 in the 'Contextual Linking' advice which was issued in the summer of 2008.

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 1 will relate to at least one of the six key areas identified to help centres focus their studies in the rich area of the Literature of World War One. These areas are:

- The realities of war
- 'Man's inhumanity to man'
- Patriotism
- Politics
- Physical/mental/spiritual consequences
- The role of women and the Home Front

The wording of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to candidates as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract. Centres should use these topics when planning their course of wider reading; they may also refer to the wider reading list on pages 18 – 20 of the Specification, although the list is not exhaustive: the best centres will introduce their candidates to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that candidates' wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: candidates are required to refer to at least one example of their wider reading in each genre when answering Question 1 and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded. It is not advisable to use a very narrow range of centre-chosen texts and extracts (or readings of those texts and extracts). It is not helpful for candidates if all those entered by a centre restrict themselves to exactly the same texts and extracts and exactly the same points and interpretations. Instead candidates should be encouraged to develop their own repertoire of wider reading and *readings* so that their responses are individual and so that they can choose the most meaningful links relevant to the given extract.

In attempting Question 1, candidates are advised to split their time evenly between the two parts of the question. It is perfectly acceptable for candidates to focus on the extract for thirty minutes, then spend the next thirty minutes writing about their relevant wider reading; however, more confident and sophisticated candidates may be able to produce integrated responses in which the extract and the wider reading comparisons are interwoven throughout the answer. Contrasts will also be an important part of successful responses, but their inclusion should be coherent: arbitrary, bolted-on texts with no obvious connection to the extract will not help candidates reach the higher bands of the mark scheme. However, this is most likely to occur in the responses of candidates whose wider reading has been limited to three texts: it should not be a problem for those candidates who are able to draw on a truly wide experience of the Literature of World War One.

The extract

One typical senior examiner described the extract from Bertrand Russell as "accessible" and went on to point out that it "opened up almost limitless opportunities for candidates to draw on their wider reading". Perhaps the key feature of the Russell extract is the ambivalence of his position on the war, and his consequently ambiguous views about patriotism and pacifism. Most candidates paid at least some attention to his mixed thoughts and feelings.

The passionate and declarative nature of Russell's style provided much for students to get their teeth into here. Many were able to respond to Russell's language choices and the ways in which he expresses himself. Candidates engaged with words and phrases such as "despairing tenderness", "slaughtered", "rage", "tortured", "protest", "futile", "sickened", "barbarism", "appalled" and "febrile nightmares" as a way of accessing his thoughts and

feelings. Russell's often dramatic figures of speech such as "to refrain from murder", "swallowed up", "swept off their feet" and "collapse and sink" provided rich language sources to explore.

Russell's contextual references to Asquith, Grey and the Battle of the Marne did not, on the whole, cause difficulties for candidates. If candidates did not know the details they worked out from context that Asquith and Grey were statesmen with political responsibility for the war and its consequences, and that the Battle of the Marne stopped the initial German advance. A small number, however, assumed that Asquith and Grey were patriotic poets. Perhaps this stems from confusing Prime Minister Asquith with his son, the poet who wrote 'The Volunteer' which appears in the Stallworthy anthology selection.

It was common for candidates to have something to say about the genre of autobiography and the time context but candidates would do well to give more thought to these considerations in future and what exactly they might reveal about the chosen extract.

It was less common for candidates to engage with Russell's pronounced use of rhetorical and syntactic features. Some of these might include: the use of short, abrupt sentences for declarative effect; using adverbials and embedded clauses at the beginning of sentences to focus the reader on time or strongly felt attitudes; the use of parallel grammatical structures and repetition to underline strength of feeling; the ways in which contrasting clauses are linked; and the way word order is manipulated to foreground particular words and phrases. Interestingly, some candidates tried to connect Russell's disciplines of mathematics and philosophy to his written style, arguing that there is a distinctive precision and logic to his argument.

His reference to "the voice of God" did attract attention. Most assumed it was a reference to strong religious faith and used it as link to wider reading. Some knew that Russell was an atheist so assumed the reference functioned more as rhetorical flourish. As one candidate put it, "Bertrand Russell was a famous atheist and may simply be using the concept of God to demonstrate the strength of his conviction". How perceptive!

The shift in emphasis towards the end, with Russell's apocalyptic vision of the destruction of London, did not receive as much attention as expected. However, some candidates used the section to explore new aspects of thought and feeling as well as to link in some interesting wider reading references.

Yet again with the chosen extract, the most successful responses came from those candidates who carefully considered tone and mood. Centres should concentrate candidates' attention on these aspects so as to help them to engage effectively with thoughts and feelings. Again, there is a tendency to try and impose a pro- or anti-war viewpoint on the extract, and indeed other wider reading texts referenced. This over-simplification perhaps stems from a desire to make comparison straightforward, but the approach is deeply flawed and closes down rather than opens up possibilities for analytical exploration.

When it came to looking at AO2 aspects of the extract, the most successful candidates related aspects of form, structure and language to meaning. It was reassuring to see how many were able to use Russell's changes of subject matter, tone and mood as an opportunity to engage with structure. One senior examiner summarised a consensus view of examiners when it came to AO2: "There was too much empty description of paragraph and sentence length masquerading as analysis of structure". She went on to point out that "it is evident that analysis of the structure of prose is still proving tricky for students to grasp". Centres may well want to note that observation and give prose analysis under examination conditions some special attention.

Wide reading is obviously crucial to giving a full answer to the second part of the Contextual Linking question and the need to cover prose, poetry and drama has been stressed in previous reports. It is less common for candidates to fail to cover the three genres, but it still happens more than it should and tends to be a problem with a centre as a whole rather than simply being a case of one or two forgetful students. One senior examiner echoes the views of several examiners on this issue: “In the worst cases, this led to whole centres of students choosing the same 3 texts –often Sassoon’s Declaration from *Regeneration* (he doesn’t seem to exist outside this text for many!), ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ and *Journey’s End*. This is fine as all 3 texts do link well with the Russell piece and can illuminate themes such as patriotism, the youth of the soldiers, a change of heart, the difficulties of objecting to the War, hallucinations and religious conviction. But the idea that teachers may have advised students to prepare so narrowly is disheartening as it’s such a reductive approach to what is meant to be a broad and rich course.” As this examiner has raised the popularity of discussing Sassoon’s experience, perhaps this is a good moment to draw attention to the tendency amongst some candidates to misuse the term ‘pacifist’. It does not apply to either Sassoon or Owen! Typicality needs to be demonstrated rather than asserted in sweeping statements that are not properly supported. Many centres continue to do an excellent job of encouraging breadth as well as depth in wide reading. These candidates were able to choose the wide reading that best fitted the Russell extract in their view, so as to make coherent and illuminating links of similarity and difference. Centres and candidates perhaps still need to note that the invitation to look as ‘different from’ as well as ‘similar to’ is intended to be enabling. In other words, those who could not easily access ‘similar to’ (candidates perhaps worry too much that they have not read similar texts to the extract), could always fall back on all their reading that was ‘different from’. On the other hand, many were able to use texts directly similar such as Sassoon’s Declaration. Many had read well beyond their coursework novels and drama texts; one or two centres had supplemented the Gardner or Stallworthy anthologies with more poetry by women, usually from *Scars Upon My Heart*, and to good effect. Most centres had ensured that candidates could reference a range of non-fiction too so as to be able to contextualise Russell within the genre of memoir. As with previous LTA1B papers, there was some evidence of too much wide reading looked at too hurriedly. In these cases, it would have been better to train candidates to select and plan around the idea of at least one well-chosen wider reading reference per genre and to explore the links further. Where a candidate lacked the necessary range of wide reading, it tended to be drama that was most frequently absent. In some cases it was poetry that was absent and this seems odd given that candidates have the poetry text with them in the examination room! Candidates and centres should consult the wider reading suggestions in the Specification and perhaps refer to the texts cited in the next section of the report.

One purpose of this section of the report is to encourage centres and candidates to read widely in their courses and to explore the wealth of wider reading possible in this topic. In no sense is there a canon of works that must be studied. At the same time, it might inform centres and candidates of some the wider reading texts that candidates put to effective use. Drama texts included: *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop); *The Accrington Pals* (Peter Whelan); *Black ‘Eil* (Miles Malleon); *The Silver Tassie* (Sean O’Casey); *Blackadder* (Richard Curtis and Ben Elton); and *Not About Heroes* (Stephen Macdonald). A range of early patriotic poetry, including Jessie Pope, was used to pick up Russell’s discussion of patriotism. Conversely, a wide range of poetry was used to complement Russell’s view that the massacre was futile. ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ was perhaps the most frequently cited poem; the vast majority wanted to link this to Russell’s use of “slaughtered”. The most popular novels cited were *Regeneration* (Pat Barker), *Birdsong* (Sebastian Faulks) and *The First Casualty* (Ben Elton). Given the central character’s predicament, the latter proved a very useful text to put alongside the Russell extract. Other novels cited were: *A Long, Long Way* (Sebastian Barry), *The Return of the Soldier* (Rebecca

West) and *Tell England* (Ernest Raymond). Non-fiction was represented by Vera Brittain, Sylvia Pankhurst, Paul Nash and Harry Patch. As stated earlier, there is nothing wrong with referencing extracts from past papers, but it would be good to see centres and candidates looking beyond these extracts to explore appropriate examples of letters and memoirs.

In subsequent examinations successful candidates will:

- explore the ways the writer's thoughts and feelings about aspects of World War One are presented in the extract
- develop their own thoughtful and considered readings of the extract
- establish a range of substantial and meaningful links between the extract and their own wider reading
- develop a repertoire of wider reading texts in addition to coursework texts that are known and understood in detail
- refer to all three literary genres when writing about their wider reading, commenting on the writers' choices of form, structure and language, as well as subject matter.

One examiner offered this further advice to centres:

- Students need to consider **genre** in Q1. They must prepare by analysing a range of non-fiction pieces in relation to their wider reading so that they can point out the differences in the ways in which choice of genre will shape the writing.
- It is most likely that looking for **differences from** as opposed to **similarities to** wider reading will lead to genuine exploration of how writers work. While it is right to point out thematic links, it is essential to be able to show how differently authors treat these themes.
- Listing literary devices is not analysis. Pointing out that other authors use the same devices is not analysis and can lead to some strained if not downright silly links.
- Beware of lazy assertions about context (*All women at the Home front were ignorant; all politicians were corrupt; all generals were incompetent.*) Beware of unloading context only loosely linked to the given passage.

Section B Poetry

Questions 02 -07

The expectations of AS candidates in this section are three-fold. Candidates should: select and then analyse appropriate poems in detail; closely explore the key words of the question; and co-ordinate a balanced response to the debate. A blend of these priorities ensures success, but the debate remains primary.

This series the Gardner and Stallworthy anthologies proved to be the most popular choices. There were many engaged and enthusiastic answers with most prepared to address poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language. As one examiner put it, "The vast majority of candidates had been taught well on how to address the debate and it was **rarely** ignored totally". Where problems occurred, they tended to be to do with:

- Balancing the debate
- Some able candidates who demonstrated high Band 3/Band 4 descriptors in other ways were prevented from fulfilling their potential by not balancing the debate. Candidates should remember to spend time identifying what they see as the debate inherent in the question

before proceeding to the planning stage. ‘Balancing the debate’ means seeing beyond the given view; it may or may not involve a polarised debate. If they can see another way of looking at the poems, then they are balancing the debate. It may be that they spend more time on the given view or the counter argument, but they should at least spend a substantial amount of time and thought on both sides.

- **Selecting appropriate material**

There was a good deal of engaged and intelligent analysis that was not clearly relevant to the question or to the candidate’s line of argument. Care should be taken to select appropriate poems and to select from those poems only the most relevant aspects, rather than offloading all they know about a particular poem or poems. One of the answers to this issue is planning; time spent planning is crucial. Many candidates begin writing too soon (and the same can be said of responses to Section A). Once candidates are writing, they should make frequent reference to the key words of the question and the central debate so as to ensure that the answer remains on track. Some candidates perhaps try to cover too many poems for their own good. They should remember that there are two perfectly acceptable choices: ranging more widely, or choosing to concentrate on two or three poems in more detail. If they choose the latter they must be careful to cover depth and closeness of reading. If they choose the latter, then ‘two or three’ means just that; covering two poems is fine and can still enable candidates to gain the highest marks.

- **Exploring poetic effects created by writers’ choices of form, structure and language.**

This remains a difficult area for many candidates. Exploring aspects of form, in particular, such as rhyme, metre and stanza form can lead candidates into empty feature-spotting with little relevance and/or asserted and unconvincing links to meaning. Such features, it is claimed, are chosen by writers to “make them stand out” (?) or to create vague effects such as “flow” and “pace”. For examiners the key questions when faced with these assertions are “How?” and “Why?” Candidates should also ask these questions themselves and use them to shape their responses when it comes to AO2.

The odd numbered questions naming a poem need just as much attention to the debate, to choice of material and poems and to planning. One examiner from last summer offered the following comment which applies to this examination: “Students must avoid merely ‘going through’ a given poem or a list of chosen poems without linking them to each other within the framework of a clearly developing argument. This seems to have been more evident in the answers to the second question on each poetry text”.

Up the Line to Death

Question 02

This was the more popular of the two Gardner questions but, as one examiner put it, “not always as easy as students seemed to think”. She went on: “Many offered an all-purpose overview of the anthology or ‘went through’ chosen poems without clearly framing a balanced argument based on the given view. The more astute often only chose two poems –one suggesting a romantic view, based on nature images, one suggesting the world was as perceived in the quotation and managed to offer a satisfying exploration”. The core debate is about “narrow range”. Most assumed from the list quoted that this meant poems about the graphic realism of the unpleasantness of trench warfare and so balanced the debate by referring to patriotic, naive poetry or by looking at poems of reflection later in the anthology. The debate allowed for other readings, however, and some argued almost the opposite that patriotic poetry is narrow by definition and trench poetry has much more variety than might be expected.

Question 03

Those who chose to write about the ‘Rendezvous’ debate tended to offer confident close readings of Seeger’s poem and were able to measure its typicality against a range of other poems that presented attitudes to conflict. Seeger’s war imagery alongside images of nature, and his use of verse form and repetition were all rich sources for exploration. Although A04 is not assessed discretely in this section, nevertheless the best answers were underpinned by the knowledge that this is a poem of 1915. It is distinct and much darker than poems of the previous year and yet the poem is placed before the prevalent shift to bitter cynicism. As always, a close reading of tone revealed this underlying attitude.

Scars Upon My Heart

Question 04

This question proved a little tricky for the unwary who struggled to address ‘male views and voices’ despite the numerous distinct poems in the anthology that take this approach. As one examiner put it, “Many were deceived into simply writing about women’s views but those who found poems where life in the trenches was imagined or the outcome of injury for the soldiers was observed managed to offer strong arguments –frequently finding women poets were not up to the task!”

Question 05

Examiners reported that this question was done more successfully. Candidates found the poem accessible and it was effectively analysed with appropriate poems chosen to illustrate its typicality in the debate. Some interesting answers looked at the poets themselves as victims of warfare.

War Poetry

Question 06

This was a very popular question and most found it a compelling debate with which to engage. Candidates clearly enjoyed the freedom of choice possible here and relished the task of proving their favourite poems to be “moving and effective”. Again, although this section does not assess A04, if students did not know who was “killed in World War One” then fundamental problems of factual accuracy ensued. A lesser error, but still an annoying and pervasive one, was the number of times students asserted inaccuracies about the death of Wilfred Owen. He did not die “only 48 hours”, “the day before” or “just hours before” the Armistice. He died on 4 November. His parents heard of his death as the bells rung out on 11 November (was this the source of confusion?). The best candidates tended to be of the view that dying during World War One was not a prerequisite for “moving and effective” poetry but the fact of a poet’s death often gave added poignancy to his words.

Question 07

Like Question 6, this proved an effective discriminator. Candidates who were confident in their knowledge of Cummings chose very well. They realised that beyond Cummings’ original style and unusual approach, his themes and subjects are familiar. This led to a clear debate where the original style and unusual approach provided evidence for the given view, whereas the familiar themes and subjects provided the basis for a counter-argument. On the other hand, some candidates chose badly. If candidates did not have a convincing reading of the

poem's content, they fell back on empty feature-spotting and assertion. For these candidates, constructing a counter-argument proved difficult.

In future, successful candidates will:

- create a balanced debate in response to the critical opinion given in the question
- select appropriate poems to support their argument and counter-argument
- explore the poetic effects created by the writer's choices of form, structure and language in detail
- remember that the debate is just as important in the odd numbered questions.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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