



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

**English Literature A**

**LITA2**

**(Specification 2740)**

**Unit 2: Creative Study**

***Report on the Examination***

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## LITA2 CREATIVE STUDY

There were 1000 entries for this sequence of the examination. At this stage in the life of the specification there is little new to say but several things to reiterate from past sequences.

Students who understood the Assessment Objectives and the relative weighting of the Assessment Objectives invariably performed better than students who were vague about what the prose task and the drama task were asking them to do. The relevant detail about the weightings of the Assessment Objectives is laid out in the Specification itself and has been made available in several of the most recent Principal Moderator's Reports. Schools, colleges and students who still do not fully understand the weightings are referred to those documents.

AO3 can still create difficulties within the drama task. A handful of schools and colleges continue to have trouble with the second part of AO3 which requires students to be "informed by interpretations of other readers." However this January the first part of AO3 was ignored by some students (usually privately-entered) who did not manage to compare and contrast two texts within the drama task, either because they thought they did not have to or because they paid such scant attention to the second text that no meaningful comparison had been made.

The most useful drama tasks in the January 2012 examination sequence demonstrated the importance of creating opportunities not only for the students to compare and contrast but also for them to do so against a backdrop of literary debate. We have been here before.

Much of the very best work appeared to have been the result of individually negotiated tasks.

A great deal of the less successful work was predictable and formulaic with some schools and colleges offering only one or two questions to the entire cohort. As has become usual, students frequently struggled to find anything interesting or original to say in response to a question which had evidently been given to everyone else in their group thus limiting their opportunities to write in a distinctive, informed personal voice.

Transformational writing continues to rise in popularity within the prose option with moderators reporting that they saw many high quality responses. Transformational writing will free a student from the confines of a "whole group answer" and perhaps more schools and colleges will wish to try it with students who may benefit from a more liberating approach to English Literature. However, for transformational writing to be successful students need to know as much about the form, structure and language of their chosen prose text as they do to answer the more traditional prose interpretation task successfully. Transformational writing requires the student to show discipline and to understand the style of the writer whose work they are studying. The transformational option is not a free-for-all or an "easier" route to success.

Evidence that some previous advice has been heeded is that in January 2012 a substantial majority of students ensured that the correct proportion of their drama answer was spent in analysing and responding to their selected drama text (about

70%) and that their non-drama text (where a second play was not offered) only occupied about 30% of their answer.

Evidence that previous advice had not been universally accepted was to be found in the number of students who did not respond to the dramatic and theatrical potentials of the plays offered for examination. Many students still wrote about drama as though it were an off-shoot of prose and a significant minority made little or no attempt to explore the significance of stage directions, acting opportunities, direction or the impact of the play in the theatre.

Students who were able to analyse writers' decisions were invariably impressive. Literature is a construct, assembled in specific ways.

As ever, students who could use text selectively and with care performed well. The most successful use of quotations is brief but frequent, ("short integrated quotation" or S.I.Q.) accompanied by analytical comments that do not merely paraphrase or present narrative but explore the form, structure and language used by the writers.

Less successful students still cling to the belief that writing about English Literature requires little more than relaying the narrative of their chosen texts via the use of "hanging" quotation which does not move into analysis or which offers no evaluation of writers' techniques.

The least successful students of all continue to relate details of plot and simply tell the stories of their texts without quotation or, when they do use quotation, feel the need to paraphrase or 'translate' it presumably to help the moderator understand it.

Folder length can still be a problem. The 2,500 word limit per folder is there for a reason: it allows the best students to demonstrate that their work is "well-organised" and "coherent" (both band 4 descriptors for AO1). Over-long work is frequently weak and out of focus in comparison to answers which were within word limit tolerances.

Students, schools and colleges are reminded that an accurate word count at the end of each essay in the folder is a requirement.

Students, schools and colleges are also reminded that they need to include a bibliography including internet sites.

The most successful schools and colleges had usually undertaken careful internal moderation and had fully engaged with the process of marking.

It is disheartening for a moderator to view page after page of students' work with nothing from the school written on it apart, perhaps, from occasional ticks or Spartan acknowledgements such as "AO1", "AO3" and so on.

The most successful and accurate schools and colleges utilise the marking conventions and commit themselves to the levels of engagement detailed in the Model Marked Scripts.

Teachers should ensure that weaknesses in written expression are not ignored. In coursework, it is a reasonable expectation that students 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.

The font size and spacing selected by a student should allow the teacher marking the folder to conduct a written dialogue in the margins of the work. 12 point font in a sensible style and with 1.5 or double spacing is best for this.

### **Commentary on Prose Assignments**

The transformational prose task continues to enable students to demonstrate their detailed knowledge and understanding of how writers use form, structure and language in a creative way. It can also be a most enjoyable reading experience for moderators. Popular tasks still revolve mainly around letters and diary entries written in the voice of important characters in students' chosen novels but this January it has been noticeable that some schools and colleges have been "stretching" this convention somewhat. Whereas it is entirely appropriate for a student to select a diary entry from a character in a novel who keeps a diary or to include a letter from a character who writes letters it stretches moderator credulity when an otherwise taciturn and journalistically and epistolary uncommunicative character suddenly decides to write a revelatory diary entry or an effusive letter. For example this year several schools and colleges decided to write a diary entry from the perspective of such characters as Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Billy Prior in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* or Serena Joy in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and ran into difficulties, the first of which was would these characters commit their thoughts to paper at all? Taking a liberal interpretation and accepting that such characters may commit their thoughts to paper subsequent questions included the believability of the voice and the reliability of the students' knowledge. For example how believable is it that Heathcliff became a "martial arts expert" and "personal fitness trainer" in his years away from Cathy and the Heights? Anachronisms seriously reduce the impact of the students' abilities to demonstrate control not only of AO4 but also of AO2. Context continues to confuse some students. An appropriate register confounds others. Would Billy Prior refer to Rivers as an "all round good guy but in your face with all that sex Freud stuff"? Basic AO2 befuddled other students. Was Serena Joy really a cocaine-addled, sex-addicted, red-carpet celebrity before the inception of Gilead? Students who elect to offer the more traditional prose interpretation as their prose response very rarely make mistakes like these so once again this report reminds students that research is, if anything, even more vital to the transformational prose assignment than it is to the more traditional prose essay. For both prose options it is vital that students are able to demonstrate knowledge of how writers use the form, structure and language of the original text while seamlessly incorporating AO4 contextual detail. Schools and colleges are reminded to seek coursework advisor approval for all tasks and texts before students start work.

Popular texts in January 2012 will be familiar to experienced readers of this report. *Victorian* favourites continue to be Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Popular World War One texts were Pat Barker's *Regeneration*, Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong*, J.L. Carr's *A Month in the Country*, Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting* and Sebastian Barry's *A Long Long Way*. Popular texts dealing with The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature were Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's*

*Tale*; Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*, Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Not many "new" texts appear in the January sequence though Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* was offered on the Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature. It is to be hoped that students who offer it for LITA2 do not offer it again for LITA4 where it is also becoming popular.

For the traditional prose essay a range of enabling tasks were set by schools and colleges. Many of these legitimately concentrated on how writers present major characters to the reader but other essays asked students to focus on how writers engage themes or ideas. Some interesting essay titles are offered below:

- Analyse Emily Brontë's presentation of the "civilised" versus the "natural" in *Wuthering Heights*;
- Explore Hardy's presentation of rural poverty in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and analyse its importance of the novel;
- What does an analysis of Charlotte Brontë's presentation of sexual conduct reveal about Victorian values?
- How does Fowles' presentation of the influence of Darwin's Theory of Evolution in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* influence your understanding of the novel?
- Analyse Faulks' presentation of children in *Birdsong*;
- How does Barker present ideas concerning the importance of the past in *Regeneration*?
- Analyse Walker's presentation of Afro-American values in *The Color Purple*;
- How does Atwood's presentation of the hierarchies which operate in Gilead influence your understanding of the struggle for identity in *The Handmaid's Tale*?

### **Commentary on Drama Assignments**

As has been reported in every Moderator's Report since the inception of this specification when students enter into a spirit of debate with the opinions of other readers their drama comparative work is lively and illuminating and is often a pleasure to read; however where there is no engagement with the views of others essays are unsuccessful and dull. Therefore the most important consideration for schools and colleges when preparing students for the drama assignment is to remember to set a task that will liberate all of the Assessment Objectives but especially the whole of the dominant AO3 worth 15/30. The following list features some interesting tasks:

- "Men with a conscience are invariably more miserable and less successful than men who feel no guilt about their actions." Compare and contrast the presentation of the male characters in *Arcadia* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in the light of this opinion.
- Compare and contrast Wilde's and Ibsen's presentation of the female characters in *A Woman of No Importance* and *A Doll's House* in the light of the opinion that "Wilde's women have learned to be happy to compromise whereas Ibsen's women have learned it is impossible ever to be happy with compromise."

- Compare and contrast the presentation of Stanhope in *Journey's End* with the presentation of Blackadder in *Blackadder Goes Forth* in the light of Brian Gardner's opinion that British soldiers of the First World War shared "a brotherhood that transcended the barriers of social class."
- Compare and contrast the presentation of secrets and lies in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in the light of the opinion that "the poisonous influence of secrets and lies ruins all the relationships between men and women in both plays."

However, examples of unhelpful and inappropriate titles do persist. Here is a selection:

- 'To what extent is *Top Girls* a feminist play?'
- 'Is *Top Girls* ground-breaking in the way it presents the changing role of women?'

These questions lack any concept of AO3 whatsoever and are deficient in that they lack a comparison and do not invite a debate by inviting students to consider the views of other readers. Research uncovered that the school offering these titles had not sought coursework advisor approval before student's commenced work. Some schools and colleges, aware of the need to offer a comparison tried to get round the "comparison problem" by offering Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* or Ibsen's *A Doll's House* to complement *Top Girls*. This would have worked excellently but closer analysis by a vigilant moderator revealed that the comparisons were only being offered via extracts. Unsurprisingly student responses were under-developed because not only had the work overlooked AO3i and AO3ii but also infringed the requirement to study whole texts. The best advice, therefore, is for schools and colleges to seek coursework advisor approval before allowing their students to begin work.

Oscar Wilde's plays continue to be the dominant force for students opting for Victorian Literature though Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is becoming almost as popular. Now and then Stoppard's *Arcadia* is offered as a modern alternative to drama written in the Victorian era. This year the Principal Moderator was intrigued and delighted to see one student offer Victorian melodrama *Maria Marten or Murder in the Red Barn* by Brian J Burton and looks forward to reading more essays on the play in future sequences. R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* is by far the most frequently-offered play within the World War One option with Elton's and Curtis's television drama *Blackadder Goes Forth* becoming more popular while Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop version of *Oh! What a Lovely War* declines in popularity so much that the Principal Moderator did not see one essay on it in this sequence. Other plays that now and then find their way into January sequences but are more popular in June are *Not about Heroes* by Stephen McDonald, *The Accrington Pals* by Peter Whelan and Miles Malleson's *Black 'Ell*. There is a greater range of drama offered on The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature: Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*; Brian Friel's *Translations* and *Making History*; Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; Pinter's *The Homecoming* and *Betrayal*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible* and *A View from the Bridge*, Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Plough and the Stars* and almost anything by Tennessee Williams all attract students. It is pleasing to report that modern drama has such a diverse appeal to schools and colleges but less

pleasing to report that many students struggle to contextualise their plays in terms of dramatic and theatrical possibilities and in relation to time and era. *Top Girls* suffers more than most with many students making little or no sense of Churchill's presentation of the zeitgeist of the Thatcher years and struggling with the ingenious production techniques especially the opening section. It is recommended that where possible schools and colleges give students the opportunity to attend a production of their set drama text and where live theatre is not available or too costly students are given access to film or television versions of their texts.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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

### **Converting marks into UMS marks**

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[www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion).