



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

English Literature A

LITA2

(Specification 2740)

Unit 2: Creative Study

Report on the Examination

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LITA2 CREATIVE STUDY

By this stage in its development the specification has become well-established and, to a very great extent, successful students continue to do what successful students have been doing for several years. Following the same logic, less successful students repeat many of the same mistakes made by the less successful students of previous years. Many of the following points have been made elsewhere but here the Principal Moderator wishes to draw together the most pertinent characteristics of students' performances in LITA2 and to reiterate the significant differences between the work of successful and less successful students.

Successful Students

- Negotiate with their teachers the titles and tasks they want to explore. A degree of genuine autonomy enables students to produce interesting, original work and greatly aids success in AO1 which at the top of band 4 calls for an “original personal voice” in the prose interpretation task and in the drama task. For the creative transformational prose task the top of band 4 requires the candidate to show a “mastery” of the source text and the experience of moderation has shown that it is sometimes difficult for students to show sophistication in creativity when they are working to the same question as the rest of their cohort.
- Stay within or close to the 2,500 word limit for the whole folder so that they can demonstrate that their work has been planned with a purpose. Seriously overlong folders cannot score maximum marks in AO1 which asks for cogency, coherence and control in band 4 and at the top of band 3. An extra benefit of keeping within the word limit is that it will allow students 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. The most successful students include an accurate word count at the end of each essay in the folder for which the optimum word usage is about 1100 words for the prose response and about 1400 for the drama assignment which calls for the comparison of two texts. The moderator will check the number of words used in a folder and will not be fooled when an erroneous number is written in the word count box on the Candidate Record Form, when the box is left blank or something like “2500 approx” is written there.
- To maximise their chances of success in AO1 write clear and correct English and take care with proof-reading. High levels of literacy which demonstrate that a student has taken pains with the quality of expression also help the achievement of high marks in the other AOs as understanding and analysis (AO2), exploring connections (AO3) and demonstrating an understanding of contexts (AO4) are all heavily dependent on the candidate's ability to write clearly and effectively.
- Pay full and diligent attention to the Assessment Objectives as they plan and write. This information has been printed before but it is perhaps helpful to offer it once again: for the prose task the break-down of Assessment Objectives is dominated by a combination of AO1 (12/30) and AO2 (15/30) leaving AO4 only 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. As ever, it is a good idea to give students a copy of the Assessment Objectives and their relative weightings as soon as they start their coursework. Under such a regimen students would, for example, be able to understand the importance of all

of the dominant AO3 when answering the drama question. The best drama questions create opportunities not only for the students to compare and contrast but also for them to do so against a backdrop of literary debate (AO3ii).

- Respond with confidence to the dramatic and theatrical potentials of the plays under analysis. Frequently where disagreements occur between school and moderator the hub of the dispute revolves around AO2 in the drama task. Granted, this AO is worth only 6 of the 30 marks available for the drama essay but many schools have been too happy to award all six marks for work which treats drama as an extension of prose. If students have not demonstrated that they have “explored” literary form they cannot be awarded a mark from bands 3 or 4 in AO2.
- Ensure that the correct proportion of their drama answer is spent in analysing and responding to their selected drama text (70%) and that their non-drama text (where a second play is not offered) only occupies 30% of their answer.
- Understand the importance of signposting in assignments. Even simple signposts such as “early”, “middle” and “late” can help a moderator see that the candidate has understood features such as structure, the presentation of character and plot development (all AO2). However, it is even better when a student refers to specific chapters in a novel or acts and scenes in a play.
- Understand that literature is a construct and that characters are designed to convey themes and ideas to the reader or audience. Such sophisticated awareness ensures success in AO2.
- Use text selectively and with judgment to maximise AO2. The most successful use of quotations is brief but frequent short integrated quotation.
- Hand in neatly-presented folders to help impress in AO1. 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 school or college.
- Ensure that secondary sources, including internet sites, are acknowledged in their bibliographies.

Less Successful Students

- Often work to a set model provided by the school. Sometimes this is in the form of a question given to all students in the cohort and though it may well limit a candidate’s chances of performing to the top of band 4 in AO1 it need not be too damaging in the other AOs if the school ensures that the finished work is the students’ own efforts. Sometimes moderators report reading folders which merely rehash the same school-inspired ideas and even the same phrases over and over again. This year as in other years moderators could not agree with some schools about the merits of such essays which at best can be categorised as clear, appropriate, well-structured and secure work and whose natural home is band 3. Such work does not enable students to achieve to the top of band 4 which in AO1 calls for the demonstration of a “confident, challenging and original personal voice.” However, this year something much more seriously detrimental to students’ chances of success was detected: evidence emerged of schools giving their students model essays from older coursework sequences to “rework” which led to many folders in the same school being similar to the point of cloning. In essence, such modelling

removed the students' individuality from their own work making it soulless and artificial. In extreme cases this "modelling" technique was applied to the creative transformational task and within the same school several students submitted work which was identical in many of its features, having entire paragraphs which were identical even down to errors of grammar and spelling. Transformational writing is a creative task and all work should be as individual as novels, poems, painting or music. Schools which insist on utilising this "modelling" technique are not only going squarely against the spirit of the examination but also run the very serious risk of falling foul of the malpractice rules concerning plagiarism.

- Answer on coursework titles not approved by moderators or change a moderator-agreed title to something inappropriate.
- Ignore or forget how the Assessment Objectives are weighted or forget all about a key AO or a part of an AO. The advice here is identical to the advice given in every other moderator's report thus far. Due to the fact that AO3 is the dominant Assessment Objective for the drama task worth 15/30, schools need to ensure that students 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.**

In a continuation from the evidence of June 2011 and January 2012 some school commentaries on *prose* assignments continue to alarm moderators when assessors write such observations as, "AO3 comparison. Band 4. Excellent." There was worrying evidence this year that some centres do not understand that AO3 is not examined on the prose assignment and a candidate can score no marks in the prose response by writing to cover AO3. Several centres referred to AO3 in marginalia or in their summative commentary. The Principal Moderator this year learned of several centres which had included AO3 in prose tasks but had ignored it for drama where it is worth 15/30. To prepare students for AOs which aren't there and then to allow students to hand in work which does not cover an AO worth 50% of a question is unfair on the students whose work will be judged against that of other students who have been prepared properly and thoroughly. Usually unattached and designed-for-profit Tutorial Colleges or students prepared privately are responsible for these serious problems of understanding the specification requirements but this summer at least one school within a Local Education Authority made the same errors.

- Write about themes at the expense of analysing form, structure and language. Some students continue to write about characters in literature as though they are real people. Many of the least successful students suffer the most dismal agonies in AO2.
- Do not signpost and consequently write about novels and plays in such a way as to make the moderator believe that the candidate thinks what is true of a character or plot is always true where ever we are in the text. AO2 suffers with this practice.
- Do not understand genre, in particular drama which again reduces students' chances in AO2.

- Entirely ignore the instructions about word length and so struggle for coherence in AO1.
- Have poor control over formal English (AO1). An alarming number of students have no idea how to punctuate titles, use apostrophes, write grammatical sentences or spell even simple words correctly.
- Are content to relay the plot and narrative of their chosen texts and sometimes paraphrase or ‘translate’ quotations.
- Use unusual fonts and typeface sizes.
- Do not include bibliographies.
- Continue to use unhelpful, vague, colloquial or meaningless phrases.

Marking and Moderation Issues

As was the case last summer and in January 2012 most marking in schools was accurate and the schools with the most successful students had obviously carried out careful internal moderation. 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 internal moderation has occurred. Most mark adjustments were made on work submitted by schools and colleges where more than one teacher marked students’ work but where the moderator could find little or no evidence of internal moderation. The practice of teachers evidently only marking the work of students they have taught cannot guarantee accuracy or consistency across a whole centre. Most schools fully engage the process of marking but some still do not: it is not an uncommon sight for page after page of students’ 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, sometimes with a reference to an AO. Model Marked Scripts have been available since the inception of the examination and schools are asked when assessing students’ work to utilise the marking conventions and levels of engagement detailed in these Model Marked Scripts. An unwelcome feature of some of this year’s marking has been carried over from the previous three sequences: some schools tried to second-guess or predict what AS grade a candidate might be given or seem to be marking the candidate rather than the candidate’s work. Comments like, “Beth needs an A for Uni - dare we go to 51?” or “scrapes an E” are neither welcome nor useful. Schools’ 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 (AO1) are not ignored. Since this is coursework, it is expected that students will take the opportunity to check and redraft their work to a good standard. 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.

Commentary on Prose Assignments

It is perhaps interesting to report that fewer examples of schools setting inappropriate creative transformational tasks were spotted by the Principal Moderator in June than in January. This could be a consequence of the Principal Moderator seeing almost every January entry but only a portion of the June entry. Only a handful of students appeared to offer tasks which stretched the convention of transformational writing to breaking point. So though there was an example of a school which allowed some of

its candidates to write in the voice of Sarah Lumb after she had been unhappily married to Billy Prior after the conclusion of Barker's *Regeneration*, there were no sightings of Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* as a martial arts trainer and personal fitness coach, no accounts of *Birdsong*'s Stephen Wraysford meeting Edith Piaf and no flights of fancy involving Serena Joy of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a cocaine-addicted, nymphomaniac movie star. 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 students' chosen novels.

Popular texts from the Victorian Literature option continue to include Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Dickens is falling down the popularity charts though some brave schools and colleges achieved some good results with *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*. At least one centre offered Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* to great effect. As ever, there was some excellent work written in the voices of Jane Eyre, Rochester, Bertha Mason, Blanche Ingram and Miss Temple from *Jane Eyre*. Tess, Angel and Alec in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* were often portrayed very convincingly and the old problems of Tess' *piratical* register have disappeared. Following on from the success of last summer Isabella Linton's voice from *Wuthering Heights* was successfully recreated in several schools and colleges and as ever Catherine the elder, Catherine the Younger, Heathcliff and Nellie Dean all attracted a range of successful and interesting responses. Lockwood however remains elusive and only the best and most organised candidates recreate his voice convincingly. From *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the eponymous central character, as well as Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward were used as source characters for some excellent work. Sibyl Vane fares less favourably. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* continues to be inspiration for transformational prose assignments with all of the major characters well-represented in transformational work. Franklin Blake and Sergeant Cuff both proved to be valuable source characters for students attempting *The Moonstone*. Perhaps next year students may attempt transformational tasks in the voices of Gabriel Betteredge and Drusilla Clack. The old stalwarts from novels about the First World War remained as popular as ever this summer. Rivers, Prior, Sassoon and Sarah Lumb in Barker's *Regeneration* were all popular "voices" as were Stephen, Weir, Jack Firebrace, Isabelle, Lisette and Elizabeth in Faulks' *Birdsong*. Yet again Sebastian Barry's *A Long Long Way* was popular with 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* once again attracting some well-written and thoughtful answers.

Within *The Struggle for Identity in Modern Literature* Andrea Levy's *Small Island* generated some fine responses and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* by Lionel Shriver became more popular. As usual some first class responses were written about Offred, Ofglen, Serena Joy, Moira, The Commander and Nick in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* continues to be immensely popular and *On Chesil Beach* and *Atonement* are gaining in popularity too. Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* are still well-represented. Though by no means a new text at Advanced Level the Principal Moderator was impressed this year with the re-emergence of F. Scott

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as a novel capable of bringing out the very best work in students prepared to spend a little time on it. Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was also offered for the first time in the life of this specification and produced much thoughtful work. Schools and colleges which are prepared to offer overlooked masterpieces such as these fine novels deserve praise for adding to the choices available on this specification.

There were fewer unintentionally comic moments this year in transformational writing: it is always very pleasing to report on progress. Anachronisms were few and far between and though there were odd examples of World War 1 continuing for a whole year longer than the history books record, Sibyl Vane from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* dreaming of a career as a film star and Florence Ponting from *On Chesil Beach* planning to form an indie rock band called Florence and the Machine control of AO4 appears to have got much better this year, hopefully as a result of previous moderator's reports. As has been said before, AO4 is a comparatively minor Assessment Objective but it can cast a long and unpleasant shadow into AO2 if the student does not research with care and sensitivity. Thankfully this year it seems that students' research skills have improved.

Here is a selection of some of this year's more interesting prose interpretation questions. The Principal Moderator has tried to include some of the more unusual questions in an attempt to enable more schools and colleges to see what is possible with popular texts:

- Explore how (Charlotte) Brontë presents ideas about and attitudes to Duty in *Jane Eyre* ;
- Analyse (Emily) Brontë's presentation of violence in *Wuthering Heights*;
- Explore Hardy's presentation of work in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*;
- How does Fowles incorporate ideas about Existentialist Philosophy into *The French Lieutenant's Woman*? How important to your understanding of the novel do you consider Existentialism to be?
- Analyse Barker's presentation of sexism in *Regeneration*;
- Explore Barry's presentation of love in *A Long Long Way*
- Analyse Atwood's presentation of motherhood in the *Handmaid's Tale*;
- How does McEwan's presentation of sex influence your understanding of *On Chesil Beach*?

Commentary on Drama Assignments

As far back as 2009 the Principal Moderator noticed that there were a number of favourite texts beginning to emerge for the drama assignment. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *An Ideal Husband* continue to dominate in the Victorian option but Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is gaining more adherents. Sherriff's *Journey's End* is the play which dominates the World War One option and only Curtis' and Elton's *Blackadder Goes Forth* comes anywhere near it in terms of popularity, though Stephen MacDonal's *Not About Heroes* and Miles Malleson's *Black 'Ell* attract occasional candidates here and there. For *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* and *A View from the Bridge* and most of Tennessee Williams' plays all continue to attract students in large numbers. *A Streetcar Named Desire* in particular is still wildly popular. However, several new

texts were offered for examination this year including *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansbury and Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, brilliantly offered alongside Stoppard's *Arcadia* in the *Struggle for Identity* option. Within the same option Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* grew in popularity this year and was used very successfully alongside *Making History*. It is gratifying to report on the innovative approaches taken by schools and colleges for LITA2 coursework. The following short list features some interesting questions from this year's examination which placed the whole of the all-important AO3 at the heart of the task.

- Compare and contrast Wilde's and Pinero's presentation of the importance of the past in *A Woman of No Importance* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in the light of the opinion that "both writers show that women can never live down the consequences of past follies."
- Compare and contrast the presentation of bravery and cowardice in *Journey's End* and *Blackadder Goes Forth* in the light of the opinion that "both writers show that bravery is always futile whereas cowardice can often bring very tangible rewards."
- I can't think of anything more trivial than the speed of light. Quarks, quasars - big bangs, black holes - who gives a shit? How did you people con us out of all that status? All that money?" Compare and contrast the presentation of scientific ideas in *Arcadia* and *Copenhagen* in the light of this opinion of Bernard Nightingale's in *Arcadia*.

Attentive readers of this report will note that the above examples all illustrate the practice of using two plays for the drama comparison question. Many of the very best responses used this "dual drama" model in the summer 2012 examination sequence. Added to this, the questions above are all constructed around the notion of a genuine debate where students are free to come up with their own convincing arguments as long as they are backed up with evidence from the text.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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