



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

**English Literature A**

**LTA1B**

**(Specification 2740)**

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

***Report on the Examination***

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## **PRINCIPAL EXAMINER’S REPORT LTA1B JUNE 2012**

### **Texts in Context: World War One Literature**

The entry was similar in size to the three previous summer series and again examiners saw the full range of marks and approaches. Schools and colleges will find the Summer 2012 LTA1B mark scheme a very useful document to use alongside this report, as it contains assessment grids and an indicative content section for each question suggesting possible approaches which successful students might adopt in their responses. The latter has been kept deliberately brief and open, however, allowing for a variety of student approaches. Examiners are encouraged to allow students to make their own choices of links and connections. In addition to these documents, centres will also find it useful to refer to subsequent reports going back to January 2009.

Schools and colleges should remember that although Assessment Objective 4 is tested in Section A but not in Section B, it is still a crucial factor in the teaching of all aspects of a well-designed course in this option because it 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. Students find the whole course more engaging and satisfying if they can understand the importance of central events in World War One and the circumstances in which it was fought. 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 2012.

To look at the achievement of students by section and question:

### **Section A**

#### ***Question 1***

Centres will now be very familiar with the format of this question since the specimen paper was published over four years ago. Just as with the equivalent question in LTA1A and LTA1C, the wording of the question focuses students’ attention first on ‘thoughts and feelings’, then on ‘wider reading’. This second focus involves considering how typical the extract is of the literature of World War One through the direct means of exploring the similarities and differences.

The best way to prepare students for Question 1 is by providing them with non-fiction texts from the literature of World War One as part of their wider reading. Often students’ non-fiction reading seems to be limited solely to past paper extracts and centres should try to encourage original wider reading in this genre. 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 students’ wider reading extends beyond this minimum required by the QCDA regulations governing every 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.” Students 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. Students are, of course, able to refer to their prose and drama coursework texts too, as well as to their set poetry examination text; 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 students chances of success in answering Question 1, centres are advised to develop an appropriately extensive programme of wider reading.

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

This list could be used as a framework for designing a course of study to support preparation for this question and it could also be used to underpin the entire course. It has been known for some centres to use it in addition as a way of organising and considering poems in the poetry set text answered in Section B

The wording of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to students 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 students to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that students’ wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: students 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, indeed, **readings** of those texts and extracts). It is not helpful for students if all those entered by a centre restrict themselves to exactly the same texts and extracts and exactly the same points and interpretations. Instead students should be encouraged to develop their own repertoire of wider reading and *readings* so that (a) their responses are individual and (b) they can choose the most meaningful links relevant to the given extract.

In attempting Question 1, students are advised to split their time evenly between the two question stems.

Different approaches suit different teachers, centres and individual students. Some might prefer taking one stem at a time so that, first, students look at thoughts and feelings in the extract and then turn their attention to wider reading. The advantage of this method is that the extract is considered in its own right and there is a chance to focus exclusively on thoughts and feelings before looking at wider reading. In this approach students may be less likely to omit one or more of the essential genres when it comes to wider reading coverage. On the other hand, an approach that integrates thoughts and feelings alongside wider reading references might lead to a more individual line of argument and might suit the more confident. It requires a different kind of planning to ensure that thoughts and feelings are given due attention and that wider reading links are integrated at a point in the argument and in a way that makes the link convincing and illuminating. It is worth trying different approaches

in the process of the course and comparing their effectiveness. Equally it is worth practising different approaches to planning. A further alternative here is to use the four AOs as a planning grid so as to approach Question 1 from the point of view of essential reading skills.

### **The Extract**

The extract from an interview with Mairi Chisholm provided an accessible and engaging basis for contextual linking. There were plenty of thoughts and feelings to explore (even though some students were a little thrown by her matter-of-fact manner), considerable scope for scrutinising the ways in which Chisholm expresses herself (although the specific genre and the spoken mode needed to be kept in mind) and there were numerous possibilities when it came to linking in wider reading. These factors characterise a well-chosen extract for this question. One Senior Examiner wrote: “Chisholm’s interview was accessible and opened up almost limitless opportunities for students to draw on their wider reading and build a case for typicality”.

It is important to remember that the first part of the question directs students to look closely at thoughts and feelings. This means looking at the extract in its own right and resisting the temptation to use the extract simply as a way in to wider reading. Many students successfully used abstract nouns to describe and then analyse thoughts and feelings. The most successful saw a range of thoughts and feelings: pride in her extraordinary achievements; a sense of duty in describing her commitment to dangerous work; a matter-of-fact approach to accounting for unpleasant day-to-day work; a relish for adventure and risk-taking; a sense of mischief and almost flirtatious relish in the attention of soldiers; and finally, a sense of deep compassion for pitiful, debilitating injury. A list approach is not recommended, but it is important to engage with and be specific about thoughts and feelings and the ways in which they are expressed.

Yet again with the chosen extract, the most successful responses came from those students who carefully considered tone and mood. Centres should concentrate students’ attention on these aspects so as to help them to engage effectively with thoughts and feelings. There is a tendency to try and impose a pro- or anti-war viewpoint on any chosen 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.

Given the AO weighting on context centres should remind themselves what this might mean. A contextual approach should be informed by historical knowledge without extensive offloading of facts and figures. Contextual observations arise from consideration of the extract and the wider reading texts chosen, rather than arbitrarily imposed on the question. The most useful observations tend to focus on time, gender and genre.

Some confident students explored time as an interesting issue in this extract. The interview took place 62 years after 1914 when Chisholm first volunteered and 58 years after the end of the war and there was intelligent speculation about the effect of this lapse of time on Chisholm’s memory and attitudes. It was essential to recognise this aspect of time in order fully to get to grips with Chisholm’s thoughts and feelings, tone and attitudes. Even more pertinently, the interview genre was central. The extract was in the spoken mode, rather than a crafted, ‘literary’ piece of writing and

this meant that the extract had characteristic features of form, structure and language. Again, the most successful students engaged with and explored these features. Some students were familiar with other interviews and many cited comparable examples of written testimony. Another Senior Examiner pointed out that “the best students clearly grasped the influence of time and the spoken context, and fully grasped the retrospective element of an old woman recalling her youth”.

### **Main features explored and used to make links and connections**

1. The interview genre helped students to explore links to the extract bringing in other interviews and testimony. Many were quick to link Chisholm to other women with experience of active service such as Vera Brittain and May Wedderburn Cannan and/or other women who relished the possibilities provided by the war such as Jessie Pope ('War Girls') and Sylvia Pankhurst. Chisholm's references to combat conditions prompted a whole host of familiar links (from poetry, drama and prose both fiction and non-fiction) used both for comparison and contrast. Chisholm, it was argued knew more than many women about such things and took a direct role; conversely sensible distinctions were made between Chisholm's specific experience and that of male combatants. The most successful links took time, gender and genre into consideration.
2. Students warmed to the whole idea of a spirited young woman going out into No-Man's Land to retrieve casualties. The sentence: "In fact I strained a valve in my heart by humping men around on my back" received a lot of attention mostly from students impressed by her strength and tenacity. Less convincingly, some tried to argue that this was merely boastful and 'more evidence' of her lack of compassion for others (sic, see later). This focus on Chisholm's physically active service was often set against other examples reflecting compassionate concern for those who have gone over the top. For example, there were references to the raid in *Journey's End*, Stephen and Jack Firebrace from *Birdsong*, poems such as 'Comrades: an Episode', 'In Memoriam', 'The Dug-Out', 'They', 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'The Sentry', to name a few. Some more confident students developed this aspect of Chisholm's experience and character by exploring the hint of double entendre when she refers to her 'enquiring', 'adventurous' nature and the fact that she had a 'slight reputation' for her willingness to co-operate with officers and enter into the spirit of the times.
3. Many students seized on the discussion of war as a game. It was very popular here to develop links to pertinent moments in *Journey's End* such as references to Osbourne's rugby career and/or the way in which sport is used to initiate and familiarise Raleigh. Links were also made to Jessie Pope's 'Who's For the Game?' on this theme. More confident and informed students, however, could see that Chisholm is not espousing this view of war per se but reflecting with the wisdom of age on how, as a young woman, she did not realise the full significance of her role at the time
4. The fact that Chisholm was a survivor prompted links to retrospective poems such as 'Rouen' and those that appear towards the end of *Up the Line to Death* and the selection in *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, poems such as

'Two Fusiliers', 'To Any Dead Officer', 'To One who was With Me in the War', 'Aftermath', 'High Wood', from 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', 'The Great War', etc.

5. The final section where Chisholm expresses compassion for the seriously injured with pitiful injuries prompted strong links to Part Three of *Regeneration* and the scene where Sarah stumbles in on a ward of amputees.

At the same time, this final section caused problems for many students who failed to detect her compassion. As one Senior Examiner put it:

**“The main challenge many students encountered was the interpretation of ‘pathetic’. Rather than ‘pitiful’, many students saw it as ‘worthless’, a ‘waste of time’, ‘useless’, etc., etc. Many very good students, working at Band 4 level misread this word. The key issue was that this misreading often rendered ineffective any subsequent wider reading link made to this section of the extract and Band 4 was lost. Weaker students responding in this way became utterly skewed in their response to Chisholm making her out to be ‘unsympathetic’, or ‘callous.**

Another issue to do with this section of the extract was the ways in which students responded to the reference to emasculation. Despite the prevalence of *Regeneration* as a coursework/wider reading text and recognition that emasculation is an important concept, some students were obviously unsure what it meant. A more common response was by those who read it loosely as ‘humiliation’ or ‘debilitating trauma’. More confident students explored the word and concept more fully.

### **Form, structure and language**

Meaning, of course, is primary and indicated by ‘thoughts and feelings’ in the first stem of the question. AO2 or FSL or ‘the ways’, as in ‘the ways writers construct meaning’ is secondary, but still a crucial part of the analytical process. Confident and convincing comment on AO2 is an essential feature of writing in Bands 3 and 4. The most successful students understand that it must be linked to meaning to have any real validity. Therefore, feature spotting fails to put technique in the context of meaning and hence is unhelpful and arbitrary.

When it came to looking at AO2 aspects of the extract, the most successful students related aspects of form, structure and language to meaning. Aspects of FSL that were made good use of included:

- Features of the interview form
- Spontaneous, spare, straightforward, unadorned, unliterary style
- Business-like, understated, prosaic language choices
- Narrative anecdotes punctuated by telling comments such as “It was a game”
- Striking imagery when it is used, such as the grouse image (the best students tended to look at the effects of ‘stop here...spurt there’)
- Direct speech creating an authentically detailed and often vivid account
- Increasingly marked and varied nature of the language
- Poignant and effusive response to terrible injury
- Edited nature of the text
- Features of eye-witness testimony

### **A reminder about recurring difficulties**

On a more general note, one Senior Examiner last year pointed out that “many students still struggled with the demands of analysing a non-fiction text and this is something that many centres need to address” and this is a comment that should be reiterated now.

In subsequent examinations successful students 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.

**On this last point, all Senior Examiners reported a rise in the omission of one or more wider reading genres which is a grave concern when, in previous reports, the trends seemed to be that this infringement was dying out. As in the past, Drama is the most common absentee.**

As above, the following observations by Senior Examiners have been made before but are worth repeating:

- 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, unconvincing 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**

### **Questions 2 -7**

The expectations of AS students in this section are three-fold. Students 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.

In this series, Gardner followed by Stallworthy proved to be the most popular choices, with a distinct tailing away in the popularity of Reilly. There were many engaged and enthusiastic answers with most prepared to address poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language. Where problems occurred, they tended to be to do with:

### **Balancing the debate**

This key skill is a crucial discriminator when answering the poetry section. To balance the debate students need to identify the **argument** or **given view** as distinct from possible **counter-arguments** and then look substantially at both sides. Some able students who demonstrated high Band 3/Band 4 descriptors in other ways were prevented from fulfilling their potential by not balancing the debate. **This was a particular problem with Question 2 (see below)**. students 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. Some confident students begin with the counter-argument which immediately implies that the debate will be balanced. Those students who do not mention a counter-argument until the very end tend not to be as successful in addressing and balancing the all-important debate.

One Senior Examiner observed that "the response to the debate was not as good as in recent years" and identified a flaw in introductions that do not signal the intention to provide a counter-argument and "the lack of conclusion pulling the argument together".

### **Selecting appropriate material**

There was a good deal of engaged and intelligent analysis that was not clearly relevant to the question or to the student'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 students begin writing too soon (and the same can be said of responses to Section A). Once students 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 students 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 former 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 students to gain the highest marks.

### **Exploring poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language.**

This remains a difficult area for many students. Exploring aspects of form, in particular, can lead students 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?” students should hear these questions when they are writing so as to ensure that FSL is linked clearly to meaning.

Students tend to opt more readily for the even-numbered questions where they can choose the poems that best suit the specific demands of the question and the debate. Apart from the problems encountered when debating Question 2, a general trend seems to be that the debate is given more prominence by students opting for these questions. The odd numbered questions that name a poem need just as much attention to the debate, to choice of material and poems and to planning. One Senior Examiner from a previous series 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”.

#### **Question 2**

This question was by a long way the most popular in this section. The vast majority of students had been taught well on the poems and on the subject of changing attitudes to the war. One Senior Examiner remarked that “the best students read the question carefully, used all the key words to their advantage and built counter views through detailed comparison”. Another put it very well when he observed that “the interesting issue with this question was that it was interpreted in two ways: (a) a debate about whether it was ‘a long and terrible journey’ (b) a debate about whether ‘the early poems are completely different from those featured towards the end of the anthology’. Either interpretation was acceptable and provided the basis for a debate. The best students, of course, included both aspects in their answers.” However, it must be said that a significant number of students who demonstrated confident understanding of the poems, lost sight of their counter-argument. This meant that, in the words of a Senior Examiner, they “**misread the question and became locked into the given view thinking they were offering some balance to the debate**”, when in fact they had simply illustrated the given view, i.e. that the journey was “long and terrible”/ that the poems at the end are “completely different”.

#### **Question 3**

Fewer students tackled this question but those that did tended to produce much better responses. This was perhaps down to the clarity of the debate they identified and, most of all, the enthusiasm and confidence with which they tackled ‘Blighters’ and related poems. There was a palpable sympathy for the tone of Sassoon’s narrator and students readily analysed FSL in order to illuminate the poem. Some students made interesting links to ‘Concert Party: Busseboom’ by looking at the idea of stage shows in both poems. However, the most successful students understood that these two poems are very different. Blunden’s poem is not set on the Home Front, nor is it about Home Front attitudes. Indeed, a significant aspect of the impact

of Blunden's poem depends on the close proximity of brutal forward trench and tunnel combat.

#### **Question 4**

For those students studying Reilly, this was the most popular question and it yielded the most impressive answers. Most engaged readily with pessimism and despair, distinguished between them and argued well on both sides. Students were keen to demonstrate the bitterness of women's emotions in articulating loss. Particularly good use was made of 'To My Brother' and 'Perhaps' where students took an informed approach and closely scrutinised the narrators' thoughts and feelings. Counter-arguments were constructed around feelings of hope, a sense of achievement in the midst of slaughter and a sense of the war offering numerous opportunities to women. One examiner pointed out that, at times, linguistic terminology was incorrectly applied or was used to obfuscate rather than clarify. He cited examples of students describing sentences beginning with 'and' or 'but' as 'fronted conjunctions' rather than simply identifying them as co-ordinating conjunctions placed at the beginning of sentences. However, the essential point was a valid one: that women poets often use this technique to create a plausible, conversational tone.

#### **Question 5**

This question was handled successfully by the majority of those who opted for it. The most successful students knew this poem and its background very well and were able to use their knowledge and understanding of subject matter and form, structure and language to illuminate this as a poem of particular grief. These students tended to explore the ways in which Farjeon uses references to the Christian cycle of death, resurrection and hope. Some students were less informed and some misunderstandings arose. There was also some unhelpful use of polar opposites such as 'positive' and 'negative' where students relied on crude contrasts rather than exploring subtleties and variation.

#### **Question 6**

This was the more popular of the two questions and, on the whole, it was handled better and Stallworthy's view was debated with some confidence. A Senior Examiner commented that "It was pleasing to see a significant number challenging the given view and making very convincing arguments about how 'great' the pro-war poetry is". Another commented that "the best students did not assume that 'anti-war' was a 'given' concept. Instead they avoided generalisations and explored specific anti-war attitudes".

#### **Question 7**

Senior Examiners reported a variety of responses to this question. It tended to be done very well by informed enthusiasts, or by students who struggled because they were apparently unsure whether to focus more on structure or how 'effective in expressing thoughts and feelings'.

In future, successful students 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 writers' choices of form, structure and language in detail
- remember that debate relies on the identification of a clear counter-argument/s
- make it clear from the outset that a debate has been identified
- conclude with a personal judgement about the debate.

**Note:**

Centres are reminded that June 2012 will be the last examination for *Up the Line to Death* ed. Gardner. This text will be replaced by *The War Poems of Wilfred Owen* edited by Jon Stallworthy (978 0701161262 Chatto and Windus). There will be a final resit opportunity for *Up the Line to Death* in January 2013.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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