



General Certificate of Education

English Literature
Specification B

LITB4 Further and Independent Reading

Report on the Examination
2010 examination – January series

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General

LITB4: FURTHER AND INDEPENDENT READING

There was a sizeable and representative enough number of entries for January 2010 to make it possible to begin to see how this unit works, and to advise teachers on how to improve practice. Moderators reported that candidates seemed to have enjoyed the challenges presented by the unit, and that in most cases centres had genuinely tried to give their candidates opportunities for independent reading.

Assessment and Annotation

As a general trend, assessment in some centres was lenient when compared to the standardising materials, which should have been used by centres following the Autumn round of regional meetings, and when compared to the work of other centres, which a moderator is able to see. This leniency was generally shown by a bunching of candidates at the upper end of the mark range and an unwillingness to use the lower bands, even for candidates who were quite weak when scrutinised against the published criteria.

It is the job of all awarding bodies, in all subjects, to ensure that the final A level award, over four units, falls within acceptable statistical guidelines given to them by Ofqual. This specification has two coursework units and two examined units, which means that the coursework units have to be assessed carefully and accurately if they are going to contribute effectively to the A level as a whole. One way this can be done is to ensure that, where appropriate, a wide range of marks is used, including bands 2 and 1, as well as the higher bands. Spreading the marks in this way makes the unit much more stable when it comes to awarding. Over-lenience merely means that an increasing number of marks in the scale become redundant, and moderators are forced to recommend increasing numbers of adjustments.

In most cases there was evidence of critical annotation, as we have been asking for in meetings, and a use of ticks to reflect the making of a point, as we use in the examination marking too. In those centres where leniency was seen, however, the annotation tended to be unfailingly positive, even where the argument and the writing were of a relatively weak standard. Teachers are reminded that summative annotation is designed for use by teachers and moderators in helping them come to a fair assessment, so the annotation should take the form of a critical commentary.

In the centres where assessment was most accurate the following practices were seen:

- Cover sheets and mark sheets were completed accurately
- It was clear that internal standardisation had taken place, with brief written notes on each candidate, often by two or more teachers
- Marginal comments did not just refer to AOs, but to bands within the AOs
- Ticks were used to show a good point being made
- Errors were indicated
- Summative comments showed how the mark had been arrived at

The Comparative Piece

Of the two different types of response required in this unit, the comparative piece was sometimes the less effective of the two. There are obvious reasons for this, with candidates having to manage extensive material and co-ordinate arguments.

Advisers have been saying for some time now that probably the best way to devise a task which will most effectively cover the required range of skills is to have a title which takes the form of a debate, of a critical view which can be challenged. This is the principle that lies behind some of LITB1, and then extends across units LITB2, LITB3 as well as LITB4.

So, for example, the following task, as first framed, had much to commend it;

Compare the ways in which Achebe and Friel present masculinity in Things Fall Apart and Translations

It stressed the need to compare (AO3 first part), it had a contextual/critical basis in terms of 'masculinity'(AO4) and the use of the word 'present' looked towards form, structure, language. (AO2) What it lacks, though, is any requirement to argue a case, to be critical as a reader. (The second part of AO3). So it would be perfectly possible to work your way through each text looking for 'masculinity' and comparing how the authors present it, without having to engage with the centrality of the issue, various possible interpretations etc

After consultation with the adviser the following task was agreed:

How far do you agree with the view that the presentation of masculinity is central to Things Fall Apart and Translations?

Although this time the task does not explicitly require comparison, it should be clear that is needed, and it could be added as a following instruction if required. More important though is the fact that the candidate can compare the texts while arguing a case about the centrality of this aspect in each text and perhaps arguing for other aspects to be considered too.

Here is another example:

Compare and contrast the ways in which Conrad and Swift use aspects of the detective story in their novels.

became

To what extent can The Secret Agent and Waterland be categorised as detective novels?

On the second title the need for some comparison would again have to be stressed, but it is a much more open task, with many more possible ways of responding to it.

The type of task which did not work well at all involved asking candidates simply to compare themes: typically love in two texts, war in two texts, madness in two texts. If candidates are going to be given marks in the higher bands, then they need tasks which are more sophisticated than this.

The Critical Anthology Piece

Early Anthology based responses show that this part of the unit is proving popular with teachers and candidates. There were some thought-provoking and innovative tasks and texts, and plenty of evidence of further reading. It was also pleasing to see so many varied tasks/texts and responses across and within centres.

The need for a critical edge to tasks, noted above for comparative pieces, is still necessary here though. In the early stages of advisory work, we saw many tasks such as:

Write a feminist criticism of text x.

These inevitably lead to a mechanical listing of typical aspects of feminist criticism, followed by the finding of such aspects in the given text.

To what extent is feminist criticism helpful in opening up meanings in text x?

However, gives lots of opportunities for feminist criticism to be applied but for wider thinking too.

The responses based on metaphor and symbolism, which can also be methodical but limited if they merely require detection of tropes, can be opened up by asking candidates to consider the various meanings that are possible when interpreting metaphorical language in a text or texts.

It was pleasing to see some candidates engaging with the third part of the anthology on aesthetics and value. This section, by definition, requires argument and so often worked well.

Administration

January 10 is a tight deadline, even without bad weather, so moderators were pleased when centres kept to deadlines, or in some cases administered work to arrive before Christmas. There were, though, a few centres who clearly struggled to get candidates to submit in time for teachers to do the assessment. In these cases the January option should not be used, as moderators also have very tight deadlines to do their role.

Much of the paperwork and posting is now done by examination officers, but it really is helpful if the following happens:

- With 19 or fewer candidates all work plus red and yellow copies of the mark list are sent to the moderator, ideally in rank order
- With 20 candidates or over, the red and yellow copies of the mark list are sent to the moderator, who will ask for a sample. This sample should be sent quickly, and again ideally in rank order of marks
- Some centres are using postal services which require a signature on delivery. In many cases, this leads to considerable delay while packages are collected from sometimes distant sorting offices. Please use 1st class post, as required by AQA.

Conclusion

These are early days for LITB4, and many of the comments in this report will no doubt reappear in the report for Summer, with a much larger entry. The Principal Moderator and his team are grateful to those centres who have given us an early look at how this unit works in practice, and have enjoyed reading the work of candidates who have clearly, with the help of their teachers, enjoyed their reading.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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