



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

English Literature B

LITB2

(Specification 2745)

Unit 2: Dramatic Genres

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

LITB2: Dramatic Genres

This is the end of the fourth year of LITB2, significant both in relation to what has been achieved and as a guide to those changes which are to come.

It is worth emphasising at the start of this report that the title of the unit is ‘Dramatic Genres’. The form of drama, therefore, should always be the central focus of students’ study. It continues to be the case that ‘The play’s the thing’.

In order to narrow down the range of material that students need to study, the unit identifies a sub-genre which can operate as a lens through which the drama texts can be analysed. For the last four years this sub-genre has been tragedy. From September 2012 the subject taught will be comedy, but the basic practices and principles should remain the same.

All four units in this specification encourage the study of genre as a means of facilitating different readings of a text within a wider sense of the possibilities and perspectives offered by a particular genre. Genres should be seen as fluid and evolutionary rather than fixed. This fluidity offers opportunities for interpretation and debate around different possible readings of the text.

The evidence of this summer’s coursework submission suggests that those students who explored the nature of dramatic tragedy within a wider debate about a reading of the play tended to produce more successful responses than those who merely set out to justify the play as a tragedy or a character as a tragic protagonist. The most effective work looked at an aspect of tragedy, such as isolation, and explored the significance of the dramatic presentation of that feature of the genre.

The Change to Comedy

If schools and colleges continue to demonstrate good practice of the kind indicated above, then the change to comedy should prove fairly straightforward. Experience suggests that some routes towards task setting are more effective than others. One process that has proved successful in the past is to identify a feature of the sub-genre (e.g. for comedy, the representation of society), to locate analysis of this feature within the presented experience of a particular character or significant scene, ensure that selected aspects of dramatic method are explored, and to direct the reading of the text towards a debate (perhaps, in the case suggested above, around the degree to which the society of the world of the play is ultimately seen to be subverted).

The study of comedy, with its frequent insistence on its own artifice, may make it easier for students to avoid falling into two traps, which often lay in wait for those who studied tragedy: one, that characters in the plays who might more appropriately have been considered as literary constructs, were being seen as ‘real’; two, that undue and often inappropriate reliance was being placed on Aristotle as the source of all wisdom. One moderator this summer expressed the hope that ‘the change to comedy will be invigorating for tired schools and colleges, and also help to rest lay the ghost of Aristotle who has continued to haunt this series’. It is certainly to be hoped that the change to comedy will bring benefits to schools, colleges and students that will outweigh any temporary problems occasioned by the need to study new texts.

Assessment

The purpose of moderation is to produce fairness and parity for all students. Understandably, therefore, the marks of some schools and colleges required adjustment. The most usual reason for these adjustments was that students produced work which, in terms of the marks awarded by the centre, matched neither the assessment criteria nor the standards suggested by the autumn standardising materials. It was often the case that when schools and colleges made comparative reference to these materials their final marking was shown to be more accurate. Many moderators questioned the degree to which schools and colleges had read and used the standardising materials during their own internal coursework standardising. That, of course, is one of their primary purposes.

There were many cases where the comments made by schools and colleges on the students' work bore little relation to the final mark awarded. Although some tolerance is allowed between the marks of schools and colleges and the marks of moderators, some marks need to be adjusted to do justice to those centres who have applied the criteria accurately. Moderators reported what seemed to be an increase from previous years in the number of cases where centres had stretched or gone beyond tolerance.

Dramatic Genres, the Assessment Objectives and English Literature 'B'

As has been indicated above, the four units in this specification emphasise particular approaches to the study of literature. If schools and colleges set tasks that offer meaningful opportunities to respond to all four assessment objectives they will not only be increasing their students' chances of success, but also reinforcing good practices that will benefit responses to the other three units in English Literature 'B'.

In this summer's submission it was evident that many schools and colleges had spent productive time in teaching their students how to shape accurate, tightly constructed and relevant arguments. Both externally examined papers, LITB1 and LITB3, place considerable emphasis on the importance of students attending to the precise wording of the set questions. Those who shape their answers judiciously and consistently in response to the debates set up in the questions, are likely to do well. Consistently relevant and coherent arguments are no less important in LITB2. Unfortunately, some centres seemed to have paid little attention to technical and structural weaknesses (AO1) when coming to their final mark.

There was evidence this summer of a greater appreciation of the significance of AO2. It is to be hoped that this understanding will continue or even develop in students' responses to the methods of dramatic comedy. It would also be comforting to believe that the work done on narrative methods in LITB1 has informed the work done in LITB2. Those students who appreciated the importance of form and structure within the narratives of the plays produced stronger responses than those who insisted on treating the characters in a play as real people. Character-based tasks often seemed to encourage the latter response.

Some students struggled to convey any clear understanding that the plays were plays, and not some indeterminate form of narrative. In such cases, Shakespeare as a maker of the texts tended to disappear. There were many responses to soliloquies,

perhaps in a laudable attempt to address AO2, but too often these speeches were being seen in isolation, unconnected to their placing within the play

Comments on language, form and structure need to be integrated into the general argument, not arbitrarily dropped in almost as an afterthought. Future comments on structure, for instance, will often be best linked to aspects of genre, how the comedy operates at different points within the play.

The requirement to debate meaning is central to this specification and to AO3 in particular. Many successful tasks firmly linked their debate to aspects of dramatic tragedy, rather than offering sweeping judgements about 'blame', where the quasi-judicial approach to the events of the play and a determination to allocate final 'responsibility' obscured any sense of the characters' wider dramatic function. Most schools and colleges understood that in this unit the requirement to connect texts does not necessitate direct reference to other named plays. Indeed, when such cross-references were made the result was often to obfuscate the central argument and expose the shallowness of the connection. One way of illuminating readings of a play is through reference to dramatic productions, which are themselves clearly interpretations of the text. Such reference, however, needs to act in support of a possible reading of the play rather than simply drifting into an account of what had been seen on stage.

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

Convert raw marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by visiting the link below:

www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.