



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

English Literature B

LITB4

(Specification 2745)

Unit 4: Further and Independent Reading

Report on the Examination

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LITB4: FURTHER AND INDEPENDENT READING

There was much very good work seen this year, with many schools and colleges clearly encouraging their students to read widely and take ownership of their choice of texts. When this happened students invariably produced interesting and engaging work that was fresh and original and which they were clearly interested in. As one would expect, the best work was done by centres who had embraced advice given in previous Principal Moderator reports re task setting. The most successful tasks, for both parts of the unit, contained an element of debate, that enabled the students to fully address AO3 and which also helped them to develop a clear line of argument. Some schools and colleges however were still not setting up debates in tasks, which inevitably resulted in students faltering with AO3 strand 2 and having less shape and structure in their work. Some tasks seemed to require students to list points about the texts, perhaps finding similarities and differences for the comparative piece, but there was no requirement to shape an argument and the work therefore lacked direction. In addition to this there was some unevenness between schools and colleges about how marks were awarded. While a straightforward comparison based on characters or themes may be the most that some students can manage, which is fine, it is not comparable to essays that are making literary and structural connections between texts and subtly debating different possible readings. More straightforward work, does not really engage with the AOs on a particularly complex level and is unlikely to merit a place in the top bands of the mark scheme but this is where some school and colleges were placing this kind of piece. Schools and colleges are reminded that the national standardising material is available on eAQA and are advised to refer to it closely before marking their own students' work.

Comparative Piece

The best work seen in this part of the unit came from students who had clearly had some input into choosing their own texts and negotiating their own tasks. Much of this work was fresh, original and really interesting. Text choice is crucial here, as it is in the critical anthology piece, and students should, wherever possible, be encouraged to do some wider reading before making a final choice. Where the students were clearly interested in the texts this made such a difference and there was a real sense of enquiry about their work.

This is to repeat a point from earlier in this report and previous reports but it cannot be stressed enough how essential it is to take time to formulate interesting, thought-provoking tasks that enable students to engage fully with the criteria. For example, the task "Compare the presentation of war in", does not direct the students to do anything more than list similarities and differences, whereas the tasks set out below give the students a clear focus and encourage them to debate some potentially interesting ideas:

'To fight and kill is wrong – to stay at home is wronger' (Robert Graves). To what extent does the literature of and about World War One that you have studied express this view?

'To what extent is the portrayal of violence gratuitous in the two war texts you have studied?'

How far do you agree with the idea that First World War literature is overly sentimental?

There were some tasks that seemed to be setting up the opportunity to debate but then asked the students something so obvious that there was little opportunity to do this. Examples of tasks that hindered students somewhat in this respect were "To

what extent are Birdsong and Regeneration novels about war?” and “Is marriage important in Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility?”

This year, more than previously, moderators reported that texts usually studied as part of GCSE courses were being studied in this unit. This is an A level that caters for all, as it should do, and there may be a valid reason why a text more commonly associated with GCSE level is used by a student but, as with the task setting, more straightforward texts are unlikely to produce answers in the highest bands. All students should be encouraged to read widely and to read challenging texts, especially the more able. In doing this they will engage with texts and ideas that will provide them with the stretch and challenge that is at the heart of A level study. The aim of this specification is to develop students as thinkers and debaters of ideas and every opportunity should be taken, both in text selection and task setting, to encourage them in this respect.

Critical Anthology Piece

In many folders this was the strongest piece of the two, although in some folders the tasks given were more like statements, “Feminism in Cousin Kate”, so it was not at all clear what the student was supposed to do. Some tasks were also too big and/or too vague, eg “Marxism in Great Expectations” or “A feminist study of Jane Eyre”. In one of the more extreme examples a student was asked to do “A feminist and Marxist study of Frankenstein, thinking about its literary value and the symbols and metaphors it uses”.

The best pieces of work had a clear sharp focus and did not try to battle through too much text. In this respect, short stories, poems or particular sections of plays / novels often worked well.

Again the best tasks set up a debate and clearly directed the students in what they were supposed to be doing. As has been said before, simply asking for a feminist or Marxist analysis of a text provides virtually no direction for the student.

Many students did work based on the Marxism and feminism sections of the anthology. This was most successful when they understood the notion of a Marxist or feminist *reading*, rather than just looking for examples of things they considered to be Marxist or feminist within the text. When students were asked to explore the obvious, feminism in Duffy’s poetry or issues of power and control in 1984 for example, they struggled to argue and debate. It is often better to ask students about what is not there or ask for an alternative reading from an unusual or unconventional angle.

Many moderators reported they had read some excellent responses based on the ‘value’ section of the critical anthology. There were some fascinating arguments as to why a text/author should be included in the canon or was worthy of higher level study and why others should be removed. One centre had asked for an article to form part of a series called “100 plays to see before you die” and this produced a wide range of very passionate and individual work. Other students tackled similar types of task very successfully. Where this type of task was less successful was when an argument had been set up that, in effect, provided no points of argument or debate. Examples of this kind of task were, “Argue that Donne should be included in

the canon” and “Does Shakespeare’s work have literary value?” Understandably students floundered with these tasks.

The metaphor section remains the least popular but there was some interesting work produced. As has been said in previous reports those essays that merely listed metaphors and then explained what the student thought they meant were least successful. It is much better to ask how the metaphors/symbols are contributing to a particular meaning (s) in the text or get students to debate a viewpoint or opinion about the metaphors/symbols and what they contribute (or otherwise) to the text. Overall this was a very successful piece of work for many students but a word of warning does need to be sent out. A very small minority of schools and colleges produced work based on other schools of literary criticism, most notably post-colonialism. While this no doubt has overlaps with some of the ideas in the critical anthology, for example ideas about power and control that are important to Marxist critics, centres are reminded that the students must produce work that is rooted in the critical approaches in the anthology.

General Points

Many centres were prompt and accurate in terms of their administration and annotated work helpfully to point out to the moderator its strengths and weaknesses and explain clearly why a particular mark in a particular band was deemed most appropriate. Where this personalised and detailed annotation was coupled with evidence of internal moderation it was very difficult for the moderators to disagree with the marks awarded by the school and college. Where annotation was minimal or unerringly positive, although a mark below full marks had been given, it was much more difficult to understand how the mark had been arrived at and it forced the moderators to look much more closely at the work. It is in the interests of schools and colleges and their students to ensure annotation and summative comments provide a clear explanation as to why the piece has been given the mark it has.

In terms of administration, there were many teachers who managed to get everything packaged and presented accurately and sent off to their moderator in good time. This is no mean feat, given the size of some of the entries and given that teachers no doubt had other work for other subjects due at the same time. Moderators do keep a note of those centres which are prompt and accurate with administration and this is highly valued. Those schools and colleges who did not complete the paperwork correctly and / or who sent work past the deadline need to start the process earlier next year in order to avoid this happening.

Overall there was much to be praised this summer. To further improve some centres should revisit their task setting, in the light of the advice given in this report, and look for ways to introduce opportunities for further reading and independent study. The Principal Moderator and all of the team would like to thank all of those teachers, up and down the country, who have worked so hard to enthuse and motivate their students and to instil in them a love of literature and ideas.

Note:

The Critical Anthology has been updated with new material for 2013:

- The aim in adding additional material is to give teachers and students a greater range of material to choose from and to offer more flexibility when using the anthology in the classroom.
- There is no requirement for students to refer to all of the material in a particular section when doing their critical anthology piece of work.
- The previous version of the anthology is still valid and there is no requirement for schools to use the new material.
- It is hoped the additions to the anthology will facilitate more discussions and debates and give students a wider range of ideas to consider in relation to their chosen text(s). Much of the work that moderators see for the critical anthology piece is interesting, fresh and engaging and it is hoped the expansion of the anthology will help and support students and teachers in this area.

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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