

General Certificate of Education  
January 2006  
Advanced Level Examination



**ENGLISH LANGUAGE (SPECIFICATION A)**  
**Unit 4 Language Investigation**

**EA4W**

Wednesday 1 February 2006 9.00 am to 11.30 am

**For this paper you must have:**

- a 12-page answer book

Time allowed: 2 hours 30 minutes

**Instructions**

- Use blue or black ink or ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book. The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is EA4W.
- Do all rough work in the answer book. Cross through any work you do not want marked.

**Information**

- The maximum mark for this paper is 60.
- The marks for the question are shown in brackets.
- You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers. All questions should be answered in continuous prose. Quality of Written Communication will be assessed in all answers.

**Advice**

- It is recommended that you spend at least 30 minutes studying the texts and planning your investigation. When you write your answer, the majority of your time should be devoted to analysis of data.

**There are no questions printed on this page**

## Language Investigation

Your task is to carry out a language investigation using **some or all** of the texts that have been provided for you.

### Description of Texts

These texts describe, interpret or respond to *Wheat Field with Crows*, a painting by Vincent Van Gogh.

Text	Title	Details
1	<i>The Paintings: Wheat Field with Crows</i>	Website page from the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
2	<i>My Brother Vincent Van Gogh</i>	A book written from the perspective of Theo Van Gogh, Vincent's brother, aimed at junior school children
3	<i>Transcription: girl talking</i>	Girl, aged six, talks about a project she did on Vincent Van Gogh in Year One
4	<i>Transcription: lecturer talking</i>	Photography lecturer responds to the painting
5	<i>Crows over a Cornfield – the last picture</i>	Poem by Leo Aylen
6	<i>Ways of Seeing</i>	A book about the perception of images

### Suggested structure for writing up your investigation

#### 1: Aim(s)

State the aim(s) of your investigation and identify which texts you are using.

#### 2: Method

Explain the linguistic frameworks you are using to analyse your data.

#### 3: Analysis

Present a detailed analysis of your data.

#### 4: Conclusion

Draw your conclusions in response to your aim(s) and based on your analysis.

#### 5: Evaluation

Evaluate the validity of your conclusions and suggest any further research that might be undertaken.

(60 marks)

**Text 1**

The image in Text 1 is not reproduced here due to third-party copyright constraints.

***Wheat Field with Crows***

Oil on canvas  
50.5 x 103.0 cm.  
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890  
F 779, JH 2117

**Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum**

**Introduction**

*Wheat Field with Crows* stands out as one of Vincent van Gogh's most powerful, and most fiercely debated, paintings. The many interpretations of this particular work are probably more varied than any other in Van Gogh's oeuvre. Some see it as Van Gogh's "suicide note" put to canvas, while others delve beyond a superficial overview of the subject matter and favour a more positive approach. And some more extreme critics cast their vision even further--beyond the canvas and the brushstrokes--in order to translate the images into an entirely new language of the subliminal.

Artistic analysis is, by its very nature, a subjective endeavour. Still, the most reasonable interpretations are best undertaken from a foundation based on facts.

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## Background

Contrary to popular myth *Wheat Field with Crows* is *not* Van Gogh's final work. Admittedly, it does make for a neatly wrapped interpretive gift if the painting really were Van Gogh's final work before his suicide. The painting is, without question, turbulent and certainly conveys a sense of loneliness in the fields--a powerful image of Van Gogh as defeated and solitary artist in his final years. Furthermore, both the popular films *Lust for Life* and *Vincent and Theo* rewrite history and depict this painting as Van Gogh's last--with more of an interest in dramatic effect than historical accuracy. As is ideally the case, however, an entertaining, though apocryphal, tale should be put to rest in the face of irrefutable fact.

Precise dating of *Wheat Field with Crows* is difficult because of its similarity to other works that Van Gogh was painting, and writing about, from the same period. In Letter 649, written about 10 July 1890, Van Gogh describes three canvases:

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*They are vast fields of wheat under troubled skies, and I did not need to go out of my way to try to express sadness and extreme loneliness. I hope you will see them soon--for I hope to bring them to you in Paris as soon as possible, since I almost think that these canvases will tell you what I cannot say in words, the health and restorative forces that I see in the country. Now the third canvas is Daubigny's garden, a picture I have been thinking about since I came here.*

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This passage presents difficulties. First because Van Gogh himself is writing in contradictions when he describes the works as conveying "sadness and extreme loneliness" on the one hand, but also "health and restorative forces" on the other. More significantly, one of the world's foremost experts on the letters of Van Gogh, Dr. Jan Hulsker, maintains that *Wheat Field with Crows* isn't even one of the three works mentioned by Van Gogh in this letter. Hulsker maintains that the former two works mentioned by Van Gogh in the quote above are *The Fields* and *Wheat Fields at Auvers under Clouded Sky*,<sup>1</sup> whereas a number of other sources instead believe that the two works are, in fact, likely to be *Wheat Field with Crows* and *Wheat Field under Clouded Sky*.<sup>2</sup> All four works fit in roughly with Van Gogh's own description of "troubled skies", but given that Van Gogh didn't provide specific details about the size of the works (calling them only "big") the speculation continues with no resolution in sight.

Regardless of the perplexities of which works are mentioned in Letter 649, Van Gogh scholar Ronald Pickvance in his book *Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Auvers* supports Dr. Hulsker's argument for an earlier dating of this painting with his own analysis of the letters. Pickvance explores the letters in depth and dates *Wheat Field with Crows* "contemporaneously from 7 to 10 July",<sup>3</sup> more than two weeks before Van Gogh committed suicide. Finally, Hulsker puts the argument about Van Gogh's last works to rest by maintaining that they were ". . . *Daubigny's Garden* and *Cottages with Thatched Roofs and Figures*, both of which are far more likely to have been the last paintings [sic] he made."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, given that *Wheat Field with Crows* is almost certainly not Van Gogh's final work, the "suicide note" interpretation should be cast aside.

**Text 2**

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**Text 3****Transcription Key:**

- (.) pause of less than a second
- (2) longer pause (number of seconds indicated)

erm (6) erm (1) I like this picture because (2) it's (1) I like (.) the (.) golden bit here (2) where the (.) hay's all swaying around (1) I like the birds (.) flying high (.) and erm (0.5) it's a lovely night (.) and (1) somebody could go and have a walk (.) on that path (1) and (1) erm (9) erm (.) I can't think of any more (4) and I think that's my favourite picture I've ever done (1) that I copied from Vincent Van Gogh (.) that's all I can say

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**Text 4**
**Transcription Key:**

- (.) pause of less than a second
- (2) longer pause (number of seconds indicated)

this painting of Van Gogh (.) shows a lot of confusion (.) there (.) are (.) two roads (.) going off to  
 the horizon (.) and (.) at least (.) two suns it's a very (.) stormy (1) scene (0.5) it's poignant  
 particularly because I (.) happen to know that this was his last painting and he is in fact (.) buried  
 (.) in this (.) cornfield (.) alongside his brother (0.5) it's got those colours typical of his paintings  
 5 er the vibrant yellow (.) that you see in the sunflowers erm representative of (.) masculinity and  
 the day (0.5) the night (.) the sky is stormy and (.) foreboding (.) so it appears to (.) suggest (.) the  
 turmoil in his mind (.) which caused him (0.5) ultimately to shoot himself (1) and (.) so I suppose  
 it's er difficult to (.) have any objectivity looking at the painting because (.) it seems (.) just to be  
 a reflection of (.) Van Gogh's (.) inner thoughts (.) so all the things within it (.) are symbolic (.) of  
 10 what's going on in his mind

**Text 5**

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**Text 6**

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**END OF TEXTS**

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Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
- Text 2: CECIEL DE BIE, *My Brother Vincent Van Gogh*, J.Paul Getty Museum, 2002
- Text 3: Private data
- Text 4: Private data
- Text 5: LEO AYLEN, *Sunflower Poems*, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1976
- Text 6: JOHN BERGER, *Ways Of Seeing*, Penguin Books, 1972. Copyright © JOHN BERGER, 1972  
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