



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Literature
Specification 4710

**Unit 47104H/4F (Approaching Shakespeare and the
Literary Heritage)**

Higher and Foundation tiers

Report on the Examination
2012 Examination – January series

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GCSE English Literature 4710

Principal Examiner's Report: 47104H January 2012

As in the summer, the second sitting of the Shakespeare and English Literary Heritage paper attracted a much smaller entry than a number of the other units. The range of texts attempted was similar, though there was a noticeable improvement in the quality of many of the responses seen; some schools had clearly read and acted upon some of the comments made in the last Principal's report, with the result that, in general, there was less simple paraphrase and story-telling from students and more engagement with writers, their crafting of texts and the effects on the reader/ audience.

Again as before, some texts were not attempted by any schools, though only 'Julius Caesar' in the Shakespeare section, and 'Wuthering Heights' in the Literary Heritage section, have not thus far produced any responses.

Section A: Shakespeare

Macbeth

This was again a popular choice of text, with both questions attempted by a number of students. There was a pleasing level of awareness of the need to look at Shakespeare's dramatic and linguistic methods in conveying his meanings to the audience which resulted in some real insight into both Macbeth's character and the pair's relationship. Students were also often well prepared to discuss the dramatic impact of both the chosen and the self-selected scenes on the audience, and there was some interesting speculation about Shakespeare's dramatic intentions. There must, however, be some doubt about the merit of comments on the punctuation of the scenes (which was quite common), given that we have no accurate record of where, if at all, Shakespeare intended exclamation marks and hyphens to feature in the text.

Really detailed textual analysis to support these readings was again rare and this is perhaps an area teachers may like to consider in greater depth. There was a pleasing range of scenes selected for the Macbeth question, while, as in the summer, Banquo's ghost and its effects was the most popular choice of scene for the relationship question. Students have, thus far at least, made extremely sensible choices for the Part (b) question and their knowledge of the whole play has been most impressive. This may though have been achieved at the expense of a more detailed knowledge of key aspects of the play.

Much Ado About Nothing

Almost all the answers of those few who attempted 'Much Ado' were on the question which asked students to comment on Beatrice's feelings about Benedick, as might have been expected. As in the 'Twelfth Night' answers in the summer paper, students seemed particularly engaged by the play and responded enthusiastically to the task. The modernity of Beatrice as a strong and independent young woman was commented upon to interesting effect, as was the realism of the ambivalence of the pair's feelings for each other as the play progresses. Again, however, more detailed study of the scene's textual detail would have proved profitable for some students.

Romeo and Juliet

This was the most popular text again with the Juliet question the focus of the majority of student responses. Here, in contrast to many of the responses on 'Macbeth', for instance, students often engaged very well with the textual detail of the extract, making a number of useful and enlightening comments on the varied love-imagery of her speech and what it suggests about Juliet's fluctuating emotional state. The Friar Lawrence question, though less frequently attempted, also produced a good level of analysis and dramatic understanding, and a consideration of the role of the rhyming couplets in the friar's speech, for example, evinced a high level of preparation and knowledge. There was little of the story-telling approach noted in

the summer and a real awareness of the play as the basis for a dramatic performance. This was a most welcome development in students' levels of performance, and a clear sense of enjoyment as well as of knowledge was conveyed in many of these responses.

Twelfth Night

The overwhelming majority of the limited numbers of responses to this play dealt, perhaps surprisingly, with the Malvolio question. There was a clear focus on the dramatic aspects of Shakespeare's presentation of him, and for Part (b) a number of appropriate and interesting scenes were selected which highlighted different aspects of his character in the play. As in the summer, students seemed to have engaged strongly with the play, and a real sense of enjoyment was evident in the students' responses.

Julius Caesar

No responses

Section B: English Literary Heritage

Pride and Prejudice

No responses

Wuthering Heights

No responses

Great Expectations

This was again quite a popular text and, as in the summer, it elicited both a high level of engagement and considerable textual knowledge from students. The question on Miss Havisham was the more popular and it produced much thoughtful and considered comment, both about her as a character and about her plight as a single woman in a patriarchal society. Contextual elements of the question were again extremely well handled for the most part, and there was very little extraneous historical writing unlinked to Dickens' concerns. Responses to the Pip and Joe Gargery question were also characterised by a good level of textual knowledge and a sometimes affecting grasp of the shifting nature of their relationship. There was little simple story-telling, though more insight might have been expected about Dickens' techniques of narration and characterisation. It was again pleasing to note, however, the clear enjoyment students had taken from what is at GCSE level a challenging and rewarding novel.

The Withered Arm and other Wessex Tales

No responses

Animal Farm

This was again a very popular choice in Section B, with the majority of responses dealing with the question of Boxer's importance to the book. There was much less evidence of the simple narrative approach seen in the summer, and students were impressively knowledgeable about the whole novella and Boxer's role within it. Contextual elements of the task were also generally well handled and linked to the demands of the question. More attention does need to be paid to Orwell's skill in characterisation and use of detail, however; textual analysis and a real focus on the writer's use language to affect the reader remain the weakest areas in responses to 'Animal Farm'. Overall, though, students seemed to have taken a great of enjoyment and knowledge from their study of the text.

Some general remarks:

- As has been made clear in the individual text comments, a number of the areas for potential improvement identified in the previous Principal Examiner's report would seem to have been addressed by schools. There was less story-telling by students, and far less simple identification of aspects of characters' behaviour, for example.
- Students do still need to focus more of their attention in detail on a writer's choices of language and/ or structure and/ or form and the effects of these on the reader/ audience if they are to maximise their attainment on this paper. A full discussion of theme and idea (and the highest bands of marks) can only be achieved by analysis and evaluation of a writer's methods and a real concern for detail.

On the basis of the students' work seen by Senior Examiners, there is much to applaud and appreciate in students' achievements in their study of English Literature. Overwhelmingly, schools had prepared their students effectively and seemed across the range of texts to have encouraged and nurtured a genuine engagement and even affection for the works they studied which made a large number of the scripts seen a pleasure to mark. Long may this continue!

GCSE English Literature 4710

Principal Examiner's Report: 47104F January 2012

This component is still in its infancy. With fewer than 250 students sitting the Foundation paper in this series, it is difficult to make anything but tentative conclusions about how larger numbers of students may respond to its challenges. The comments below must be read with this in mind. As some texts have not been seen yet, the comments are restricted to those questions which were attempted in sufficient numbers to say anything meaningful.

Section A: Shakespeare

Generally, there were two weaknesses in students' responses to texts in this section. While many students knew the stories of the texts and the nature of the characters, and were able to write about them in detail, the treatment of Assessment Objective 2 (writers' methods) was generally weak. The bullet in Part (a) questions referring to 'how Shakespeare presents ...' was often ignored, or dealt with at a very simple level. Students did not seem to know what sort of thing to write about.

The second general weakness lay in the responses to Part (b), which asked students to write about a different part of the play to the extract given in Part (a). Although nearly all of the students were able to do this, many of them simply gave a narrative account of another part of the play, and did not show any skills that they had not already displayed in Part (a).

Question 1

Responses to this question, the most popular in this series, illustrated the problems mentioned above. Many students wrote well about the thoughts and feelings of Macbeth and Banquo, making accurate comments about them in the passage, commenting on details and often showing awareness of their feelings and attitudes. The question, however, began 'How does Shakespeare tell you about ...', and the second bullet in Part (a) began 'how Shakespeare shows...'. These form very clear invitations to write about Shakespeare's techniques, but the majority of students failed to achieve much beyond Band 2 'simple identification of effect(s)', and some not even that. 'Shakespeare uses language to show their feelings' is Band 1 only, where sometimes the students writing this were achieving Band 4 or 5 in responding to the characters' thoughts and feelings. Even if they had found it difficult to identify methods in the extract, Part (b) offered a chance to do so in virtually any part of the play, but many just wrote an account of thoughts and feelings in another scene, adding little to what they had already shown.

Question 2

This question was less popular than Question 1 amongst the students who had studied *Macbeth*, and less well done. 'Dramatic and interesting' proved a difficult concept, particularly in writing about the extract in Part (a), as they did not know how to write about the language in the Captain's speech. Unusually, part (b) was sometimes better here, students offering explained responses to some more obviously dramatic episodes in the play, though again without much success in dealing with Assessment Objective 2.

Question 3

This question produced the most successful responses in Section A, though this probably reflected the quality of the small number of students who studied *Much Ado About Nothing* in this series. Beatrice's feelings were understood and written about well, students commenting on details of the passage and writing better about method than elsewhere. Similarly, Part (b) produced good responses about Beatrice's feelings elsewhere, though this time neglecting method.

Question 5

Juliet's feelings in the passage were usually identified here, and there were sometimes attempts at identifying method, but nearly all of the Part (b) responses gave narrative accounts of Juliet's feelings in another scene, without dealing with method at all.

Very few responses were seen on the other Section A questions.

Section B: English Literary Heritage

Dealing with Assessment Objective 4 (contexts) in the examination was new to most schools, but this was often done well in this series. As with Part (a), the least successfully tackled Assessment Objective was AO2.

Question 11

All of the students who wrote about *Pride and Prejudice* chose this question. Students knew about Darcy's behaviour, and could offer and comment on details of what he says and does in the novel, but were able to offer very little in response to the instruction to write about how Austen presents him. Some thoughts on the social and historical context which produced Darcy's attitudes were usually offered in Part (b), though not at a very sophisticated level.

Question 15

As with Darcy in Question 11, students knew about Miss Havisham and what happens to her in the novel, but were unable to write about method, surprisingly for such a richly drawn character. Responses to Part (b) were not very successful here. Some AO4 questions might ask students to reflect on differences between the context of the novel and their own society, but this one did not, so that the idea of Miss Havisham being better off had there been dating websites was not really relevant.

Question 16

There were a few very limited responses to this question, and Part (b), about how Joe was affected by the life he leads, was poorly answered.

Question 18

A limited number of students had studied the Hardy short stories, and all of them chose this question, though without much success, which largely reflected the quality of the candidature. They could not really deal with Hardy's methods in making the story amusing, choosing to simply tell the story to demonstrate why it was amusing. Only very basic ideas about the Wessex context were offered in Part (b), if at all.

Question 19

Animal Farm was easily the most popular Section B text in this series, and largely the best answered. This question was the more popular of the two. Most students could write a lot about what Boxer says and does in the novel, to the extent that some got bogged down in recounting everything that happened to him. There were a lot of supported and explained responses, though, which often became sustained, though AO2 was largely neglected. Part (b) was often more successful than Part (a), in the sense that students achieved Band 5 responses to context where they had failed to reach it on the other Assessment Objectives. The Russian revolution proved a good starting point, and the best ones widened this out towards the end of their responses.

Question 20

This was less popular than Question 19, and largely less well done. The behaviour of Jones in the beginning of the novel was often detailed well, but Assessment Objective 2 was poorly done again, and context was less successfully handled than in Question 19.
