



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Literature

Specification 4710

47101F: Exploring modern texts

Report on the Examination

2012 Examination – June series

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GCSE English Literature 4710

Principal Examiner's Report Unit 1 (47101F)

January 2012 is the fourth sitting of English Literature Unit 1, for the new specification and the end of the two year syllabus for many students. This has led to many improvements noted by the examining team: areas of weakness highlighted in previous exam series such as Section B context or writer's strand in both Sections A and B, appear, on the whole, to be understood and commented on successfully. 'Method' and 'context', which seemed to be the 'poor relatives' in the first series of the paper, are now being addressed by students across the range of abilities for this Tier, indicating that schools have responded constructively and accurately to comments made in previous reports. However, having said that, some less able students dealt with 'method' at the expense of saying much about the details of the text, thus restricting the marks that could be awarded. The best responses were those where students could find the fine balance of commentary on the text and the methods used by the authors.

Understanding and engagement of the texts was in abundance with many students producing admirable responses of considerable length. As in each previous report, 'An Inspector Calls' and 'Of Mice and Men' were still by far the most popular choices although a spread of texts was seen. Many students demonstrated a clear understanding of the Assessment Objectives and the requirements of the mark scheme, both in modern prose or drama and exploring cultures. The new assessment objective in Section B – AO4 personal response to context was embraced by many of the students and they appeared to enjoy being able to explain the historical, social context of the novel, although for some it became a history lesson with no link to the text. There appeared to be more evidence of students being able to respond to the passage given in part A of the question suggesting that more focus on close textual analysis has taken place within teaching.

Successful navigation of the paper as a whole, was variable, but the variation tended to be centre-based, rather than variation within individual schools: the majority of students, in the majority of schools, were able to respond as required (e.g. produce one response each for Section A and Section B.) However, there were some schools in which an alarmingly high percentage of students had not been primed for the exam. Commonly, students responded to both questions on a Section A text (often Q 1 and 2 or 17 & 18), then clearly had to rush through the Section B (often Q 21) response. Also examiners noted having schools where students answered three or more questions from section A: answering on two different texts or more.

There were other frustratingly regular infringements of the rubric of the paper. The Anthology questions produced many problems for students who felt they had to produce responses to both questions. Even more frustratingly a number of schools had students who didn't respond to 'part b' at all, resulting in a very good 'part a' response being capped at 15 marks.

It has been felt by all the examining team that this was a successful summer for schools and students. Many areas of weakness were addressed and students were able to showcase their knowledge and understanding. The cohort this summer was large and therefore comments made in this report are based on the selection of responses seen by the senior examining team.

Section A: Modern prose or drama***Sunlight on the Grass***

Many students demonstrated some wonderful engagement with these short stories and always found the response to part 'a' the simpler task. A variety of choices of text were shown in part 'b' responses resulting in interesting responses and engagement with the anthology. Unfortunately the anthology generated lots of rubric errors: many students thought they had to respond to both questions – this of course meant that both responses were lacking detail as students rushed through their responses. More worryingly was the number of schools with students who didn't understand the question paper and omitted 'part b' altogether; costing some very good students marks due to rubric infringement. The most worrying concern about this, is the problem appears to lie with schools and not the odd individual candidate. Another interesting development this summer was the number of students who thought they had to compare the stories; this is a skill not tested on this paper! Senior examiners noted that generally question 1 was more popular than question 2, however good responses were seen from both questions.

Question 1

One of the most successfully attempted 'Anthology' questions to date, with many students attaining marks in Band 4 or above. 'Family life' proved to be a good hook: students readily responded to this within the context of 'Compass and Torch', with 'the essence of Dadness' proving to be a popular quote, as a way in to the text and task. Most students could recognise and articulate the tensions within the 'new' and 'old' family structure, exploring variously the relationships between the mother and Jim; the mother and father; the mother and son; the son and Jim; and the son and father....a spectrum to explore, and ample material for students to quote in support of their points. The better students went on to develop those points through (often) incisive explorations of writer's method.

'The horse' was frequently seen symbolically within the wider context of family life as: 'protector', 'watching over them', 'like the mother - always there' etc. The mother was sometimes seen as 'the compass', while the father and son had the 'torch'. The fact that the father had brought a 'two man' tent made the boy feel acknowledged as a man rather than just a 'boy'.

For part (b) of this question many students chose 'Anil' and 'When the Wasps Drowned', and commonly referred to the 'violence' within the family structure in 'Anil' and the duality of Eveline's role as a 'parenting sibling' in 'When the Wasps Drowned.' However, 'My Polish Teacher's Tie' was also referred to in several responses, whereby the candidate explored the importance, or not, of inherited family culture, 'full of rhymes Mum taught me', but this often proved quite a difficult text choice for students. A few students chose to use 'Something Old, Something New' and again this proved a difficult choice for them, again trying to consider cultural family issues.

Question 2

This question worked well and senior examiners commented on reading some outstanding responses about Eveline's dubious moral character. Students' knowledge of the story was often very good and they were able to choose examples very well to support points. Many students used the dual complexity of Eveline's parent/sibling role as a starting point, with the better

students exploring the viewpoint and focusing on the use of the ring, to show Eveline's mixed/confused responses at different stages of the story, first removing it from her younger sister, then wearing it, but later 'holding my right hand behind my back'.

A common point was about Eveline's 'home made swim suit' and use of 'smarties' showing her caught between adult and child worlds. Writer's method wasn't always as strong in this response as question one but many students attempted it with some success.

Carla Carter from 'My Polish Teacher's Tie' and 'Anil' were common second stories for this question, but there were also responses using the children from 'The Darkness Out There.'

Lord of the Flies: William Golding

Only a few responses were seen by senior examiners. Students achieved mixed results with both questions, whereby those addressing question 3 often managed to show explained response to task and text but perhaps didn't achieve so highly on writer's method and those addressing question 4 used the extract well, to draw out explained responses to writer's method but often failed to link it to the rest of the text. However, there were some very pleasing responses with clear engagement and detailed understanding of the text; students managing to deal with ideas such as democracy, savagery, order etc., which was very pleasing to see.

Question 3

Students appeared to like writing about Jack and even the weaker students were capable of offering a little detail about him. The weakest students often offered a narrative view of the whole text but from Jack's point of view, whilst the stronger students used Jack to elicit some of the central themes of the novel.

Question 4

Students appeared to like this question although the weakest ones tended to paraphrase the extract and struggled to identify the word 'tension' within the extract and how the writer had achieved this. The better students managed to pick out key detail from the extract to 'explain' how tension was developed.

Martyn Pig: Kevin Brooks

Very few examples were seen by senior examiners this time. Of those seen a mixed response to the questions was evident, although senior examiners did comment on the students' apparent overall enjoyment of the text.

The most popular question was question 5 and this appeared to be dealt with better than question 6.

Question 5

Students liked Dean as a character to respond to and managed to use the text well e.g. the description of Dean to help achieve marks for the writer's method strand. A good working knowledge of the text was shown and this enabled students to place Dean within the novel and draw out 'explained' responses.

Question 6

On the whole students found this question quite difficult. They appeared to be able to identify one character that was lonely but struggled to deal with two characters. The writer's method strand was also challenging for many students in relation to this question. However, the better students were able to identify pathetic fallacy as a method to link to character's emotions.

***The Woman in Black* : Susan Hill**

A few responses were seen and students responded to both questions. Question 8 was by far the most popular with students appreciating the opportunity to discuss how they felt about the ending and also the methods used by Hill to reach the ending. However, for the weaker students, this question did elicit some interesting responses including film reviews! Question 7 was also done well by some but there were far more responses where students struggled to find enough to say about Mr Jerome, especially linked to the writer's strand.

Question 7

Weaker students tended to offer a very brief narrative response rather than focusing particularly on Mr Jerome and those who kept the focus often found only a small amount of detail to comment on which meant responses were repetitive. But the stronger students provided well supported responses to Mr Jerome's part in the novel, picking out relevant quotes such as 'Mr Jerome stopped dead'; they also commented on tension in the use of the pony and trap from Mr Jerome's understanding of the woman in black's motive. One senior examiner comment on an excellent response that began with a confident assertion of his use as a literary device: 'Mr Jerome is used to create both suspense and suspicion.' Others explored the choice of 'dead' in the description and how it is linked with the woman in black suggesting how powerful her history with Mr Jerome was and its effect on the novel.

Question 8

Students liked being able to offer their own opinion in relation to the end of the novel and for the stronger students this didn't detract from their concentration on understanding the effects used by Hill. There was clear appreciation of the manipulation of the audience, e.g. just when all seems okay, revenge comes at the very end, destroying happiness and evil triumphs. The very best students linked the use of the pony and trap on the marshes to the ride at the end of the book, whilst others acknowledged the writer's skill in manipulating the reader's response throughout the story, culminating in a 'dreaded ending' e.g. through 'foreshadowing' and 'unanswered questions', pathetic fallacy and the shock of the tragic ending on a pleasant day.

***Touching the Void*: Joe Simpson**

As has been experienced in previous exam series, this book allowed students to demonstrate their clear engagement and enjoyment of the text. Students enjoyed the drama of the book so much that a reasonable percentage of them answered both question 9 and 10 on it. Many demonstrated clear involvement with the characters and students really knew the details well.

Question 9

Such was the engagement with this book, that there was an evident danger that the students filled their essay with details of the action at the expense of any other AOs. However, many were well prepared and moved through the bullets with example and some explanation. Some empathy was seen with the separate, internal thoughts of Joe and Simon on the accident. One senior examiner quoted that they saw very detailed and accurate knowledge of the book and good use of pertinent quotation.

Question 10

This option seemed harder and less successful for the students. The main weakness was loss of focus on memories with many students re-telling the story.

Under Milk Wood: Dylan Thomas

Senior examiners did not see any responses to this text.

The Crucible: Arthur Miller

This text proved problematic for weaker students and many failed to move beyond supported response with either question. However, the better students provided some wonderful engagement and understanding of the text.

Question 13

This was probably the more successfully attempted 'Crucible' response, and clearly Mary Warren had been taught as a possible character question. Many students explored her character with reference to her 'weaknesses', especially in relation to Abigail, with many acknowledging that it was her need to be recognised leading her to destructive actions. The better students explored Miller's manipulation of our feelings, as an audience, to her, and subsequently, whether she deserves our sympathy, or not. Weaker students, however, took a 'personal' interpretation of the question as a starting point, judging Mary Warren as if she were a real person, with no reference to the theatrical context or Miller's intentions, (e.g. 'She was really stupid for being friends with Abigail...') which is a shame to see after four series using the same style question.

Question 14

Responses similarly fell between skilful explorations of characters who 'feel guilty', and weaker 'judgmental' responses, referring to students who 'should feel guilty for what they have done' and in this context many wrote about Abigail who 'should feel guilty because...' – in effect not addressing the question accurately. In the former, the first choice was very often 'John Proctor', with many students then using 'Elizabeth' as their second character. Often the starting point was John Proctor's affair with Abigail, and Elizabeth Proctor's guilt at her coldness for perhaps driving John Proctor away.

Kindertransport: Diane Samuels

Senior examiners commented on seeing quite a wide variety of ability with regards to this text. Many students only dealt with the text superficially, either narrating the events or touching on very basic detail and information. However, a few students did respond well to the text demonstrating an understanding of dramatic devices as seen in previous exam series with this text.

Question 15

Students were not as successful with this question as question 16. Many offered superficial understanding and the very weak students confused Eva and Faith. The better students were able to show some sympathy towards Faith and also demonstrate a sensitive understanding to the different generations' attitudes and emotions.

Question 16

Students seemed to enjoy this question demonstrating clear engagement with the ideas of motherhood to Eva. However, it was noted that students were stronger on strand AO1 ideas than AO2 methods.

An Inspector Calls: J.B.Priestley

This was the most popular text by far and both questions were attempted but question 17 proved the most popular.

Question 17

Many students successfully responded to this question, taking the 'How does Priestley present..' quite literally as a way in to the task and text by citing the opening description of Arthur Birling in the scene description preceding Act 1 (e.g. 'a heavy-looking rather portentous man' etc.). The weaker students generally confined their responses to the presentation of Arthur Birling as exposed in the first scene (his manners; use of language, priorities - money/class etc.) whereas the better students explored how these first impressions underpinned Arthur Birling's responses later in the play, e.g. in his reaction to the Inspector and his response to the news of the suicide of a former employee.

In terms of 'method' this was often explored in the context of what 'Priestley makes him say', with the speeches referring to war and the Titanic as favoured examples of 'dramatic irony'. Many weaker students were able to identify these speeches as important but couldn't quite reach an explanation of dramatic irony. However, the very strongest students were able to develop this method and link to the ideas of socialism and Priestley's message. One lone candidate saw The Titanic as representing 'Arthur Birling and his family, as it was rich, luxurious and full of high status people. The Inspector was then seen as the 'one iceberg' that was able to destroy Arthur Birling's reputation.'

Question 18

This was the less popular choice, but many responses did manage to explore BOTH differences and similarities; recognising chiefly that Sheila was quicker to take responsibility than Eric, but that together, they provided a strong contrast to their parents, in terms of both behaviour and moral viewpoints. However, weaker students tended to deal with Eric and Sheila separately (or one of them only) and did not compare as required by the task. Those students who responded to question 18 generally performed less well and often failed to achieve a great deal of AO2, relying on quotation to support comments on language, without actual identification of effects of writer's choice of language. It was not possible therefore, to award strand 4.4 or above, although the majority of students achieved 3.4.

DNA: Denis Kelly

Responses to DNA continue to provide the examining team with scripts that are a delight to mark. Students obviously engage well with the text and consequently produce interesting responses. As found in previous exam series, themes/ideas/feelings/attitudes were explored in some detail in both responses, with many students attaining 5.5, even 6.5 for this aspect of their response.

Question 19

This question produced clear essays, giving support on a variety of girls and then boys to prove the point. One popular view was that Cathy in particular was evil, the other girls less so. However, the better responses delved much deeper offering an explained and at times sustained comparison of male and female characters, finally reaching the conclusion that boys or girls were more evil. Some responses reached the decision that separate characters are evil and it didn't matter on gender it was who wanted the most power; demonstrating a clear understanding of themes and ideas! However, weaker students demonstrated good knowledge of the story and were content to tell it, without answering the question which is such a shame as one feels that with a little more focus they too would have been achieving wonderful results.

Question 20

Not as successful as question 19. Some students typically would choose a scene then forget to refer to it again, just discussing method from anywhere in the play, whilst others focused heavily on the scene but then didn't relate its importance to the play. Responses ranged from bands 2 to 4 on the whole.

Section B: Exploring Cultures***Of Mice and Men: John Steinbeck*****Question 21**

This was by far the most popular text in this section and although some concern was aired by a centre about the use of 'Slim' as a character focus, students dealt with the extract very well. There were a lot of strong responses with pleasing evidence of 'method' being drawn out of the extract and developed; many students expressed their ideas with some cogency, writing that Slim was seen as a 'God-like' figure due to Steinbeck's choice of language such as 'prince' and 'royalty'. The better students could explain and appreciate the effect of more complex linguistic phrasing: 'His ear heard more than was said to him....understanding beyond thought', and the implications therein; similarly the description of 'his hands', followed by the description of Slim's countenance at the end of the passage were cited, with implications for the development of his friendship with George in the rest of the novel.

However many senior examiners were able to quote some quite interesting interpretations from students: many scientific comments relating to gravity; Slim was a "jerk" - "this is Slim, the jerkline skinner"; Slim was skinny - "jerkline skinner"; and Slim was "large and lean" which meant he is tall and leans a lot against doorways"; "Ear" this suggests that Slim is one of the few whose [sic] not disabled as he's got both his ears.

As in previous exam series the weaker students confused the characters and responses were seen where students thought they were reading an extract about Curley. However, this was rare and it seemed apparent that students, on the whole, had been well prepared for the part 'a' response.

The response to part 'b' – context - was well done on the whole. Again the better students were those who understood how other male characters fitted with Slim and also how the ranch was a 'microcosm' of society. Many students demonstrated their ability to explore the disillusionary, perhaps evasive yet seductive nature of the 'American Dream' AND in relation to Steinbeck's 'male characters'. In this respect, 'context' was better responded to than in previous series, as

many students were able to integrate their historical knowledge of America during the Depression with their appreciation of Steinbeck's skill in characterisation (and use of), so that 'good' responses were much more cohesive, and less disjointed. The weaker students listed each male character and wrote a narrative on them so whilst they did achieve some marks in this section, they were less focused on context than others. And for some students they delighted in writing a 'history' essay on everything to do with the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression!

Question 22

Very few responses were seen. However, of those seen, senior examiners claim the passage was dealt with well, offering some good close analysis. Part 'b' was generally very poorly responded to with little knowledge or understanding displayed of the context of the novel.

Question 23

Only a few responses were seen by the senior examining team. All responses successfully targeted some details which revealed Dolores's 'feelings and attitudes', and her address to the children e.g. 'her heavy eyelids drew back'; 'a hostile look'; 'strode into the classroom'; 'some white fellas' etc. The best responses targeted the 'method' strand by exploring how the narrative viewpoint was manipulated to convey the mother's bias and partiality, e.g. in relation to her beliefs, and conflict with the teachings of Mr Watts as well as references to the failure to pack a 'raincoat', 'The Good Book' etc..

In the responses seen, context had clearly been an integral part of the textual appreciation in the classroom, and consequently, students were able to relate their knowledge of the 'blockade'/ 'civil war' / 'Bougainville in the early nineties', to the narrative and characterisation, and the intentions of Lloyd Jones as 'writer'. Students seemed to have grasped the fear of the indigenous people towards westerners.

Question 24

A few responses were seen and it was apparent that this text was particularly problematic for weaker students. The passage appeared to enable students to say something about the lynch mob and writer's method but students could not link the lynch mob's behaviour to the wider context of society and therefore what we learn about Maycomb.

Question 25

Only a very few responses were seen. Students responded well to this text and question, demonstrating a good awareness of the wider context.

As a final note for this report:

Considerable improvement has been seen from responses in January 2012 and June 2011 especially in respect to writer's methods and context (section B) and this can be attributed to many factors:

- Longer preparation time for students
- Many students sitting this exam at the end of their two year course so maturity might be a contributory factor
- A greater understanding by some schools of the demands and requirements of the assessment objectives

However do note there is still inconsistency in many responses between section A and B and also within Section A texts.

Clear enjoyment and accessibility of 'foundation' tier students with the texts offered and coverage of every text and every question on the paper, demonstrates that foundation students can cope with and enjoy literature! Schools must be applauded – the value is clear to see.

The main areas still causing some students problems are:

- Writer's methods – actually considering the author's craft and explaining the effect a particular approach or method has on the reader / audience / themes within the text etc
 - More fresh approaches to texts that allow students to demonstrate their enjoyment and understanding rather than rote learning which appears to be hindering students
 - AO4 in section B – linking of general context to move to 'supported context' with a clear and detailed explanation of the link between the two to move to 'explained' responses to context.
-