



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Literature

Specification 4710

**47104H (Approaching Shakespeare and the
Literary Heritage)**

Report on the Examination

2011 Examination – June series

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This was the first sitting of the Unit 4 examination under the new specification. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the entry was small, and those candidates who were entered have been assumed to be in the final term of Year 10; this may well have had some impact on the quality of the answers produced, and the range of texts attempted.

Several of the texts on the paper were not attempted, and, though some comments on individual questions will probably be universally applicable, it should be remembered that they are based sometimes on the experience of marking one centre's work only. Despite this, one hopes that teachers will be able to make some use of this report in planning their courses and in preparing their students for future sittings of the examination.

Section A

Macbeth

This was a (perhaps predictably) popular choice, with responses fairly evenly split between the two questions. The best responses focused closely on Shakespeare's dramatic techniques and their effects on the audience in conveying either Lady Macbeth's character or her relationship with her husband. Such responses did not merely identify techniques, but explored how they subtly delineate aspects of character for the audience, for example, how the soliloquy form conveys the intensity of Lady Macbeth's vision of her husband's essential nature, while the patterns of imagery reflect both this and her own ambition for the pair. Most of the Part (b) responses, reasonably enough, focused on the 'mad' scene for Question 1, and either the aftermath of the assassination of Duncan or the Banquo's ghost scene for Question 2, and in both cases useful contrasts were drawn. In many of the weaker responses, not much beyond a paraphrased account of the plot was offered, with little by way of language effects or awareness of ideas and themes to support this.

Much Ado About Nothing

No responses

Romeo and Juliet

This was the most popular choice of text, with Question 6 (Romeo and Juliet's difficulties) the more popular task, though Question 5 (ideas about love) elicited in general the more thoughtful responses. Many responses to Question 5 (like question 2) did little more than tell the story and so were unable to approach the higher mark bands. For Question 5, many of the more successful responses contrasted Romeo's view of love, as expressed in the extract (and elsewhere), with that of Mercutio, often in illuminating and impressive detail and depth. These candidates made the natural link between the techniques Shakespeare uses to achieve an impact on the audience and the way these techniques and effects are intimately connected to his themes. The hierarchy in the mark-scheme for bullet point 4 (Shakespeare's language choices and their effects on the audience) runs in the higher bands from Appreciation to Analysis and finally to Evaluation, and these are only accessible if students approach the text with an eye for literary, rhetorical and phonological detail and a constant awareness of the audience's potential response.

Twelfth Night

Most of the responses on this text attempted Question 7 on Viola's thoughts and feelings. A real enthusiasm for the text seemed particularly evident among candidates who had studied this play, and almost all had a clear grasp of Viola's situation and predicament. Again, however, candidates spent rather too much time telling the story, with which they seemed fully and pleasingly engaged, at the expense of looking closely at Viola's character at this point in the play. The passage offered lots of scope for comment on strands of imagery which might have led to a discussion of the theme of confused identity, and a number of the more successful responses picked up on this aspect of the task. Responses dealing with Feste (Question 8) were often characterised (appropriately enough) by sharp insight, and his role in the play as a whole was often thoughtfully considered. Interestingly, there was little story-telling in such responses.

Julius Caesar

No responses

Section B***Pride and Prejudice***

No responses

Wuthering Heights

No responses

Great Expectations

There were many extremely interesting responses to both questions on this text. Question 15 (about Magwitch) was the more popular, and candidates often showed a most sympathetic understanding of his character in the novel, often linked imaginatively and subtly to the context of the novel's creation. Dickens' evocation of Pip's responses to Magwitch throughout the novel were sometimes impressively analysed, and some useful points on narrative voice were made. Most candidates who attempted Question 16 on Pip's learning about life chose very sensibly to focus on the opening graveyard scene, but there was an interesting variety of second episodes chosen, from meeting Herbert, then Joe, in London, to the reunion with Bidley. Again, there was some good writing on Dickens' techniques of characterisation and narrative and their impact on the reader. Despite (because of?) the novel's length, simple story-telling was less of an issue here, and candidates generally approached both questions seemingly with a greater focus on the task. Contexts were often dealt with in pleasingly original and thoughtful ways, and there was, thankfully, little evidence of pre-prepared chunks of learned material being employed.

Wessex Tales

No responses

Animal Farm

This was by far the most popular text in Section B, and responses were roughly equally divided between the two questions. Many candidates had a good grasp of the Russian revolutionary parallels, but also tried to broaden out the contextual discussion with more contemporary references. Though these sometimes lacked a specific, focused link to aspects of the original text, it was pleasing to see AO4 being addressed in quite interesting and stimulating ways. Candidates also clearly engaged with the text and had a good understanding of its narrative detail. Both questions, however, did seem to lead many candidates into lengthy and unrewarding story-telling, at the expense of any real consideration of the methods Orwell employs either to create the character of Napoleon, or to examine more objectively how he portrays the rebellion's decline into disaster. Orwell's use of the fable form was similarly neglected by candidates. As with the Shakespeare questions, the bullet point relating to the writer's uses of language and their effects on the reader (here bullet point 2) was the least well considered.

Some general remarks which centres may find useful:

- Candidates need to focus closely on the writer's choices of language and/ or structure and/ or form, and their effects on the audience/ reader if they are to be successful. Links then made to themes and ideas will then inevitably be integral to the candidate's argument, rather than being detached and separate from it.
 - Simple story-telling was an issue throughout both sections, particularly so in the Part B of the Shakespeare question; context for the candidate-chosen scene can be established quickly in no more than a sentence or two, and then an analysis of language and effect can take over.
 - Lots of comments such as 'This quote (sic) shows Macbeth is scared' were made but could not attract a great deal of reward, being essentially a simple identification of an
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effect, rather than an explanation, or anything higher. The matter of **how** writers achieve their effects is the important one.

- All questions have the writer at their heart, and most candidates do mention the writer in the first sentence of their answers. However, many candidates then do not mention him/her **at all** in the rest of the answer, a symptom of a lack of focus on one of the crucial elements of all the questions.
- It might be worth teachers considering some planning work for the Shakespeare task which seeks to find links, both character-based and thematic, across the whole text in order to prepare students for this task.

A new paper offers a learning experience for all those involved, and from an examining perspective, there has been a great deal to admire in the candidates' work that has been seen in this session, and a number of lessons to be learned. Any advice given in this report is offered in a spirit of genuine appreciation of work already done and challenges already met, and to provide some guidance as to how further development may be helped to occur. Students' enthusiasm for all the texts studied was notable, and their insights, particularly in the contextual element of the prose texts, offers just one among many reasons to be optimistic about the future of the study of literature at this level.
