



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
January 2011**

English Literature

47101H

(Specification 4710)

Unit 1: Exploring modern texts (Higher)

Report on the Examination

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This examination is a first in several ways: the first examination of a new English Literature specification, the first time AQA has offered a unitary English Literature specification and the first time that the candidates are all likely to be in the second term of Year 10.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the candidature was relatively small. Also, some texts were not chosen by any centre and others by only by one. This report must be read in that light and, whilst many of the comments made may be universally applicable, others are based on scripts from one centre only. Also, it is possible that some texts which were responded to are not commented on in this report. Nonetheless, one hopes that teachers are able to benefit from some of this report in terms of informing their strategies in preparing their students for any future sitting of the examination.

SECTION A

William Golding: ‘Lord of the Flies’

This proved quite a popular choice and Question 3 the more popular task. The best responses were able to see Jack as a device and thus focused on his importance rather than merely his character. There was often some thoughtful consideration of how Jack changes during the course of the novel, as well as appreciation of a range of Golding’s methods of presenting him. More pedestrian responses just narrated the Jack/Ralph conflict in chronological terms. Question 4 was tackled by a few candidates, the best of whom focused clearly on themes and Golding’s purposes.

Susan Hill: ‘The Woman in Black’

There was a sense that the candidates who had prepared for this text had enjoyed it and many had an excellent and wide-ranging knowledge of the text. The majority of candidates chose Question 8 and whilst there were some imaginative and interesting responses. Most focused solely on Eel Marsh House and, in particular, on the first description. Some of the most insightful responses, however, came in answers to Question 7 and explored emotional – often as well as physical – isolation. In both responses, candidates were able to discuss Hill’s methods at some level.

Joe Simpson: ‘Touching the Void’

Few candidates had studied this text for the exam and many were not able to develop their ideas sufficiently for achievement in the higher bands. Also, many candidates struggled to comment on Simpson’s methods and their effects on the reader. [Questions 9 and 10]

Arthur Miller: ‘The Crucible’

Again, this was not an overly popular choice of text and most candidates who had studied it responded to Question 13 rather than Question 14. Answers to the former often relied heavily on narration and thus the focus of the task was lost. There was often little or no consideration of the idea of ‘blame’; nor was there much more than an awareness of the writer in many responses – thus the second part of the question was not really addressed.

J.B. Priestley: ‘An Inspector Calls’

This was a very popular choice and there was a sense that the vast majority of candidates engaged with the text on some level. It was pleasing to note that many candidates were well aware of the text as a play and wrote effectively about techniques such as stage directions and dramatic irony – especially with regard to Birling’s confident pronouncements. Better candidates had a sense of Priestley’s intentions but there was some confusion in weaker responses about capitalism/socialism. Question 17 was slightly more popular and elicited responses across nearly all the mark bands. Better responses explored the idea of the Inspector as a dramatic construct rather than a wholly realistic figure and how the character is the means by which Priestley brings out the tension in the Birling family. Tension between the generations was a fruitful area for exploration. Details were often securely linked to Priestley’s intentions and Priestley’s methods – especially stage directions – were often appreciated or analysed. Weaker responses dealt with tension in a very general way, along the lines of explaining that the Birlings were not happy with what the Inspector was telling them, supported by quotations indicating the family’s feelings.

Question 18 generally was not quite as well done and some responses became descriptions of the selfishness of each character, all four Birlings and Gerald. Such responses would probably have been

better had the focus been on one or two characters. The best responses considered the concept of selfishness in the play as a whole.

Dennis Kelly: 'DNA'

Responses to Question 19 focused well on the 'violent and unpleasant' steers of the task. There was generally a sound understanding of how the play worked dramatically and so the 'present the changes' part of the task was handled quite well (when it was handled) with references to Phil's eating, or not, and Leah's changing moods exemplified by her language, and amount of it. Some candidates did not, however, address the 'change' element of the question and focused exclusively on 'violence and unpleasant actions'. Question 20 was also handled well and most candidates had a good grasp of how the play works as a construct; the 'what does the writer achieve' focus was done well by discussing the audience's reaction and the dramatic impact of the way the information is revealed.

SECTION B

John Steinbeck: 'Of Mice and Men' Question 21

Part a)

Weaker responses struggled with the precise focus of the task – something which candidates need to be carefully prepared for. The 'methods' were often not identified, let alone analysed or explained. Instead, details were picked out and a gloss or paraphrase provided. Some candidates wrote as much as they knew about Candy and – unfortunately – a few did not really know who Candy is. The tendency was to focus on what we find out about Candy from the passage rather than how this is presented by Steinbeck.

Better responses were able to engage with details from the text and were able to explain – sometimes appreciate or analyse – for example, Steinbeck's use of dialogue, the reference to 'brilliant sunshine', language used to describe Candy and his actions.

Part b)

This elicited some responses which included generalisations about society at that time but only some related these to the text and, more specifically to Candy; for example, an assertion about old people being unwanted but with no details to support. Some students, however, were able to go beyond attitudes to old/disabled people and respond thoughtfully to the American Dream and Candy's desire to join in with George and Lennie; others considered Candy's view of Curley's wife and how this reflected ideas about women at that time.

Harper Lee: 'To Kill a Mockingbird' Question 24

Fewer candidates had studied this text.

Part a)

The context focus was in this part and, by and large, candidates were able to select and comment on details about the Ewells from the passage. Many were able to comment successfully on the language, especially 'guests of the county' and 'like the playhouse of an insane child' and then went on to relate this to the family's place in the hierarchy of Maycomb society – especially in relation to the black community.

Part b)

Mayella was usually considered sympathetically and many candidates explained how the reader would view her differently at different times. Sometimes, details of Mayella were linked to contextual issues and candidates were rewarded appropriately for these responses. Her relationship with her father was often well handled.

Candidates who did not respond as well to this novel seemingly did not know the text especially well.

General Remarks

- On the whole, Section A was done much better than Section B. Centres who are familiar with the AQA English Literature A will thus be more familiar with the type of questions asked in Section A, perhaps, and have therefore been more confident about preparing their candidates. Certainly, in Section A, there was a clearer addressing of relevant assessment objectives.

Section B tasks have a much more precise focus – in both parts a) and b) – and some candidates found this difficult. AO4 requires that candidates ‘relate’ texts to context and this is where some struggled – as they did with selecting relevant details. The focus on a particular passage and the methods used in it [AO2] needs to be practised as some of the skills required are clearly different from those required in Section A. It would be helpful for candidates to learn how to select, and perhaps categorise, methods and details. With just over twenty minutes for each part, the maxim of ‘write a lot about a little’ is a good starting point.

- Examiners reported that, given that candidates were probably in Year 10 – and obviously only early in the second term – that some were not quite ‘the finished product’ and may have benefited from a later entry. This was not so in all cases, however. Centres clearly have to make judgements about the preparedness of candidates on a unitary course.
- There was no doubt that many of the candidates had engaged on some level with the text they studied. There was some sense, however, that not all candidates had a secure knowledge and understanding of the texts, given some of the observations about plot and character they made in their responses– this was especially true of Steinbeck and Lee. These candidates were a minority, however.
- Some examiners remarked that several candidates would have been better served by entering foundation tier.

Something new in the examining world provides a learning experience for all those involved. Advice in this report is offered in a spirit of encouragement rather than criticism and in the knowledge that we all think English Literature is a very important subject and that we all want candidates to achieve as highly as they are able. Many candidates did very well and provided responses which showed enthusiasm and insight.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.