



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Literature

Specification 4710

**47104F: Approaching Shakespeare and the Literary
Heritage**

Report on the Examination

2012 Examination – June series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX
Andrew Hall Director General.

GCSE English Literature 4710

Principal Examiner's Report Unit 4 (47104F)

At Foundation level in this component some texts are considerably more popular than others: *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* in Section A, and *Animal Farm* in Section B. The comments below reflect this, and the general issues appeared to be the same on the other texts, albeit on limited evidence.

Section A: Shakespeare

The majority of the students in this series seemed to be Year 11 rather than younger, which perhaps explains more responses at a higher standard than previously seen. One examiner commented that 'many of the responses in Section A were structured and focused, and clearly the product of good teaching. Many were aware of Shakespeare's stagecraft and understood the dramatic tension underpinning the scenes.'

At the same time, there were some general weaknesses. Some students tended to work through the passage in Section A line by line (never the most successful approach), making a comment and supporting it with a quotation (Band 3), but then giving a literal meaning and then moving on rather than building on what they had selected, as in: 'Macbeth tries to pray: 'But wherefore could I not say amen?' This shows that he could not say amen.'

Another general weakness, as in the previous series of this component, was in the treatment of Assessment Objective 2: '*explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings.*' Some students ignored the writer's techniques altogether, so that there was no sense of the text as a literary construct, while others paid lip service to it in sentences like: 'Shakespeare presents Lady Capulet as mourning her daughter by saying 'Alack the day'. Another way of attempting to deal with AO2 but actually failing to do so lay in the deployment of such terms as 'negative diction', 'general connotations' and 'foreshadowing', which might lead somewhere if illustrated and explained, but mostly they were not.

Responses to Part (b) failed to score any additional marks if students simply showed the same skills as in Part (a), particularly if the same points as had been made in Part (a) were simply repeated, but applied to a different scene. Students tended to score better when they chose a scene which displayed a different feeling or attitude or a different aspect of the relationship in question from the one shown in the first part. Even more successful were those students who seemed to realise that they had not been able to score effectively in AO2 in dealing with the Part (a) passage, so chose a scene where they could do so in Part (b). Some students, apparently under the impression that response to context was tested in this section as well as in Section B, wasted time and space generalising about attitudes to witches in Jacobean times or Elizabethan reactions to Juliet's relationship with her parents.

Section B: ELH Prose

Although the assessment of response to context is still relatively new for schools who took the AQA legacy specification, on the whole students dealt with it well; sometimes it formed the strongest part of the response. It is important to note that the mark for Section B is 24, and is rewarded holistically. Thus, if a candidate's response to Part (a) of the question includes comment that can be rewarded for AO4 (context) it will be, and will count as part of the assessment, even if AO4 was apparently not targeted in this part. Similarly, if the prompt to tackle AO2 was apparently in Part (a) but the candidate addressed it more effectively in responding to Part (b), this would count.

The remarks about performance below use examples drawn from responses to *Animal Farm*, as this was overwhelmingly the most popular Section B choice, and there were insufficient responses to other texts to make meaningful general comments about them. As with the responses to Section A, the lowest achievement was generally in AO2. The writer's name was often mentioned, but if the formulation was (typically) 'Orwell presents Snowball as a lively pig' accompanied with a quotation supporting this comment but going no further, it does not really hit the Band 2 descriptor 'simple identification of method(s)', let alone anything in a higher band.

Perhaps inevitably at Foundation level, the question was often seen as an invitation to regurgitate lengthy lists of events instead of tackling the heart of the question. Thus, Question 19 Part (a) 'How does Orwell present the character of Snowball in the novel?' often produced a long account of everything that Snowball does, which is not the focus of the question, and resulted in a fairly low achievement in AO1 and an even lower one in AO2. Similarly, Question 20 Part (a) was 'Write about two occasions in the novel which you think are important', and weaker students recounted two events without really addressing significance, or the second bullet, 'how Orwell shows their importance.'

As stated above, the AO4 descriptors were often the most successfully met, especially where students realised that one of the two AO4 descriptors in each band was for use of detail relevant to contexts, which of course needs to be detail from the text concerned. In responses to *Animal Farm* the Russian Revolution featured heavily, and most successfully where the behaviour of the characters was detailed and clearly linked to their historical counterparts, and explained. The best moved on to consider wider or more general issues about society raised by the text. Those who only tried for general social philosophy tended to struggle for supporting detail.
