

# ***English News***

**May 2006**

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## **WELCOME TO THE THIRD EDITION OF ENGLISH NEWS!**

- v This newsletter is intended to keep you up-to-date with the OCR suite of English qualifications, from GCSE through to the Advanced Extension Award.
- v We hope that you will continue reading to find out about the latest developments, opportunities and resources.

## **IN THIS ISSUE YOU WILL FIND INFORMATION ON:**

- v GCSE set texts
- v A-Level developments
- v Research into 16+ writing standards
- v A-Level English Language support and resources
- v Shakespeare productions and education
- v Examining opportunities
- v Specification rules
- v AEA English

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## **Final phase of changes to set texts for GCSE**

Centres are reminded that summer 2006 marks a change to stories and poems set for examination at GCSE from the *Opening Worlds* and *Opening Lines* anthologies.

For GCSE English in May 2006 and subsequent sessions, the following stories from *Opening Worlds* are set for examination in Unit 2432 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument:

*The Young Couple* (Jhabvala);  
*Leela's Friend* (Narayan);  
*Games at Twilight* (Desai);  
*The Red Ball* (Khan);  
*Pieces of Silver* (Sealy);  
*The Winter Oak* (Nagibin).

All 12 stories from *Opening Worlds* remain set for examination in GCSE English Literature.

The sections from *Opening Lines* set for examinations in May 2006 and subsequent sessions for GCSE English and GCSE English Literature are:

Pre-1914 Poetry  
Section C: War  
OR  
Section D: Town and Country  
Post-1914 Poetry  
Section G: How it looks from Here  
OR  
Section H: The 1914-18 War (ii).

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## **Modern Women's Short Stories**

The Penguin Book of Modern Women's Short Stories, which is set for examination in GCSE English Literature, is now out-of-print. OCR has, however, negotiated a permissions agreement with Penguin for the photocopying of the text for those centres wishing to use this selection with its candidates.

The arrangement is that OCR provides upon request one copy of the 12 stories set for examination, which can then be photocopied by the centre. Penguin Books Ltd will invoice the centre £1.80 per copy.

To obtain the set of stories for photocopying, please e-mail your request to [english@ocr.org.uk](mailto:english@ocr.org.uk)

## Research into aspects of writing

*Gill Elliott and Nat Johnson from Cambridge Assessment's Research Division (ARD) describe a recent research study which looks at aspects of the writing of OCR's GCSE candidates.*

You may have seen articles in the press recently about aspects of GCSE candidates' writing. These articles refer to work carried out by the ARD, using OCR English scripts.

Research work on this topic was originally carried out in 1996, comparing candidates' work from 1980 with 1993 and 1994. In 2004 we selected a further sample of scripts in order to extend the comparison a further ten years.

The method used was to select the fourth sentence from the essay question of the OCR English paper for a sample of thirty boys and thirty girls at each available grade, thus giving us over 1500 sentences across the four years sampled.

Naturally, the nature of the work selected – a single sentence - limits the extent of the comparisons we can make, but we are able to investigate trends in:

- sentence length, structure and complexity;
- average word length and lexical sophistication;
- the correct and incorrect use of punctuation;
- counts of spelling errors;
- use of non-standard English words and phrases;
- effective communication.

The 1996 study suggested a decline in standards of performance on these particular aspects of writing across most grades since 1980. The current study has found that for the most part standards of performance have risen in the decade since 1994, although not to the levels seen in 1980. In particular, the sophistication of vocabulary has increased and the number of spelling errors has fallen at the lower grades. However there has been a huge increase in the amount of non-standard English seen in these examinations.

The full report discusses all the results in detail, and addresses the issue of whether such comparisons are fair and how we should interpret them.

We intend to continue this strand of research into the next decade, and are currently debating ways in which the methodology could be improved for future studies.

*Gill and Nat would be delighted to receive your comments about the current study or the future of such work. E-mail:*

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The full report, "Variations in aspects of writing in 16+ English examinations between 1980 and 2004" has been published as a special issue of the journal *Research Matters*. It is available online at [www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/research](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/research), or a printed copy can be obtained from Jane Fidler, Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment, email [fidler.j@cambridgeassessment.org.uk](mailto:fidler.j@cambridgeassessment.org.uk).

## **Support network for A-Level English Language**

An exciting, free service to promote discussion and the interchange of ideas between teachers preparing candidates for OCR's GCE English Language specification was launched on April 3.

The English Language on-line community is a country-wide group of teachers, examiners and professionals. Members can ask questions, share ideas and resources, recommend teaching strategies, and raise concerns.

OCR will also be posting messages and documents – including exemplar materials – to the community.

Messages from the community get delivered directly to members' e-mail account.

To become a member of the GCE English Language e-community, visit

<http://community.ocr.org.uk/lists/listinfo/englishlang-a>

We look forward to seeing our GCE English Language teachers there!

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## **Earn while you Learn**

Examining offers teachers an excellent opportunity to extend their professional experience while learning more about the assessment of the specification. It is also a great way to build networks with other teachers, and to gain direct access to the senior examiners.

For further details on becoming an examiner or moderator for any of the English qualifications, please e-mail [examiner.recruitment@ocr.org.uk](mailto:examiner.recruitment@ocr.org.uk), or telephone 01223 552558. Information on examining is also on the OCR website at [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)

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## **Consultation on new A-Levels**

At the time of going to press, QCA are about to begin consultation on new subject criteria for A-Level English qualifications. Visit [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk) to keep up-to-date on the consultation and subject developments.

## GCSE – The Terminal Rule

Centres taking advantage of the optional staged route through GCSE English and GCSE English Literature are once again reminded that they must meet the requirements of the **terminal rule**. This QCA rule requires that, in their final examination session, candidates **must** sit an examined unit or units amounting to **at least 50% of the specification**. The same rule applies to candidates who wish to re-enter for any unit(s).

Centres should note that **coursework units do not count towards the 50%** required by the terminal rule.

Candidates who have not fulfilled the requirements of the 50% terminal rule are not eligible for a subject grade, even though they may have completed all units in the specification.

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## Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

We hope that many of our Centres preparing candidates for Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* for unit 2713 of GCE English Literature will have been able to attend the staged production starring Kathleen Turner at the Apollo theatre in London. The show runs until May 13.

Perhaps those of you have attended could share your views on the performance with members of the GCE English Literature online community at <http://community.ocr.org.uk/lists/listinfo/englit-a>

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## GCE English Language attracting new centres

The OCR English Language A-Level is continuing to attract new centres, who are recognising the versatility of the subject area and the advantages to candidates for more effective written and spoken communication, enhanced analytical skills and a demonstration of thinking critically.

One new centre, Baxter College, is offering English Language alongside the OCR English Literature A-Level. Head of English Janet Bent said: "We have found that the students who have chosen English Language have really taken to it and will happily read *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, articles from newspapers and transcriptions of the spoken word. They have also enjoyed learning a whole new glossary of words to describe English."

To find out more about OCRs A-Level in English Language, visit [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk), or e-mail [english@ocr.org.uk](mailto:english@ocr.org.uk)

## Much Ado About Shakespeare

The Royal Shakespeare Company launched the most ambitious and exciting festival in its history on Shakespeare's birthday, 23 April 2006. A year-long celebration of the entire Shakespeare canon, **The Complete Works Festival** will take place between April 06 and April 07 in Stratford-upon-Avon. It is the first time that all 37 plays, the sonnets and the long poems will be performed in one place.

Fifteen of the productions will be staged by the RSC and together with performances by visiting companies from South and North America, Russia, China, Japan, the Middle East, Africa and across the UK and Europe, will examine Shakespeare's continuing influence on cultures around the world. As well as full-scale productions onstage, the Festival will also explore new takes on Shakespeare's plays, including original interpretations from experimental companies and new plays from contemporary dramatists. And in a unique commission by Opera North and the RSC, Shakespeare's sonnets will be set to music. Curated by one of the world's leading contemporary composers, Gavin Bryars, musical heavyweights such as singer/songwriter Natalie Merchant and violinist Alexander Balanescu, are among those who will set their chosen sonnets to music.

Underpinning the plays, the RSC Learning department has put together a series of events and activities designed specifically for students and teachers. A campaign looking at the way

Shakespeare is taught in our schools and colleges will kick-start an exciting programme of workshops, courses, lectures, demonstrations and outreach sessions. Called **Teaching Shakespeare - Time for Change**, the campaign is a direct response to the QCA's ongoing English 21 project and a full report will be presented to Government and key policy makers at the end of the Festival year.

August 2006 will also see the culmination of a ground-breaking project between three partners – the RSC, Gallery 37 and Nos do Morro. Deborah Shaw, Festival Director for **The Complete Works** at the RSC, explains: "Nos do Morro is a theatre school and company from the favelas - or slums - of Rio de Janeiro. Many young people there get caught up in gang and drug culture and the company uses theatre as a way of introducing young people to an alternative way of life. Gallery 37, in Birmingham, uses a similar approach by employing the arts to help young people at risk. The RSC's involvement means that these young people get to work with professional actors, directors and producers from one of the world's leading theatre companies and the collaboration demonstrates the ability of theatre to engage people regardless of background, age, sex, race and class.

"Another project that we're calling the **Mini Complete Works Festival**, will feature bite-sized interpretations of all 37 of Shakespeare's plays by school

children in the Warwickshire area. We will work with every school in Warwickshire on a training day and a cross section of schools will either perform their plays in The Dell, a new, informal outdoor theatre space, or in venues across Warwickshire.”

With the emphasis on practical and creative learning, the Festival year will also see the RSC join forces with five of the UK’s leading drama schools. The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama will produce edited versions of five Shakespeare plays aimed at younger audiences. Assisted by well-known RSC practitioners, the drama students will perform their plays at the Swan Theatre in Stratford, before taking the productions on tour to schools in the area.

In addition, a sixth-form conference called ***Hamlet: Text in Context*** takes place in May 2006. Aimed at English A-level students, the conference gives pupils the opportunity to spend a day in Stratford and focus in detail on the interpretation and contemporary relevance of *Hamlet*. Delegates will also have the opportunity to see the acclaimed South African ‘Baxter Theatre Centre’ perform

their version of *Hamlet*, as part of the main Festival line up.

Other highlights in the learning calendar for ***The Complete Works*** include a series of 45 minute Curtain Raisers, where selected schools will be invited to perform a short piece immediately before the main evening performance. Maria Evans, Director of Learning at the RSC, said: “Not only will the students work with RSC professionals to develop their own interpretations of the plays, but they will be given the unique opportunity to perform in The Swan theatre. It is this sort of once-in-a-lifetime experience that we want people to encounter as part of ***The Complete Works*** and by visiting the RSC. By bringing the learning experience to life and getting students and teachers actively involved in the creative process, we hope that we can use the Festival as a platform to improving our audiences’ enjoyment and understanding of Shakespeare.”

Throughout the festival, RSC Learning will also run regular ***Midweek Workshops*** for school groups who are attending performances; specially designed ***Teachers’ Courses*** looking at engaging and effective approaches to Shakespeare; and ***Outreach Training Days***, where RSC Learning practitioners deliver a variety of workshops in a venue of choice.

Further information can be found at [www.rsc.org.uk/learning](http://www.rsc.org.uk/learning) and at [www.rsccompleteworks.co.uk](http://www.rsccompleteworks.co.uk)

RSC Ticket Hotline 0870 6091110

# **The Advanced Extension Award (AEA) in English – your questions answered**

## **What is the AEA and who can we enter for it?**

The AEA in English is a qualification aimed at anyone who might benefit from a more challenging paper than that offered by A level – notionally the top ten per cent of students in the subject. It consists of a single, three hour examination taken at the end of the summer session. The emphasis is on depth of understanding and independent response.

## **Is it just for Literature students? Are there any set texts?**

No. The paper caters for candidates across the range of English study, including those from Language, and Language and Literature. This is reflected in a diverse booklet of unseen reading material, organised around a central theme, from which candidates make selections in their answers. They will also be able to draw on their own knowledge and reading from the particular areas of English they have studied. There is no set text requirement.

## **Do we have to teach it?**

The paper is designed to require no additional teaching, though some familiarity with the open style of the paper will help. Beyond this, centres will decide themselves what additional teaching or preparation is involved. Entry for the AEA provides opportunities for programmes of enrichment as well as individual and small group tuition.

## **Does it carry additional UCAS points?**

Yes, as from 2006. A pass at AEA is graded either Merit or Distinction level. Points for Advanced Extension Awards are over and above those gained from the A level grade and come into effect for entry to higher education in 2006. (Merit = 20; Distinction = 40.) More details can be found on the UCAS website: <http://www.ucas.com/candq/tariff/index.html>

## **How can we get hold of the specification and other materials? Any other support?**

You can download the specification, teacher and student's guides, and a specimen paper from the OCR website [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk) . Hard copies of these, along with past papers, can be ordered from OCR publications. Details of AEA INSET events appear in the OCR English Training programme, and are usually scheduled in the Autumn. Some events can also be delivered at your centre. For more information contact OCR on 01223 55 3998 or e mail [english@ocr.org.uk](mailto:english@ocr.org.uk)