

GCE

English Literature

Advanced GCE **H472**

OCR Report to Centres June 2017

About this Examiner Report to Centres

This report on the 2017 Summer assessments aims to highlight:

- areas where students were more successful
- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice for future examinations

It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

The report also includes:

- An invitation to get involved in Cambridge Assessment's research into **how current reforms are affecting schools and colleges**
- Links to important documents such as **grade boundaries**
- A reminder of our **post-results services** including Enquiries About Results
- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programme
- A link to our handy Teacher Guide on **Supporting the move to linear assessment** to support you with the ongoing transition

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Researchers at Cambridge Assessment¹ are undertaking a research study to better understand how the current reforms to AS and A levels are affecting schools and colleges.

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Supporting the move to linear assessment

This was the first year that students were assessed in a linear structure. To help you navigate the changes and to support you with areas of difficulty, download our helpful Teacher guide: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/341817-moving-from-modular-to-linear-qualifications-teachers-guide.pdf>

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H472/01 Drama and poetry pre- 1900

General Comments:

This seems to have been a successful first series for this new paper. While elements of the paper have clear precedent in the former OCR F663 unit, other aspects are entirely new, and it is greatly to the credit of Centres and candidates that – on the whole – they have absorbed the requirements of the paper (its structure and approach to assessment) and managed its requirements with some success – and all in a comparatively brief space of time.

One notable feature of the new paper is its length. Two hours and thirty minutes is a substantial period of time for candidates to be focusing and writing. Many candidates have risen to this challenge impressively. Several assessors have noted how unusually lengthy many scripts have been with the suggestion being made that - in fact - some candidates are possibly writing too much. Candidates might like to consider using some of the 'extra' time available to think ahead and to plan answers appropriately, and then leave some time to check responses. Individual answers of seven or eight pages can be too long: there is no need for a candidate to write down everything he/she knows about a set text; rather the time should be used to focus specifically on the terms of the question and on the relevant application of the assessment objectives. Complete scripts of twenty or more pages were not uncommon in this series. Although planning is clearly a useful exercise, it was again noted by some assessors that some plans were simply too long to be of practical benefit in an examination context.

The new structure of this paper did present difficulties for some candidates: many approached the three answers required on equal terms. This meant that – rather than spending an equal amount of time on Sections 1 and 2 – some candidates considered the paper to have three equal parts. Candidates should be reminded that only fifteen marks are available for each of part (a) and part (b) of section 1 - and Section 2 of the paper carries a full 30 marks. Once again this would seem to be an issue of timing, planning and pragmatism when it comes to approaching the paper in the examination room. More candidates than usual were answering the paper 'backwards' (ie. doing Section 2 first before attempting Section 1) – which is a perfectly acceptable way to approach the paper.

It should be remembered that the application of the Assessment Objectives in the three parts of the paper is quite different. In effect, part (a) of Section 1 requires candidates to focus on linguistic and dramatic devices in the set passage; in part (b) of Section 1 there is a focus on interpretation; and in Section 2 context is dominant. As well as addressing the specific terms of the question in each case, candidates do need to ensure that they are focusing their answers on the requirements of the relevant Assessment Objectives each time. Whereas the answer to part (b) in Section 1 does require some sort of structured development, assessors are open to a more ruminative and discursive approach from candidates in part (a) of Section 1 and in Section 2.

As ever with OCR's A-Level in English Literature (legacy or revised) it has been very good to note during this series how well prepared – on the whole – candidates have been for this component. Most importantly, many candidates' engagement with literature continues to be perceptive, fresh and impassioned – and clearly this is a credit to candidates, to their Centres, and to the subject itself.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section 1 – Shakespeare

General notes –

There was a tendency for some candidates to write very detailed comments about the features of punctuation printed in the excerpts [Section (a)] and Centres should be reminded that this is sometimes a feature of editing and therefore precise observations about, for example, “Shakespeare’s use of the exclamation mark” should be used with care.

Part (a) of this Section does simply ask that candidates ‘Discuss’ the passage and they should feel free to approach that task in any way suitable to the question and the Assessment Objectives. This is an opportunity for candidates (and not always one taken up by them) and a new feature of the ‘revised’ specification.

Many candidates used stage and film productions of the plays to great effect as part of their consideration of interpretations in part (b).

There is a clear connection between the events, themes and ideas in the context part (a) and the essay part (b) in this Section. Candidates may choose to explore and exploit this link if they wish.

1 – *Coriolanus*

Unfortunately this was not a popular text and very few answers were seen. A handful of responses focused on dynamics of power, family and gender in part (a). Pride proved to be a popular choice in part (b) with some candidates choosing to employ classical terminology of ‘hubris’, ‘nemesis’, etc. in their answers. It is hoped that this play will become more popular as the life of the paper extends.

2 – *Hamlet*

This was probably the most popular Section 1 text choice. Candidates had a great deal to say about the context passage (a) which seemed to give them the chance to consider a wide variety of linguistic and dramatic aspects. Some candidates were keen to point out that the passage does not feature one of Hamlet’s ‘great soliloquies’ (with some disappointment) and it is perhaps worth issuing a reminder at this stage that part (a) Shakespeare passages can be taken from any stage in the set plays. The subtleties apparent in the way Horatio and Hamlet address each other (including their tendency to complete each other’s lines) were considered by some candidates. Signs of Hamlet’s “antic disposition” were also mentioned. References to kingship, fatherhood and death were also exploited. The “funeral bak’d-meats” provided an impetus for candidates wishing to explain the play’s leanings towards the macabre. The part (b) essay about death was perhaps an unexpected topic for some candidates – and there was, perhaps, a clear sense of some candidates (profitably) thinking on their feet about the subject. Others chose to debate the term ‘disturbing fascination’ at the centre of their response. Many candidates were able to list a very large number of characters and incidents relating to death in the play – from the very opening of the play to its conclusion (via Ophelia and “To be or not to be” – amongst other episodes – along the way). Some assessors were surprised that there was very little mention of the gravediggers and Yorick in this part.

3 – *Measure for Measure*

This play was another very popular choice. Candidates had a great deal to say about the relationship and dynamic presented between Isabella and Angelo in this scene (sometimes making comparison with the second, parallel, meeting scene). Legal terminology, shared lines, rhetorical tricks, and the sense of a battle of wills formed the focus for many of the comments made. The place of Lucio (“like Shakespeare himself” according to one candidate) in the scene provided a useful discriminator in some answers. The link between this passage and the essay

question (b) about justice and mercy was a clear one for many candidates. Many had – perhaps – been expecting such an essay question, but it was those candidates who were able to address the prompt quotation in full (with its reference to a difficult relationship) who were often able to be most successful. From the focused dialogue of Isabella and Angelo in the context passage, candidates were often able to expand consideration of the key terms in the question to consider the wider social implications of Shakespeare's Vienna.

4 – *Richard III*

This was not a popular text and very few answers were seen. Of the very few responses available, most seemed to pick up on the Richard/Buckingham theme in the part (b) essay when addressing linguistic and dramatic matters in the part (a) context. It is hoped that this play will become more popular as the life of the paper extends.

5 – *The Tempest*

Quite a few responses to this play were seen – although it was perhaps not quite the very popular choice expected. In the context part (a) – perhaps with an eye to the part (b) essay – there tended to be a focus on the character of Caliban. Candidates seem to be fascinated by this character and what they clearly (often) believe to be his 'mistreatment' to the extent that post-colonial theories about his place in the island society are often presented. Attitudes to Prospero in part (a) seem to be as varied as ever with some candidates finding evidence of benevolence in his language while others are keen to highlight his tyranny. The cursing by both Prospero and Caliban was highlighted by many candidates – as was the parallel nature of much of the language of the teacher/master on the one hand and the pupil/slave on the other. Many candidates seemed to agree with both sides of the prompt quotation about Caliban in part (b). Less effective answers tended to offer a generalised character sketch of the creature whereas more perceptive answers synthesised these aspects of his character in a more subtle response.

6 – *Twelfth Night*

This text was a fairly popular choice. Many candidates had a great deal to say about the prose style of the context passage and this was often contrasted with other structures elsewhere in the play. Candidates were often impressive in the way they recognised the complexity of the language being used by these 'below-stairs' characters – sometimes coarse and laden with 'double entendres'; sometimes thoughtful and allusive. The pathos of Sir Andrew was frequently highlighted – as was the degree of vitriol aimed at Malvolio by the others. Deliberate deception proved to be a popular topic in part (b): weaker answers sometimes merely provided a list of such events in the play whereas more sophisticated responses often attempted to create a thesis about how the various deceptive acts in the play combined to provide a particular view of human nature.

Section 2 – Drama and Poetry pre-1900

General notes –

In some cases it was clear that – when there was disappointment that an 'expected' or 'prepared' topic had not been addressed directly as one of the questions set – some candidates attempted to turn the question picked towards that preferred topic (which sometimes meant that the question chosen was not appropriately addressed).

The most popular texts in this Section were *The Duchess of Malfi*, *A Doll's House* (and *An Ideal Husband* – to some extent), Chaucer, Milton and Rossetti. Very little was seen of Marlowe, Goldsmith, Coleridge or Tennyson. The most popular combinations of texts for comparison were: Webster with Chaucer and Ibsen with Rossetti.

Context is by far the dominant Assessment Objective in this Section of the paper and some candidates seemed to find it difficult to write in a sustained way about their chosen texts from

this perspective. Better answers integrated contextual material into the response rather than simply ‘bolting on’ a long, unrelated exposition in this area.

The comparative element in this Section was handled in a variety of ways by different candidates. Weaker answers tended to write about one text first – and then address the second text in an unrelated way. This could be a reasonably successful way of approaching the question but more sophisticated answers nearly always kept both texts ‘in play’ throughout the length of the answer.

7 – This was quite a popular question. Many candidates found that the question applied very effectively to their chosen combination of texts and the general conclusion was that people are indeed both vain and selfish. The question was often used by candidates as a vehicle for exploring a feminist reading of their set texts (when – arguably – there was no specific question on the paper facilitating this approach) particularly by considering the selfish behaviour of men towards women. Selfishness was occasionally seen as desirable (for example in the Duchess’s intention to live in the way she wishes) but – more often - was portrayed as sinful and vain (with Chaucer’s characters often being cited in this context). Contextual material drawn from the Christian tradition was often cited for this question.

8 – This was a fairly popular question – but not excessively so. There was clear scope to discuss truth and secrecy in most of the listed texts. Contrasts, changes and revelations tended to be the focus of answers addressing this question. Texts in which a turning point in behaviour or attitude was presented (Ibsen, Wilde, Milton, Coleridge) tended to offer most scope for discussion and some candidates handled this very well indeed. Again – religious contextual material often featured in answers.

9 – This was not a very popular question but some candidates did handle it very well. A number of strong candidates seized the opportunity to define ‘The Outsider’ in a suitable way which also matched their own requirements in addressing the question. Outsiders were perceived in all sorts of literary contexts in relation to the set texts – whether rulers who struggled with their roles (the Duchess; Edward II) or visitors (in Goldsmith or in Coleridge’s poetry) or those who found it difficult to fit in with the norms of their society (Nora in Ibsen’s play; Milton’s first couple; Tennyson’s suffering narrator).

10 – This answer was rarely attempted even though it did offer a topic suitable for both narrative and lyric writing in equal measure. The few candidates who did address this question chose to consider the key term ‘reflection’ in a number of different ways: characters were perceived to be reflecting on their own thoughts or reflecting upon the actions of others or even (in one lively response) acting as a mirror to reflect the behaviour of others back onto them. Favoured chosen texts for this question included *Edward II* and Rossetti.

11 – This was a very popular question. Freedom was perceived by many candidates to be one of the central qualities to be recognised, celebrated and indeed encouraged by literary texts. The appeal (and danger) of freedom was perceived to be a topic in all the texts listed and answers covering every text – although not in every combination – were seen at some point in the series. Characters in the texts were frequently portrayed as trying to free themselves from an oppressive situation (and this was often presented contextually from a feminist or Marxist perspective). Characters were sometimes seen to fail in their bid for freedom and – at times – freedom was presented as failing to offer all it had promised.

12 – This was another very popular question. Most candidates seemed to agree that loss and suffering are universal states in the human condition and that most people try to escape from their effects although in many cases this is not possible. Some candidates treated loss and suffering as two separate – but related – states while other saw them as being synonymous. A litany of suffering and loss was cited in all the listed texts and better answers tended to identify both the reasons for the loss/suffering and the effects caused by it. Webster and Milton tended to be the most popular texts in this context.

H472/02 Comparative and contextual study

General Comments:

Candidates were generally well prepared for this paper and many seemed to relish the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise in their chosen topic area. There was take-up for all five topics, although the 'Immigrant Experience' option was less popular than the other choices. The top answers were eloquent and knowledgeable, impressively confident in literary discussion and adept at selecting contextual material in its support. Weaker responses were inclined at times to use contextual material almost as a substitute for engagement with literature.

Candidates were required to complete a critical appreciation of an unseen passage and a comparative essay. The contrast in question-types meant that some candidates performed significantly more strongly in one answer than the other. Candidates were sometimes inclined to introduce a substantial amount of prepared material into the critical appreciation at the expense of exploring the unseen passage, although analysis of the set passage attracted most of the marks. Weaker scripts were sometimes dependent on a few examples taken from texts and contexts which they deployed in both their answers; although there is no penalty for repeating material, these scripts were inevitably among those attracting lower marks.

Some answers were unnecessarily lengthy. In these responses, candidates often needed to be more selective and to give more time and thought to developing an argument, rather than just building up large amounts of material. Longer answers sometimes suffered from illegibility too; centres and candidates are reminded that answers should be clearly presented and legible, and that more candidates should perhaps take advantage of the opportunity to word-process their scripts.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Q1 Passage from *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson.

Answers to this question usually demonstrated understanding of the passage which was competent or better. Some were outstandingly good, identifying subtle qualities of Anderson's prose and eloquently demonstrating its effects. Knowledge of the topic frequently led to some sophisticated readings, such as the significance of the westerly direction of the view from Jesse's window. All candidates tended to characterise Jesse as a patriarchal figure, using as evidence his harsh treatment of his young wife; hardly any, oddly, linked his patriarchal nature to his youthful interest in the Bible or his patriarchal name. Links were frequently made to *The Great Gatsby*: candidates found Jesse and Jay to be alike in their commitment to hard work and success, and better answers also pointed out that there are differences between them too in terms of character and milieu. Links were also made to *The Grapes of Wrath*, often identifying Jesse's hard-pressed employees with the suffering Okies.

Q2(a) *The Great Gatsby*
'Characters in pursuit of money lie at the heart of much American literature.'

Answers to this question were usually successful, although some candidates found it difficult to make the question work well with *The Grapes of Wrath*; they were sometimes reduced to drawing a very simple comparison between the pursuit of wealth and the desperate quest to stay alive. Many candidates chose *The Age of Innocence* to compare with *Gatsby*, one showing an impressively detailed knowledge of the text and concentrating on Sillerton Jackson, Julius Beaufort and the van der Luydens. Effective context about the Roaring Twenties was supplied by the majority.

Q2(b) *The Grapes of Wrath*
'American literature often depicts a society which is cruel to its most vulnerable members.'

This question was often answered with reference to the two core texts, and usually George Wilson was identified as the vulnerable character to be compared with the Okies in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Q2(c) 'Much American literature is characterised by the importance of hope in adversity.'

Again, the core texts were both popular choices here, with *Gatsby* perhaps offering more in relation to hope and *The Grapes of Wrath* supplying plenty of adversity.

Q3 Passage from 'A Night in the Catacombs' by Daniel Keyte Sandford.

Answers to this question generally focused on a range of Gothic details and effects. Weaker responses were inclined to find details which they used as triggers to enable discussion of prepared material; these candidates usually glossed over the events of the passage and seemed to have a limited sense of its events. Better answers stayed closer to the passage, only introducing contextual discussion where it helped to illuminate the text. Gothic context was sometimes reduced to a range of familiar tropes which were often merely asserted to be characteristically Gothic; better answers could refer to named authorities (for example Ann Radcliffe on terror and horror) or seminal Gothic texts (such as *The Castle of Otranto*) to support their discussion.

Q4(a) *Dracula*
'Gothic writing frequently explores the battle between good and evil.'

Answers employed *Dracula* to good effect in discussion, usually choosing to compare it with *The Bloody Chamber* or *Frankenstein*. Candidates were often adept at identifying doubt and ambiguity relating to good and evil in their chosen texts.

Q4(b) *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*
'In Gothic writing, female characters are generally presented as victims.'

This was the most popular comparative essay question. Candidates had given a lot of thought to the role of female characters in the Gothic, and usually chose to compare *The Bloody Chamber* to *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Some answers focused on feminist issues and were inclined to lose sight of the Gothic context. Candidates were expected to reference at least three Angela Carter stories in their answers, and most met this expectation.

Q4(c) 'Suspense is a key feature of narrative in Gothic writing.'

At the time of writing, no work had been seen in response to this question.

Q5 Passage from 'Is This Your Day To Join The Revolution?' by Genevieve Valentine

Answers to this question necessarily spent some time demonstrating that they understood the situation presented in the story. In weaker answers, this sometimes led to a response based heavily on the first part of the passage, and some candidates didn't even reference the passage's dramatic crisis with the interruption of the film and the police chase. Better answers commented on details throughout the passage's presentation and drew parallels with many other examples of dystopian fiction.

Q6(a) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
'Dystopian writing is driven by the voice of protest.'

There were many excellent answers to this question, usually starting from the premise that the writers of their chosen texts (often the two core texts, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale*) were inspired by contemporary events and situations to produce their dystopian works. Knowledge of context was often excellent, and at its best where closely tied to the texts and to literary issues.

Q6(b) *The Handmaid's Tale*
'Dystopian writing frequently suggests that men, not women, are responsible for society's problems.'

Answers to this question usually referenced second wave feminism as a contextual factor for *The Handmaid's Tale* and put some work into sharing out the blame for society's problems; oddly, some suggested that women were at fault for precipitating the crisis in fertility in the Atwood novel. Links to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were often made, and better candidates made some capital about the relative scarcity of female characters in this novel.

Q6(c) 'Social and religious conformity are key areas for dystopian writers.'

Answers to this question usually focused on the oppressive forces which require conformity in dystopian fiction, and pointed out that the human instinct for self-expression and rebellion creates the drama in these texts. The two core texts were again the popular choices, although work was also seen on most of the other listed alternatives, often in addition to the first two.

Q7 Passage from *The Edible Woman* by Margaret Atwood.

Answers on this passage were usually pleasingly attentive to AO2 detail, noticing the lack of balance in the dialogue (Joe dominating over Marian) and the effects of the social setting, with Marian in a feminine role as hostess and Joe approaching her from 'the men's territory'. Some were not alive to the humour of the passage, and some even praised Joe for his sensitivity to the problems women face. Very good answers took on the remarkable image of 'large globular pastry' floating above Joe's head in Marian's vision, and offered a range of plausible interpretations.

Q8(a) *Sense and Sensibility*
'Female characters in literature are unfairly restrained by social convention.'

This was not a very popular choice, but attracted some excellent answers, for example one which paired the set text with *Jane Eyre*. A discriminator at the top end was whether or not candidates registered the word 'unfairly' in the question.

Q8(b) *Mrs Dalloway*
'Women in literature are engaged in a search for identity.'

This was the most popular comparative essay choice for this topic, and candidates often paired *The Bell Jar* or *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* with *Mrs Dalloway*. As with other questions in this topic area, examiners often found that candidates wrote more thoughtfully about women's roles than they did in some other topic areas such as the Gothic or Dystopia.

Q8(c) 'Female characters in literature are depicted as each other's strongest supporters.'

There were a few lively responses to this question, and candidates often came down in the middle, finding that Clarissa Dalloway in particular is not necessarily 'one of the sisterhood' and

that the female characters in *Sense and Sensibility* are split in this regard. Again, answers were more nuanced in this area than is often the case in A Level literature responses on the role of women.

Q9 Passage from *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid.

At the time of writing relatively little work has been seen, but some responses registered the surprise of the air being cold when the sun is shining and picked up on the pessimistic colour imagery of 'black, blacker, blackest'. There was a tendency to assume (wrongly) that the passage relates to a move from the West Indies to the UK in the 1950s.

Q10(a) *Call it Sleep*

No work seen.

Q10(b) *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

'Immigrants in literature are often depicted as isolated figures.'

Some work was seen in response to this question, usually pairing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* with *Small Island* by Andrea Levy. Candidates were inclined to limit their discussion to a comparison between Changez in the first text and Hortense in the second.

Q10(c) 'The literature of immigration explores the fascination of a new world.'

Very little seen.

H472/03 Literature post- 1900

A new specification and unit can take a little time to bed down, but the overwhelming experience of Moderators was that the Non Examined Assessment was immediately a great success, with Centres offering a wide range of interesting work, often very carefully assessed. There are certainly areas for refinement, but the impression is that Centres and candidates are very comfortable with the demands of the component.

Administration

The administration in most Centres was efficient, with well-packaged coursework arriving on time with all the relevant paperwork. This was not universal, however, and it may be worth offering a few tips and reminders:

- A copy of the Centre's final Text and Task Approval notice should be included with the sample.
- The coversheet, as the final statement of the candidate's attainment, and the Moderator's working document, needs to be properly completed, with candidate name and number, texts and task titles, marks, word counts and summative comment. While it is appreciated that some Centres have extensive comments at the end of essays, there should be a summary of the most salient points, relating to the AOs, on the coversheet.
- Essays should be attached in the right order to the coversheet using a treasury tag. Paperclips become detached or attach themselves to other essays, while plastic wallets are an encumbrance. Loose, unattached sheets, as sometimes sent by Centres, have the potential for mixing and confusion.
- Task 1, either Close Reading or Recreative, should be accompanied by a photocopy of the relevant section of the original text.

Text and Task Choices

The use of the Text and Task Approval Service is compulsory for this component, which some Centres seem not to have realised. This is to ensure that texts fulfil the specification requirements and that tasks are shaped in a way which will lead candidates towards the relevant assessment objectives. This does not mean that a task which has gained approval is a perfect task – only that it fulfils the requirements. It became clear over the session, for example, that Close Reading tasks which explicitly foreground the analysis of the extract are the most successful.

As part of the design for the co-teachability of the specification with the AS qualification, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Jerusalem* were perhaps the most popular texts and they certainly dominated offerings on drama. However, *The History Boys* was also very popular, and some Centres presented work on playwrights as diverse as Arthur Miller and John Osborne, Caryl Churchill and Tom Stoppard, Polly Teale and Noël Coward. While *The World's Wife* dominated the poetry, Duffy was also represented by other collections, and there was a wide range of poetry offered, including Simon Armitage, EE Cummings, Thomas Hardy, Seamus Heaney, Philip Larkin, Dalgit Nagra, Wilfred Owen, Sylvia Plath, Owen Sheers and Jo Shapcott, to name a few. Prose texts varied widely. Ian McEwan featured frequently, with Adichie, Atwood, Greene, Hosseini, Joyce, O'Neill, Salinger and Yates appearing several times.

The most common approach by Centres was for all candidates to write on the same texts. This worked well when they were allowed to choose their own extract or poem for Task 1 and had an individual question for Task 2. Occasionally candidates responded to the same tasks too, which denied them the opportunities for the individual reading, thinking and research for which the component is designed, and inevitably led to a staleness in the responses. In a high number of

Centres, a common text for Task 2 had been paired with an individual choice, which extended the candidates' opportunities, and a few Centres gave their students full choice over texts and tasks, fully embracing the opportunities afforded by the component. When learners are able to follow their own interests and direction, the result is a freshness of response and extra spark of interest which in most cases leads to higher marks.

Tasks

Task 1 Close Reading

The purpose of this task is to give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their skills of close, sustained analysis, which is why AO2 is dominant in the marking. Certainly, Moderators read many examples of sophisticated, probing analysis of writers' methods across the three genres. The most successful were alert to structure and form as well as language and imagery, and in drama, to the effects of lighting, sound, costume, setting, entrances and exits – here Tennessee Williams' 'plastic theatre' was appreciated by many of the candidates writing on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. On the other hand, the wording of some questions led candidates to write general essays, as they did not pick up clearly enough on the prompts to 'discuss ways in which...' or 'how the writer presents...' and wrote thematic essays which did not sufficiently address AO2. In cases like this, teachers might do well to discuss the implication of task wording with their students, looking at the AOs, before they start writing, to ensure the students are fully aware of the demands of the task.

The other part of this task is to see the selected poem or extract as part of the wider text and to note its contribution to the text, both stylistically and in terms of developing concerns. The strongest responses showed secure contextualisation of the passages with careful discussion and precise references to other points in the text, used to illuminate aspects of the discussion of the selected section. Sometimes, though, essays communicated little sense of the broader text. This was often the case with poetry, with few or only cursory references to other poems in the collection. Such essays did not provide a confident sense of having studied a whole text as opposed to just one poem, which affected their address of AO1.

There were a number of Task 1 essays which featured discussion, sometimes at length, of different readings and of contexts. There may be a case for this if it allows a learner to tease out and develop an analytical point with greater understanding, but in most cases seen by Moderators, it detracted from the analytical focus of the essay and suggested that candidates were not always sure which objectives were being assessed in the task. With the task being only about 1000 words, it is important to keep the focus on the key AOs.

Task 1 Recreative

A substantial number of candidates offered a recreative piece as their Task 1, many clearly relishing the creative opportunity to explore the writers' concerns and techniques by imitating them. Moderators saw many lively, carefully observed pastiches and in many cases were awed by the skill of candidates as they wrote parallel poems, new scenes or additional chapters. One of the keys to success here, apart from very close observation of how the original writer chooses language and shapes the text, is judging the length of the recreated passage. Candidates need to write enough to demonstrate the grasp of style and concerns, but avoid writing too much, so that their recreation is concentrated and they do not run out of steam. This also leaves more room for the very important commentary. Some of the most successful wrote about 300 words for their passage and 700 for the commentary. This allowed for a careful discussion of both the recreated passage and the original text, analysing stylistic aspects and what is achieved by them in a sustained way, rather than a simple accounting for decisions in the style of 'the author uses this metaphor so I used a similar one', which offers much less scope.

It also helps to choose texts with clearly recognisable traits and opportunities for additions. Moderators saw perceptive and skilful new sections for Armitage's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, simmering scenes between Stanley and Blanche from *Streetcar*, amusing and witty vignettes from *The History Boys*, additional poems for *Rapture*, some striking additions to *Atonement* and ruminative explorations of the narrator's position in *Spies*, to pick out just a few.

Task 2 Comparative

While this task is titled Comparative, all of the assessment objectives are assessed equally, making this a complete, balanced, literary essay. Moderators saw many examples of just that, written with thought, intelligence and sophistication, as candidates directed their complex theses on challenging texts. Such work showed a keen grasp of the texts as constructed literature, rather than concentrating purely on content, ideas and characters, organising their ideas into careful arguments. It is important that essays achieving high marks have a clear drive and purpose; there were examples of essays, albeit interesting, which were characterised more by general exploration or description, being awarded marks high in the range. Sometimes candidates' writing was fluent, but the essays comprised accounts of what happens in the texts, what characters say and do. No matter how well written, such work does not represent literary argument.

As the component requires learners to study texts from all three genres, the comparative task inevitably asks them to compare two texts from different genres, and the strongest work took this as a starting point, looking at how a play and a collection of poems, or a novel and a play, or a novel and poetry, approach topics in distinctive ways. Many candidates' discussion, however, did not differentiate between drama, prose or prose. Often, AO2 skills which were in evidence in Task 1, disappeared in Task 2. Poetry was a particular problem here, with little discussion of verse form or versification, and very few candidates ever quoting poetry as verse, in its lines. Most often, little snippets were extracted from their context, with little sense of their contribution to the meaning of the poem from which they were taken. Frequently drama was poorly handled too, essays concentrating on what characters do and say without considering the playwright's construction of dialogue, monologue, modes of language, stage directions and so on. On the whole, candidates seemed more confident when discussing prose, but this would be improved by a greater awareness of the construction and writing of novels and short stories, seeing characters clearly as literary constructs. It was curious to see discussions of characters in meta-fictional texts, such as *Atonement*, still sometimes treated as real people.

Non examined assessment has moved on a long way from the days when learners added unattached chunks of context into their essays; in this component, contexts were usually dealt with appropriately, with candidates judging their importance, significance and influence. It is most helpful when contextual references are used to highlight or develop argument about specific aspects of the texts. In this way, the significance is much easier to apply and argue. Contexts vary enormously, in accordance with texts studied, and some text choices are clearly guided by context, such as Modernism, First or Second World War, 20th century America, dystopia or post colonialism. Other interesting areas considered fruitfully were class, gender and power relationship contexts. Biographical contexts need careful handling and can overpower a discussion of the literature, as can be the case with Sylvia Plath, for example. It is important to be able to discuss even the work of confessional writers as literary constructs, rather than purely as illustrations of personal crises. It was interesting to see that some text choices, and therefore contexts, were clearly informed by contemporary concerns, with mental illness and sexual abuse appearing a number of times, and discussed with maturity, sensitivity and careful research.

The most successful work was driven by the comparison, with AO1 and AO4 closely entwined. While it can be appropriate to develop a key idea on a single text in a paragraph as a springboard for subsequent comparison, essays need to keep the texts closely together. At about 2000 words, the essay is not a long one, so consistent comparison is important. Most tasks are phrased along the lines of 'Compare ways in which...' Such wording makes it clear

that the focus of the essay is a comparison of the writing of the texts, a comparison of the writers' approaches, a comparison of the ways the texts are constructed. Authors of strong essays had this firmly in mind. Less successful work focused on a comparison of ideas, or a comparison of characters, rather than how those ideas or characters are presented to the reader or audience. Again, this is something to look at with learners before they begin to write.

The essay also required essays to demonstrate discussion or exploration of different readings of the text under discussion. Many candidates showed evidence of careful and extensive research and wider reading, considering the views of older and contemporary critics or reviewers. A high level of exploration and engagement with such views is needed for marks high in the range; learners need not only to cite the views, but to consider their implications for a reading of the text. They might find their own evidence to support the view, or find well-sourced reasons to qualify or disagree with it. Some candidates pose different readings against each other and come to their own conclusion. Others take the view of one text and consider whether it can be equally applied to the other. These are ways that purposeful or detailed exploration of views is shown in candidate work. In many cases, though, Centres credit at a high level just the citing of a critical view with little or no exploration, or credit the candidate's establishing of their own view without reference to others. Sometimes candidates will finish a paragraph with a critical quotation which confirms their view. All these would gain some credit, but they do not represent high level attainment in AO5. It should be noted here that candidates are required to use footnotes to acknowledge the source of any critical or contextual reference, which should correlate to the bibliography at the end of the essay. As the Delivery Guide states, Oxford referencing is preferred, but any approved method of acknowledgement is acceptable.

Marking and Annotation

With a new specification and a new mark scheme designed to create greater opportunities for discrimination, it is inevitable that Centres will have felt that they were feeling their way with using the new criteria and awarding marks. While there may well be a higher number of adjustments to marks than previous series, to establish the standard in this first series of the new specification, Moderators noted how carefully most Centres had applied the mark scheme. There was much very careful discrimination in the marking, with the most careful Centres punctiliously balancing the strengths and weaknesses of their candidates' work through initial marking and internal moderation. This level of professionalism has long been a feature of Centres' submission of coursework. The most successful marking features evaluative comments alongside the marginal AO acknowledgements, which gives the marker a reference when balancing the key features of the candidate's essay in the summative comment. It is also useful if a brief explanation is given when marks are moved at internal moderation. This kind of careful, detailed marking demonstrates the Centre's thinking clearly to the Moderator and makes it easier to support the Centre's marks.

Word Length

The guidelines for the component suggest a folder of 3000 words, with approximately 1000 words devoted to Task 1 and 2000 to Task 2. It should be remembered that the component accounts for 20% of the candidate's A level marks and that there needs to be an equal basis on which to assess the component for all candidates. Limits on candidates' writing are therefore necessary. This series conclusively demonstrated that it is possible to gain full marks by writing less than 3000 words and that writing beyond that often dissipates the argument as it loses precision and focus. There is little to be gained by allowing learners to write beyond the guidelines and potentially it could seriously detract from the essay's quality.

Conclusion

Overall, Moderators felt that this first series was a success, the two tasks providing learners with discrete challenges to show a range of skills in demonstrating their understanding of literature. Throughout the mark range, there was evidence of engagement with and enjoyment of literature, developed beyond what is achievable in the confines of the examination hall.

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OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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