

# Candidate Style Answers

OCR GCSE English Language

Unit A651 Extended Literary Text: Controlled Assessment Task

This Support Material booklet is designed to accompany the OCR GCSE English Language specification for teaching from September 2010.

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## **A651 Extended Literary Text**

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# Introduction

OCR has produced these candidate style answers to support teachers in interpreting the assessment criteria for the new GCSE specifications and to bridge the gap between new specification release and availability of exemplar candidate work.

This content has been produced by subject experts, with the input of Chairs of Examiners, to illustrate how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provide some commentary on what factors contribute to an overall grading. The candidate style answers are not written in a way that is intended to replicate student work but to demonstrate what a “good” or “excellent” response might include, supported by examiner commentary and conclusions.

**As these responses have not been through full moderation and do not replicate student work, they have not been graded and are instead, banded “middle” or “high” to give an indication of the level of each response.**

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

# Unit A651 Extended Literary Texts — English Language

## Controlled Assessment Task

### Question

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**Explore some of the ways in which Wilfred Owen portrays his thoughts and feelings about death in war.**

### Candidate A

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I found the poem “Futility” easier than “Anthem for Doomed Youth”. I could see what he was getting at but some of the language was really difficult? I’m going to write about that poem first. The first line is easy enough: Owen says that the men being killed in the battle are like a herd of cows at the slaughterhouse. That’s how they’ve been treated by those in charge of the war. Just like “cattle”. I thought the next bit was about the way the men’s last words just before they die were drowned out by the noise of the war. The words “stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle” are meant to make the sound of the gunfire.

It goes on to say that the men were buried where they lay in the mud. They weren’t given a proper funeral because the battle was going on around them and their bodies just lay out there in No Man’s Land, like the film we watched of “Journey’s End”. The “choir” was the sound of wailing shells. The bugles weren’t the bugles that sounded them to wake up in the morning. They would have been the bugles playing the Last Post somewhere back in England (the “sad shires”).

The second verse goes from the battle to the home front: to the “sad shires” in fact. It begins, like the first, with a rhetorical question: “What candles may be held to speed them all?” I imagine that Wilfred Owen was thinking of the choirboys walking into a church for a funeral service and getting into their seats as the service begins. It’s certainly a big contrast to the first verse. I assume the bit about “hands” refers to the candles the choirboys are holding, but I found the next bit about eyes/goodbyes difficult. Perhaps it means that the boys are concentrating very hard on singing a hymn about death.

The next bit is clearer: it’s talking about the girlfriends of the soldiers who have been killed in the battle. The pallor, the pale, white, upset faces of the girls is what marks the funeral out. The most moving bit was the last line “and each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds”. We did this in history: every time there was a funeral or a service for one of the dead soldiers and the hearse was in the dead one’s street, people would close their curtains or lower their blinds as a mark of respect for the dead. In some streets they were down more than up at the worst times in the war. So perhaps “slow dusk” doesn’t just mean each evening, but could refer to the end of the soldiers’ lives?

As I said, I found “Futility” easier. You get the point straight away: the soldier is dead and so it doesn’t matter where they put the corpse. It would have been in the shade if he’d had any chance of survival but now there isn’t any. Obviously this is very sad because it’s the opposite of normal life where we like to be in the sun having a nice time in the summer. Wilfred says a lot more about the sun to show you how horrible the war was.

The rising sun was once a signal to get up and get going, now it's death. It's now more likely that the snow on the ground will put life back into him. This is an irony. It's as if the war was against the sun, which is described as "kind old sun". Kind because it shines on everyone and old because it was there before anything (or body) else. There was no life at all before there was the sun. That's what the second verse is about: how the sun gave life to the earth and started human life off. It warmed the "clays of a cold star". He compares this with the intricacy of the human body, the arms, legs, nerve system and so on. I thought that the mention of "clay" was difficult. The soldiers fought in the clay soil of northern France and Belgium and got bogged down in it. But it is the religious sense of clay, man without god that he's talking about. Or perhaps it's a reminder of both. So in a sense this is like "Anthem" with the men dying on the battlefields as well as behind the lines.

The conclusion here is very good, I think. Then idea is that the sun was wasting its time shining on the "cold star" in the first place if the best men could do was to kill each other in the war. This is my favourite poem that we studied. We also studied "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young. I found the language very difficult, apart from the end, about all the young men dying in the war.

## Commentary

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*This develops a personal response to the poems and makes some well chosen and thoughtful comparisons and contrasts between them to support what is said. There is a clear attempt to show how meaning is conveyed. A sound middle response..*

## Candidate B

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"The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" does not use a strict verse form: it is written in a loose iambic pentameter which, typically, allows Owen a great range of effects and emphases. There is no real rhyme scheme. Owen uses the sounds and shape of the words to provide an ongoing rhythm to the poem. For example the first line,

"So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went"

clearly has ten syllables, but the second line,

"And took the fire with him, and a knife.

has nine. The foreshortening of this line throws the emphasis on the word "knife". The full stop adds emphasis to the sinister connotations that this might have. Similarly there are constant uses

of alliteration and assonance. For example: “as they sojourned” and “Behold/But” opening the fifth and sixth lines.

What is remarkable about the first fourteen lines of the poem which, as I say, don't rhyme but do have an intense rhythm, is the way he has used the archaic language of the 16<sup>th</sup> century translation of the Old Testament to make some chilling points about the prosecution of the war. “Clave” “sojourn” and “spake” are all examples of this. It's not so much that the meaning is difficult, obviously it isn't. What makes you think and pause is the difficulty in actually saying the words. It really is as if you are reading the Bible.

The coincidences of this evocative description of an event thousands of years previously and what was going on where and when Owen was writing this are truly shocking. They are shocking because it is scarcely believable that he had so little of the original to alter. You might take the allusions to “fire and iron” and “belts and straps” to be coincidences that he had happily lighted on but I was amazed that the original words of line 11 (the twelfth verse) were actually “Lay not thy hand upon the LAD”. “Lad” sounds exactly the sort of word that the soldiers used as a euphemism for the names of their battalions. The “Salford Pals (or Lads)” for example were the 10<sup>th</sup> East Lancashires. So here, by repeating the words of this famous Bible story, Owen has brought the reality of the war to our attention.

The punch line of the poem is fuelled by these ironies. Whereas in the original God stays his hand once Abraham has shown his complete faith and obedience, the “old man” that is the middle aged men who ruled Europe in 1914 acted in the most ungodly way and sent their “sons” to their deaths in millions showing an obedience amongst them which was inversely appropriate to the causes of the war. The final couplet rhymes fully (“son/one”) but by no means leaves us with a sense of harmony as the penultimate line has twelve syllables and not ten like the final line. Structurally it is, in itself, an irony.

By contrast, “Anthem for Doomed Youth” observes the formalities of shape, line length, form and structure very much more closely. This is a formal sonnet in Shakespearean (or more accurately Petrarchan) style with counter balancing octave and sestet. The former evokes death on the battlefield, the latter a formal religious funeral (or perhaps memorial service for the dead) back on the home front.

Line three looks and sounds one of the shortest in the poem, yet “Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle” packs in twelve short syllables making the onomatopoeic effect so pronounced. The first lines of each half of the sonnet begin with two very different rhetorical questions, based on elements of the Anglican funeral ritual: “What passing bells...?” and “What candles may be held?” The power of these is the stark unity of the answer: a resounding “none!” to each. Once again, as in “The Parable...” Owen mobilizes the Church as a weapon to fight against the war unlike the governments who did the opposite.

He also insists on the utter dehumanization that is a necessary fact of war and this links the poem to “Futility” with its talk of “the clays of a cold star” which... “grew tall”. Describing the soldiers as cattle was nothing particularly new but it is given striking immediacy and poignance by the rhetorical question and subsequent rhyme with “rattle” a word not only associated with the sound of the rifles but also the sound in the throat at the time of death. But here Owen goes beyond the familiar animal imagery and asserts that the beautifully but shockingly simple personification of “anger of the guns” is, in reality, “monstrous.” It is, really, an insult to the cattle because it is a hideous new deformity of sentient human life.

Next, Owen uses simple punctuation (or at least the absence of simple punctuation) to convey his horror at death in war. Normally we would expect there to be an apostrophe of possession at the end of line six, so it would read

“Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs”

In other words at a funeral service the choir's singing would embody the grief of the mourners. Because the experience of death in war reversed all that “choirs” of course becomes simply a

plural: “the choirs of wailing shells.” How well Owen must have known that sound! The final line links the two stanzas and on we go to the sestet.

The eyes are commonly held to be the windows to the soul (hence “holy” glimmers) and here Owen again measures the deep destruction the war inflicted on the human spirit. As in “Spring Offensive” the boys are struck to the quick with the dawning consciousness of what they are singing about and perhaps rather fancifully, that they will be next.

The way the iambic pentameter works in the final line is very moving indeed. “And each slow dusk” slows the pace to a funereal drumbeat followed by the intensely onomatopoeic “drawing down of blinds” both literally and metaphorically as the war continued to take its toll of life.

## Commentary

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*An outstandingly well, informed personal and persuasive response which is filled with apt quotations and telling comparisons both between and within individual poems to illuminate their meanings. Owen’s perspective is given an exhaustive analysis as are the relevant details of grammar, language and structure and their respective places in the ways the reader is engaged and moved by these works. (A good higher response).*