

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LITERATURE

J352

For first teaching in 2015

J352/02 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 2 series overview

This was a highly successful session for Paper 2, and there is plenty of evidence that this qualification is now bedding down well. Examiners gave very positive feedback on the achievement of candidates, and most responses do immense credit both to their hard work and that of teachers in adapting to these reformed specifications. The Assessment Objectives and the skills assessed by them are understood by centres and by most candidates. Most candidates are completing this examination and show good knowledge of their texts.

There was plenty of evidence that candidates have followed advice from examiner reports on previous sessions. Rubric infringements were rare, and candidates divided their time much more equally between Section A and Section B, with fewer overlength responses to poetry, and fewer narrative summaries in responses to Shakespeare. There is better understanding that Section A responses are in two parts, and must be answered on the same cluster of poems, and that context (AO3) and spelling, punctuation and grammar (AO4) are only assessed in Section B.

Good answers were usually well-planned and sometimes showed evidence of that planning in the exam booklet. Planning should involve thought not just about timing, and how to adapt prepared material to the questions, but also consideration of which skills to prioritise in each answer.

Most candidates are aware that AO2 is dominant in the first part of Section A. They consciously address language, form and structure and make a good attempt to use terminology appropriate to the subject. It is important to remember that it is the effective use of terminology, which is assessed, and not the mere identification of rhetorical devices without comment on their effect. It is not necessary to name parts of speech, or to identify interrogatives and declaratives. 'Relevant subject terminology' is the subject terminology of English Literature, not Language or grammar. There was some highly successful commentary on the effects of a particular lexical cluster, but there is little reward for stating that a poem about war has a lexical field of war. The first word of the task in part a) is 'compare' so a strong response will be driven by the need to sustain a comparative argument throughout the response.

AO2 and AO1 are equally weighted in part b). There is plenty of reward for clear understanding of the studied text, supported by relevant textual detail. Good answers integrate the two AOs by following quotation with analysis of language and its effect on the reader. There is an important difference between 'explanation' (a Level 3 skill) and 'analysis' (Level 4 and above). There was plenty of evidence of various mnemonics and acronyms which candidates had learned for different stages of analysis. It would be better if the last letter in 'P-E-E' were generally understood to be 'effect' rather than 'explanation'. That might avoid candidates simply paraphrasing rather than exploring the impact of language on the reader. Successful responses have an overall understanding of the whole poem which allows a developed and detailed answer to the question, with an argument supported by examples from the text which are analysed closely.

Context is only assessed in Section B, and is not the dominant Assessment Objective in that section. The passages and questions set imply an understanding of context, such as family bonds and courtship conventions, ideas of justice, power and kingship, social hierarchies and belief in fate and the supernatural. As plays, the impact of performance on audiences is also significant. There seems to be a dominant idea that Shakespeare's audience was easily shocked and highly conventional: it is much more likely that they enjoyed debate and the play of ideas. Good use of context is to integrate it within a discursive and evaluative approach to the debate addressed by the question, rather than to stick in a paragraph of historical half-knowledge only tangentially relevant to the play.

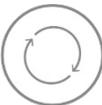
AO4 is also assessed in Section B, making it more important that candidates plan and check their answers. Fluency of grammar and sophistication of vocabulary are more important than simple accuracy: examiners mark attainment positively and do not follow a deficit model.

Handwriting is not assessed in this qualification and it is good to report that most scripts were highly legible and clear. However, examiners continue to report on a significant number of scripts which are difficult to decipher, even when the scanned script is magnified. It would also be helpful if candidates clearly and correctly labelled the question they were answering in their answer booklets, especially if using extra sheets. If a candidate is permitted to type their answer, typed scripts need especially careful labelling and use of double-spacing.

In an age of smartphones and easily downloaded 'facts' of dubious provenance about individual poems and Shakespeare plays, invigilators have to be especially vigilant about plagiarism, and teachers need to teach the difference between facts and opinions. This subject becomes more, not less, important as it rewards reasoned argument based on individual interpretation of evidence, and so helps candidates to find their own voice. Biographical and historical readings of poems are not rewarded by the mark scheme, while understanding of the Renaissance context of Shakespeare's plays needs to be integrated within a well-reasoned individual evaluation of text in performance, language and imagery. Candidates should be encouraged to make their own meaning from the texts and not to rely on external sources. Examiners are experienced and trained to reward the individual voice of candidates, rather than recycled and half-understood assertions.

The beginnings of original argument are what we mean by 'critical style' and this is the key difference between Level 3 and Level 4 responses. These candidates have a clear understanding of the text as a whole, make analytical comments on language and form, have plenty of relevant textual references to support their arguments and produce detailed personal responses both to the text and to the question.

	Misconception	<p>Make sure candidates are aware that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • context is not rewarded in Section A • comparison is essential in Section A, part a • comparison is not rewarded in Section A, part b • poems chosen for part b must be from the studied cluster from the OCR Anthology • context should be integrated within argument in Section B • Section B answers should be carefully checked for accurate spelling, punctuation and use of language.
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	AfL	<p>In 'walking talking mocks':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • place the emphasis on effective timing and planning, strong opening sentences and clear conclusions • encourage candidates to write essay plans addressing the Assessment Objectives and illustrated with quotations • make sure they understand the importance of showing they have answered the question.
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Note

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens has been added to our set text list for GCSE English Literature. This means that there are now six 19th century novels to choose from for study. *A Christmas Carol* will be assessed for the first time in summer 2020.

Section A overview

Part a)

Part a) of Section A tests the key skills of comparison and response to unseen literature. Candidates are encouraged to compare texts and perspectives on the same topic in both OCR GCSE English Language papers and Paper 1 of English Literature, and there was plenty of evidence from candidates' answers that their skills of comparison and evaluation have developed well. Discourse markers clearly signpost comparison, and details were selected from each text and placed alongside one another to illustrate different writers' methods.

Useful lessons have been learnt from previous series: overlong answers to this part of the paper are now more rare, and most candidates have realised that they will respond to the task more effectively if they compare throughout their response instead of writing about each poem separately before comparing. Nevertheless, most also realised that it was important to demonstrate clear understanding (AO1) of each poem individually, as well as to compare them, and that they needed to show that the unseen had been understood and appreciated in its own right. Indeed, many examiners commented that the work on unseen poems in this part of the paper was often stronger and had more insight than the work on the taught poem, which certainly suggests that candidates are being prepared to approach poems confidently and creatively.

Most candidates now realise that the bullet points provided for this part of the paper should be viewed more as a checklist than an essay plan. Good answers integrate the effects of language and structure within a response to ideas and attitudes and use both to evaluate the tone and atmosphere of each poem. Separate paragraphs on structure and stanza form in each poem are happily rarer, although it would be encouraging if sonnets were more often recognised as such. Effective commentary on structure generally links it to the development of the argument of a poem, and shows the ability to identify progression and change of perspective.

There remains a tendency to see all poems as autobiographical, and to identify the poets as the speakers of the poems. The OCR specification deliberately does not assess context (AO3) in responses to poetry because we want candidates to read the poems themselves, and pay close attention to how meaning is made from their words and images, and not to impose extrinsic readings based on biography or history. We are open to any interpretation which candidates can justify by reference to the language of the text and its internal structures.

Exemplar 1

3	a	<p>The poems "When I have fears that I may cease to be" and "What I Regret" both present worries about growing older. In the first poem by John Keats, the poet is afraid of dying. John Keats had experienced the deaths of many relatives at the time he wrote the poem and was aware that death could be around the corner. He is afraid of dying before his pen "has glean'd [his] teeming brain". In other words he does not want to die before sharing all the thoughts and ideas he holds in his full brain. The adjective "teeming" emphasizes his pride, he wants to show people that he is intelligent. Similarly, Nina Cassian expresses her fears of dying too soon. In a similar way to John Keats she is scared of dying "never having asked for honour [she] deserved". This shows how she wants her talent as a poet to be recognised, and she wants to leave a legacy behind and she wants her name to be known when she eventually dies. The reader also gets a sense that the poet is proud and slightly arrogant. She is convinced that she "deserves" the honours but feels inclined to ask for them. Therefore both poems have similar ideas, which is mostly the fear of dying, having not left anything behind, having not completed what they set out to do. Therefore both poems have similar ideas, which is mostly the fear of dying, having not left anything behind, having not completed what they set out to do.</p>
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This script gives an example of a strong comparative opening. Both poems and the question are clearly addressed in the opening paragraph. There is an overview of each poem, illustrated by a key quotation. In each quotation, a single word is highlighted ('teeming' and 'deserved') and a language point is used to illustrate ideas and attitudes. These are effectively linked both by the fear of dying too soon, and the idea of poetic pride. Comment on Keats is illustrated by knowledge about his life, but biography informs rather than dominating the response. The idea of legacy and leaving a name behind is addressed with respect to Cassian but the final sentence makes it clear that this could equally apply to Keats.

	OCR support	For further guidance about comparing texts, see the OCR Delivery Guide: https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/206403-comparing-texts-delivery-guide.pdf
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Part b)

Happily, this year there were far fewer candidates who did not attempt the second part of Section A at all, or who produced much weaker answers to that question. There were some who wrote commentaries on poems with very little attempt to address the task set: candidates need to be confident that they can write about a range of poems, so that they can adapt what they have prepared to the task set. The theme of part b) will always be slightly different from that in part a): candidates do not always notice this. This is intended to be helpful for candidates: there will be a wider range of poems which meet the theme selected for part b). However, some Anthology poems will inevitably fit the topic better than others and part of the test will involve candidates adapting what they have learnt to the task, and not simply reproducing a commentary on a poem which they have pre-prepared. Both AO1 and AO2 are assessed, so quotation needs to be followed by comment on the language and methods used by the poet and not just explanation of content.

Having chosen a suitable poem to address the task, candidates next need a plan which will allow them to say something about the structure and development of the whole poem, demonstrating understanding, while also allowing them to explore particular details which they can quote from memory. This is an advanced skill, but it is clearly one which candidates are learning and preparation for this part of the exam was evidently more effective this year.

Exemplar 2

2	b	<p>Vergissmeinnicht also presents the effect of conflict on a person through the the description of the person, the effects on loved ones and how conflict conflict changes a person.</p>
		<p>In Vergissmeinnicht the soldier who is killed in the conflict has a brutal and sad death. The The soldier is found in a 'gunpit spoilt,' in the 'nightmare ground,' three weeks after he was killed which shows that he he died fighting and yet was buried in a 'gun pit,' with no respect. This is further shown through the personification of the soldier's equipment who are said to have 'mocked,' the soldier showing in death even his own even after dying the soldier has no peace. This The brutal effects of conflict are also shown through the description of the soldier's dead man's body. He has a 'burst stomach,' and there is a 'swart fly,' on his skin. This horrific imagery as well as a semantic field of death emphasise the brutal way the soldier has died and the terrible effects of conflict on him.</p>

This script gives an example of how to address part b) of Section A. Keith Douglas's 'Vergissmeinnicht' was a popular choice for Q2b, very appropriately on the 75th anniversary of his death shortly after the D-day landings.

This candidate immediately addresses the topic – 'the effects of conflict on a person' – by considering the description of the dead German soldier, the effects on his loved ones, and the ways in which conflict has changed the speaker of the poem. This implies that seeing the dead German has made the poet reflect on how his involvement in conflict has changed him as a person. This paragraph effectively sets out an essay plan, promising to explore three different aspects of the poem, and its perspectives on conflict.

The brutality and violence of the German soldier's death, and the way in which his body remains exposed three weeks after his death are graphically illustrated by brief quotation, showing understanding and well-integrated textual support. The candidate moves effectively from the 'gun pit' to the personified gun itself and how its survival 'mocked' the human remains, with astute comment on the poet's methods as well as his concerns: 'even after dying the soldier has no peace'. Comments on the poet's language show how it illustrates the brutality of war, setting up an argument which will demonstrate how the details of Douglas's poem make the reader consider the effects of conflict on those who have died - and those who survive. There were many candidates this year who performed better in part b) than in part a), to suggest that there is now a better understanding that this part of the task is weighted just as heavily as the comparative exercise. The majority of candidates have some sensitivity to how poetry works. Most concentrate their analysis on the poet's choice of words and their significance in the context of the poem and its themes. There still remain candidates who are over-eager to parade an obscure variety of Greek and Latin terminology, who refer to every form of punctuation in a poem is a 'caesura' (especially at the end of a poem), or who write out the rhyme schemes of poems, or unhelpfully comment on capital letters at the beginnings of lines.

It is worth reminding candidates that this part of the exam is about response to a single poem. The very few who attempted to write about more than one poem were not very successful, while some made the mistake of attempting to compare an anthology poem with one of the poems printed on the paper: there is no reward for this. Sometimes candidates struggling to remember a particular poem conflated it with another, so we had Thomas Hardy fighting in WW1 and William Blake contemplating the effects of conflict in El Alamein. There is no substitute for effective learning of an overview of each poem, some key quotations and some effective commentary on methods and their effect.

	OCR support	<p>For more creative approaches to teaching and learning about the OCR Anthology poems, see the OCR Digital Poetry Anthology:</p> <p>https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/by-type/gcse-related/gcse-english-literature-j352-from-2015-related/digital-poetry-anthology-for-beta/index.aspx?id=english-literature-j352-from-2015</p>
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Question 1 (a)

1 Love and Relationships

Read the two poems below and then answer both part a) and part b).

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on part a) and 30 minutes on part b).

- a) Compare how these poems present someone explaining their love to the loved one.

You should consider:

- ideas and attitudes in each poem
- tone and atmosphere in each poem
- the effects of the language and structure used.

[20]

The broad focus on explaining love to the loved one allowed a range of possible responses to the taught and unseen poems. Charlotte Mew's 'Fin de Fete' is not one of the easier poems in the Anthology and a range of possible interpretations are out there and clearly being taught or used by candidates. While the title and first stanza primarily suggest that this is a poem about the end of an affair, some candidates used the poet's biography to interpret the poem to be about the loss of her siblings or to be a tangential allusion to her sexuality. Such readings are not invalid, but need to be substantiated by interpretation of the imagery and descriptions of the second and third stanzas. Many candidates assumed that P. B. Shelley was a woman, but this made no difference at all to their interpretation of the natural images and (rhetorical?) questions which make up this plea for unity with the beloved. Most candidates settled on the idea that one poem described a relationship which was over, and the other one which had never started, and this was a reasonable basis for comparison. Commentary on the Shelley was more successful when it moved beyond identifying pathetic fallacy to explore the poem's philosophical nature, some skilfully linking the argument for mingling with the poet's use of rhyme. The best responses commented on the sensuousness of repeated images of the 'clasp' and the 'kiss'. This was often effectively contrasted with the loneliness and shadowed world of Mew's poem, and Shelley's use of the present tense set against Mew's modal verbs ('So you and I should have slept') and memories of the past ('Do you remember the picture-book thieves'). There was good understanding of how the structure of the poems mirrors the emotions described.

Question 1 (b)

- b) Explore in detail how **one** other poem from your anthology presents someone describing their feelings directly to the other person.

[20]

Popular poems chosen in response to this task included 'A Broken Appointment', 'Dusting the Phone' and 'In Paris With You'. Disappointed or frustrated love is well understood in the first two poems, but the way the speaker addresses his lover in Fenton's poem seems to cause candidates some difficulty, as they struggle to identify the erotic as an element of love, rather than 'lust', or to take the anti-romantic element of the poem seriously as a comic response to sentimentality. They preferred to see this as proof that the speaker has not got over his previous relationship, although Fenton's comic rhymes ('wounded/marooned') warn us against taking this more seriously than what he has to say to his current lover, to whom the remaining five stanzas are addressed. The best answers on this poem paid attention to rhythm and structure as well as its sardonic voice. Surprisingly few wrote about the similarly anti-romantic 'I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine'. There were well-informed and sensitive readings of 'Bright Star', 'Long Distance II' and 'Love After Love'. Readings of Helen Maria Williams tended to be very narrative while those who wrote about 'Warming Her Pearls' struggled to explain how this poem presents the maid describing her feelings directly her lover, given the grammar and situation of the text. It is inevitable that some poems will fit a task better than others, and candidates will need to work to justify their choice of text. There were some interesting answers on 'Morning Song' but once again many candidates tended to struggle with the ambiguity and ambivalence of Plath's response to the newborn, trying to oversimplify the text and persisting in quoting the line 'I am no more your mother' without looking at the rest of the sentence and exploring the image it describes. There were some strong responses to the Browning sonnet 'Now' which is a very teachable text.

Question 2 (a)

2 Conflict

Read the two poems below and then answer both part a) and part b).

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on part a) and 30 minutes on part b).

- a) Compare how these poems present doubts about conflict.

You should consider:

- ideas and attitudes in each poem
- tone and atmosphere in each poem
- the effects of the language and structure used.

[20]

'Conflict' seems to be growing even further in popularity, in contrast to 'Love and Relationships' which has declined a little. Good answers to this question needed to address 'doubts about conflict': candidates were well-prepared to do this in response to 'The Man He Killed' and could easily link this idea to the speaker's verbal stutters and hesitations as he flounders in his attempt to justify his actions. There was some effective comment on repetition (although this word was often misspelt) and punctuation (although few realised the difference between dashes and hyphens). The imagined scenario of Hardy's poem made a lot of sense to candidates, and there was some perceptive comment on how the learnt vocabulary of 'my foe of course he was' contrasts with the simplicity of the speaker's colloquial vocabulary, idea of a good time, and need to join up because he was 'out of work' and did not even have enough money to go poaching. However, many still conflate the speaker of the poem with Hardy himself, missing the poem's dramatic element, and some want to tell the examiner about Hardy's experiences on the front line in WW1. Once again, an attempt to apply context can be misleading, when it is more effective to concentrate on voice and tone. This was a little harder to discern in R. J. Lindley's poem: this sonnet depends on the sharp contrast between octave and sestet. Few candidates realised the poem is a sonnet, although they have also studied 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', but many commented effectively on the decreasing length of each stanza, the contrast between a 'seeker of like' and its 'promised mysteries' with 'fodder that machine guns were fed', and the final couplet's image of battlefields covered by flowers and the passing of Time. The fricative alliteration of the former image and the personification in the final one received sensitive comment, as did the recurring image of 'blood-red' courage and violence. The strongest answers really needed to step back from the surface features of the poems and ask why the poets wrote them, in order to address how they questioned the nature of conflict.

Question 2 (b)

- b) Explore in detail **one** other poem from your anthology which presents the effects of conflict on a person.

[20]

This question was a little broader and less abstract than part a) and that probably helped candidates. While it is important for them to consider the relationship between the story a poem tells and the ideas and attitudes it illustrates, the straightforward focus on effects here made it easier to show clear understanding of what a poem describes and the way that description is memorable or impressive. 'A Poison Tree' was again a popular choice, and good responses looked as much at the effect of unresolved inner conflict on the speaker as the more obvious way it affects the foe 'outstretched beneath the tree'. Attempts to explain the poem's religious background were less successful in addressing the Assessment Objectives for this task than those who focused on extended metaphor and patterns of sound and rhythm. Many conflated the poet and the speaker. There was impressive knowledge of a range of poems, with some very good responses on 'Vergissmeinnicht' and 'Honour Killing'. 'Punishment' remains a difficult poem to deal with in the time permitted: those who wrote well about it considered the effects of conflict on the speaker as well as the victim, which was also a productive way to explore Keith Douglas. 'Flag' and 'Partition' are not always so well understood. Again, they depend on an appreciation of differences between the poet's own perspective and what they describe. Wilfred Owen's sonnet remains popular, and candidates are beginning to write more effectively about the sestet, which lends itself particularly well to this task, and not just the sound effects in the octave. Success in writing about this poem depended particularly on the candidate's ability to adapt what they had learnt to the task set. There were some particularly good answers exploring the inner conflicts expressed in 'There's a Certain Slant of Light' and 'Boat Stealing' to show that this Anthology is well taught with strong appreciation that it illustrates a much wider range of conflicts than simply warfare. There were examples of responses to every poem in the cluster: some poems worked better than others, but all could be adapted to fit this task. Candidates would probably write better about 'What Were They Like?' and 'Phrase Book' if they focused on language instead of trying to apply the historical context of particular conflicts.

Question 3 (a)

3 Youth and Age

Read the two poems below and then answer both part a) and part b).

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on part a) and 30 minutes on part b).

- a) Compare how these poems present worries about growing older.

You should consider:

- ideas and attitudes in each poem
- tone and atmosphere in each poem
- the effects of the language and structure used.

[20]

Although this is the least popular of the poetry clusters, there seemed to be more responses this year, and it produces some of the most interesting and best-informed answers. The question proved very accessible, with Cassian's directness a useful counterpoint to Keats's more elliptical sonnet. Biography was sometimes a distraction: this poem was written in January 1818 so well before Keats had any indication of his own mortality and some months before he first met Fanny Brawne, so it lends itself less well to autobiographical readings than 'Bright Star'. The Keats poem is more about fantasies of love and fame, and therefore was successfully compared with Cassian's wish that she had composed a Mozart sonata or 'heard the voice of the Dodo bird'. Good candidates commented on how both poems showed to varying degrees how as we grow older we can never realise all we desired, while poignantly commenting on how Keats regrets what he has not yet experienced while Cassian has lived 'long enough' to realise that having achieved the possible she still regrets the impossible 'and much much more'. The textual crux in the third line of Keats ('high-piled/pilgraved books') was not an impediment to understanding: candidates appreciated that Keats is writing about as yet unfulfilled literary and romantic ambitions. There was skilful comparison of the different ways the poets list their unsatisfied or impossible desires, worries and thoughts of love. Although Cassian's poem was short, candidates found plenty to say about imagery, structure and language as well as its sentiments.

Question 3 (b)

- b) Explore in detail **one** other poem from your anthology which presents the thoughts that come with age.

[20]

'Farther' was the most popular choice of poem in response to this task, although there were also many effective responses to 'The Bluebell' and 'Spring and Fall'. Responses to Sheers' poems which focused on the landscape and what it tells us about the persistence of the father-son relationship were more convincing than those who tried to introduce imagined biographical tensions, or misread the religious allusion in 'a father's grief/ at the loss of his son to man'. There's no internal evidence that the father is actually very old, or that the relationship between father and son is difficult: the poem simply acknowledges that both are getting older. Both Anne Bronte's poem and Hopkins lend themselves to an effective contrast of before and after responses to age: only a few addresses how the adult perspective in both has, for different reasons, a sharper sense of mortality. Ideas of innocence and experience are well understood, although there were few responses to Blake this year. Those who wrote about 'Red Roses', 'Baby Song', 'Cold Knap Lake' or 'Venus's Flytraps' showed not only that they knew these complex and troubling poems well, but had been sufficiently inspired by them to work hard to adapt their idea into arguments which responded to the question.

Section B overview

Candidates are clearly following the advice given in previous reports, as context is generally better integrated within Shakespeare responses than in previous years, and there were far fewer responses which did not make effective links between the passages and other parts of the set play studied. The quality of written communication was higher, and there was evidence that candidates are spending more time on this Section commensurate with the fact that it is equally weighted with Section A, and tests four Assessment Objectives not two. Candidates know their plays well, and are keen to pass on that knowledge. *Macbeth* remains by far the most popular text but unfortunately is the most vulnerable to 'bolted on' contextual paragraphs on James I, *Daemonologie* and the Gunpowder Plot. Candidates seem to feel the need to write a reasonably lengthy paragraph explaining The Divine Right of Kings (a highly contentious notion in the reign of James I) in any essay on *Macbeth*. They may find it helpful to consider that a paragraph without a quotation or direct reference to Shakespeare's text is probably irrelevant. Conversely, there are still some candidates who forget to refer to context altogether. Contexts integral to this play as well as to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are those concerned with fate and free will, tragedy and comedy, status and hierarchy and the relative roles of men and women. The last of these is especially prone to oversimplification: Jacobethan audiences were unlikely to be 'shocked' by the representation of strong women, or rebellious lovers.

Understanding of Shakespeare's plays and appreciation of their language and structure depends on awareness of their theatricality and dramatic effectiveness. Candidates who were able to relate the scenes they chose to write about to their theatrical context and to the response of audiences were especially successful, especially if they had overall understanding of how scenic form contributes to the dramatic progression of their set play. It is perfectly possible for candidates to address AO2 fully through commentary on the poetry of the extract provided for the passage-based questions. While they must use the passage as a springboard to explore wider issues in the play as a whole, or in one other scene in detail, the passages are chosen because they are linguistically rich, and sometimes candidates could have made better use of them, particularly looking at how they end as well as how they begin.

Candidates are a little too eager to show everything they know about their set play: essays on *Romeo and Juliet* are especially prone to tail away into narrative. A good way to keep the argument on track is to return to the passage and to the original focus of the question. Exemplar 3 has been included to illustrate this.

Exemplar 3

In Act 2 scene 2 the power of love is also presented by the willingness of Romeo and Juliet to do anything for each other. Juliet says 'Take all myself,' showing she is willing to give everything she has to Romeo ~~and~~ showing how her love for him is the most important thing for her. Romeo says 'I take thee at thy word,' which shows Romeo will do whatever Juliet tells him to and will ask for no explanation simply following her 'word.' This is further shown when Romeo says 'I'll be new baptized,' which shows Romeo is willing to change his entire being and start a new life with ~~in~~ Juliet as 'baptized,' has religious connotations of birth and the start of life which shows how strong his love is for Juliet. Another moment when their powerful love is presented is when both Romeo and Juliet commit suicide and

Juliet even calls it a 'happy dagger,' showing even though the dagger is going to kill her she is happy she can be with Romeo in death.

Overall the power of love between Romeo and Juliet is presented through the large extents both of them are willing to go through for each other such as death and abandoning their families.

This script provides a strong example of how to conclude an argument, while integrating reference to the passage, the wider text and its context. Brief but relevant quotations illustrate the final stage of an argument which consistently explores 'the power of love' as required by the question. The first two quotations illustrate the extremity of devotion shown by both Juliet and Romeo. Both statements have huge implications for later developments in the play. The analysis of Romeo's line 'I will be new baptised' incorporates contextual understanding of the significance of his religious metaphor and is linked directly to consequences which result not in new birth but death. However, Juliet's 'happy dagger' paradox is effectively quoted to show that, for the lovers, death will bring happiness as it unites them.

This answer moved fluently between the passage and the wider text, and contextual points about the importance of names and family were skilfully interwoven throughout its argument. Having addressed the links between names and status and Juliet's disobedience of her father Capulet in Act 3 Scene 5, at the very beginning of the response, this candidate was able to return to the passage and make a strong final statement about how the passage shows the power of love and prepares Shakespeare's audience for the final denouement.

	OCR support	<p>For more on how to link the different Assessment Objectives in responses to Shakespeare, and especially how to explore individual passages from each play, see Chapter 4 of the OCR endorsed OUP textbook that accompanies this specification.</p> <p>https://global.oup.com/education/product/9780198374336/?region=uk</p>
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Question 4

- 4 Explore the ways in which Shakespeare presents the power of the love between Romeo and Juliet. Refer to this extract from Act 2 Scene 2 and elsewhere in the play.

[40]*

Romeo and Juliet is the second-most popular choice of text in this examination, and this passage from the beginning of the famous 'balcony' scene was a very popular question. Certainly, it allowed candidates to address key themes and to explore differences in characterisation between Romeo and Juliet. Popular scenes to link to this were ways their relationship is anticipated in the prologue and introduced in Act 1, and the final scene as an example of where love will lead Romeo and Juliet. Most candidates wanted to refer to the 'happy dagger' with which Juliet kills herself, although fewer were able to say something interesting about it. Some candidates wrote very well about the consequences of denying name and family, contrasting this scene with the clash between Juliet and Capulet in Act 3. This topic allowed sensitive integration of contextual comment on arranged marriages and the relative freedom permitted to men and not to women. The religious imagery of Romeo's language when addressing Juliet provided rich material for both AO2 and AO3, although fewer were aware that his language would have suggested pagan idolatry to some of Shakespeare's audience. Candidates were not always so aware of the drama of the scene: Juliet can't hear what Romeo initially says to her, and her first question was often misunderstood. She is not asking where Romeo is, but why he should be Romeo and not have another name. However, links to the family feud and to clashes between generations were made to good effect. An impressive feature of responses was the range of quotations that candidates could call on in order to explore the wider text. The strongest answers were aware of just what Romeo means when he says he will be 'new baptised' and some linked this to their impending marriage and his refusal to fight Tybalt in Act 3 Scene 1. Good responses realised that the extremity of 'Henceforth I never will be Romeo' goes well beyond the courtly love formalities of his courtship of Rosaline and begins the tragic trajectory which will end in the Capulet tomb.

Question 5

- 5 To what extent is Shakespeare's audience encouraged to see the Nurse as more than simply a comic character? Explore at least two moments from the play to support your ideas.

[40]*

This question was a great deal less popular than Question 4, but it was clear that many candidates had prepared the Nurse as a character and had plenty to say about her. Some focused on memorable comic comments and quarrelled effectively with the implication of the question, correctly pointing out that she proves inadequate to the seriousness of the situation when Juliet is forced to marry Paris and not trusted any further with Juliet's confidence, so her shocked reactions to later parts of the drama are merely conventional. Others, however, understood her instrumental role in bringing the lovers together, and as someone practical whom Juliet could confide in, while acknowledging that her earthy humour and view of human relationships prove inadequate to the unfolding tragedy. The discursive nature of the question encouraged balanced and well-illustrated responses. Most were aware of how the context of role as surrogate mother provides opportunities but also makes her vulnerable and limited in her knowledge.

Question 6

- 6 Explore the ways in which Shakespeare presents mercy as more important than justice. Refer to this extract from Act 4 Scene 1 and elsewhere in the play.

[40]*

This central passage allowed a range of responses to this play, which seemed a little less popular this year. *The Merchant of Venice* is an interesting text to teach because of its contradictions rather than in spite of them. Many candidates pointed out the difference between Portia's espousal of mercy here and how Shylock is treated later in the same play. One strong response pointed out that stripping Shylock of all he possesses, including the means whereby he lives, is hardly mercy by modern standards. Others compared Portia's mercy to Shylock with her merciful treatment of Bassanio. Many were aware of the religious context of her New Testament appeal to mercy over justice, but fewer saw the implicit challenge to the 'sceptred sway' of princes. Most made an effective contrast with Shylock's insistence on justice and the word of his bond. Good responses used the whole of the extract and commented on the proleptic irony of Shylock's cry of 'My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,/ The penalty and forfeit of my bond'. Some justifiably asked if the mercy preached by Portia was practised when she speaks to Shylock as 'Jew' rather than addressing him by name, allowing an interesting discussion of how audience reactions to this play differ in different contexts. For candidates today, the principle of fairness makes more sense than 'mercy' or 'justice' and this leads to interesting personal responses to the play.

Question 7

- 7 How does the story of what happens to Portia's ring develop Shakespeare's audience's understanding of her relationship with Bassanio? Explore at least two moments from the play to support your ideas.

[40]*

There were relatively few responses to this question. Some simply narrated the story of the ring, although even these could be rewarded for meeting AO1 and often AO3 through understanding of courtship conventions and the relative roles of men and women in Shakespeare's world. There was strong understanding that the only way Portia can influence the outcome of the drama is by addressing herself as a man. There were some sensitive explorations of sexuality, and ways in which she is testing out whether Bassanio prioritises her love for her over his loyalty to his friend. The symbolism of the golden ring was well understood, fortunately, as were the fairy tale conventions of this aspect of the plot and the sauciness of its comic resolution in the play's final scene. Some wrote critical and well-supported evaluations of the relationship between Portia and Bassanio throughout the play. The strongest answers paid attention to the presence of 'Shakespeare's audience' in both the question and Shakespeare's theatre, linking the Ring Test to the good reasons both audience and Portia have to be suspicious of the sincerity of Bassanio's love and intentions, and the extent to which these are resolved in Act 5.

Question 8

- 8 Explore how the different responses of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to murder are presented. Refer to this extract from Act 2 Scene 2 and elsewhere in the play.

[40]*

This was the most popular question in this session, although Question 9 was also popular with candidates who had studied *Macbeth*. It is a dramatically exciting passage in itself, immediately following the murder of the King, and candidates were quick to judge Macbeth as afraid of consequent damnation. Many were too quick to decide the once 'brave' Macbeth has been reduced to a coward. Macbeth's fears are surely more a consequence of his conscience than of cowardice: he is much more frightening when he has 'forgot the taste of fears'. The comparison with Lady Macbeth encouraged by the question led to very focused commentary on the ruthless pragmatism of her language here, which was often poignantly contrasted with the Sleepwalking Scene, with direct comparison of 'a little water clears us of this deed' with 'out damned spot' and 'all the perfumes of Arabia', or even with the different significance of nightgowns in each scene. Many commented with understanding and sensitivity about the 'multitudinous seas incarnadine' making links to imagery of blood elsewhere in the play, with one candidate noting that the invocation of 'Neptune' shows how far Macbeth has already moved from conventional Christian morality. Fewer wrote effectively about the knocking at the gate, and what it means to Macbeth, or its dramatic impact for the audience. Those who did pointed out successfully that it meant very different things to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, just as they had different responses to the airborne dagger and to Banquo's ghost. Both of these scenes were also popular for further illustrations of their different responses to murder. Here candidates were often too quick to dismiss Macbeth's reactions as signs of madness: it is Lady Macbeth who is shown to be mad, and Macbeth remains frighteningly rational in spite of all he has initiated. Those who appreciated that Shakespeare's audience would have interpreted the irrational apparitions as a projection of Macbeth's conscience showed better understanding of context. Strong answers appreciated how the roles played by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in this scene are reversed later in the play, and that this illustrates the different journeys their characters make.

Question 9

- 9 To what extent does Shakespeare present the supernatural as responsible for Macbeth's fate? Explore at least two moments from the play to support your ideas.

[40]*

Many candidates seized on this question as an opportunity to write an essay on the witches. It could be read in that way, but it also allowed for a wide variety of approaches, and many stronger responses picked up its discursive steer and set up an argument about whether the weird sisters' prophecies, Macbeth's own ambition or Lady Macbeth's persuasion were most responsible for his fate. This worked well as a whole text approach to the task. Others wrote effectively about other apparitions in the play and their proleptic function, although some lapsed into narration when writing about the effects of the second set of prophecies and their equivocal truth. Some wrote well about the links between the supernatural and natural manifestations of disorder ('hover through the fog and filthy air') and there were even effective commentaries on the Hecate scene (while acknowledging that this scene may not be Shakespearean). Many were well-versed in why a Jacobean audience would have been well-informed about witchcraft and the idea of demonic possession and consequently appalled (or perhaps even thrilled) by Lady Macbeth's invocation of 'spirits that tend on mortal thoughts'. Some answers compared the way Shakespeare's audience would have responded to the supernatural with more modern psychological readings of Macbeth's character and fate. This was the most popular of all the discursive questions and often prompted a convincing and sophisticated exploration of dramatic presentation and the writer's craft.

Question 10

- 10 How does Shakespeare combine comedy with more serious themes? Refer to this extract from Act 3 Scene 5 and elsewhere in the play.

[40]*

There were relatively few responses to *Much Ado About Nothing* in this session. A few clearly struggled with questions which were not primarily focused on Beatrice and Benedick. However, a number of stronger responses demonstrated that the Beatrice and Benedick scenes also combine comedy and seriousness, and the prompt for this question should have made candidates aware of what Dogberry is so incompetently attempting to communicate to Leonato. Good answers showed contextual understanding of conventions of comedy and social difference while also exploring the malapropisms, and the verbal humour of misunderstanding that surrounds Dogberry's pretensions. One or two very strong responses linked this to the play's theme of not trusting to superficial appearances, and the differences between appearance and reality. Such responses fully appreciated the relationship between the two different plots of the play, and how misunderstandings could almost lead to tragedy. Dramatic irony and its significance both in this scene and in the play as a whole was usually well understood.

Question 11

- 11 'Hero proves to be a stronger character than the audience at first expect.' To what extent do you agree with this opinion of Shakespeare's characterisation of Hero? Explore at least two moments from the play to support your ideas.

[40]*

This question was almost as popular as Question 10 and provoked responses on both sides of the debate: some felt that Hero remained weak and conventional throughout and that this was the reason for her feeble response to the accusations levelled at her at her wedding. Others pointed out that she is much stronger when in the company of other women, and that she plays an instrumental role in the gulling of Beatrice. Many contrasted her very effectively with her cousin, and showed good knowledge that she illustrates the Renaissance conventions of female submission which Beatrice so effectively defies. Some appreciated that both the play's plots pivot around her, and that her relative silence can be a force of moral strength when accompanied by her youthful innocence.

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