

# Candidate Style Answers

OCR GCSE English

Unit A641 Reading Literary Texts: Controlled Assessment Task

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

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## **A641 Reading Literary Texts**

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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 A641 Reading Literary Texts — English

## Controlled Assessment Task

### Question

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**“Women are the Weaker Sex.” In what ways does Shakespeare’s presentation of Juliet challenge this view?**

### Candidate A

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In Shakespeare’s day, life was very different for women, compared with life today. Marrying for love was unheard of: parents arranged marriages, and young people did as they were told, marrying at a much younger age. Juliet is only thirteen, after all.

“My child is yet a stranger to the world;  
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years.”

Capulet expects her to marry his choice of husband, County Paris, a man of wealth, status and importance. He gets very angry with Juliet in Act Three Scene Five:

“Thank me no thankings, proud me no prouds,  
But.....  
....go with Paris to St. Peter’s Church  
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.”

The irony here is that Juliet has already married Romeo and has spent the night with him! I felt that she was quite right to defy her father and go with Romeo, because they love each other and Capulet is so nasty to her. She shows that she is actually more intelligent than her father here and that is why he gets so cross. She is better with words and shows him up for the bully that he is.

“Proud can I never be of what I hate;  
But thankful even for hate that is meant love.”

This isn’t the only time that Juliet stands up to the people who are supposed to be her elders and betters. Later in the same scene she shows how she has grown up by dismissing the Nurse who has previously shared her private thoughts. When the nurse suggests she goes ahead with the marriage to Paris, Juliet gives answers with a double meaning:

“Well thou hast comforted me marvellous much.”

The nurse goes away with the idea that she’ll marry Paris. In fact, of course, Juliet’s answer was ironic: her real feelings follow when she is alone:

“..... Go counsellor,  
Thou and my bosom shall henceforth be twain.”

This shows how strong she has become because we see how well she knows herself and understands her feelings.

Act Two Scene Two was my favourite. Juliet is on the balcony and Romeo is in the garden down below. Romeo is either very brave or very foolish (or perhaps a mixture of both as he is so in love with Juliet). They both speak about their feelings for each other. They are obviously crazy about each other here: and they are prepared to put their rival family loyalties aside in order to be together. Juliet is stronger than Romeo here, as she takes the lead in the conversation, cautioning Romeo against saying things he doesn't really mean but then taking the initiative and proposing marriage herself. Her so conventional family would be horrified!

Firstly she declares that:

"a rose/by any other name would smell as sweet". This shows her strength because the image of a rose is one a man would usually use of a woman. Then she assures him that she really does mean what she says:

"else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek".

She warns him not to swear his love, when he shows no caution or restraint at all:

"What shall I swear by?  
..... Do not swear at all...."

It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden."

When Romeo is on the point of going, it is Juliet who calls him back and says:

"If that thy bent of love be honourable,  
Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow..."

This shows how much stronger than Romeo she really is because she goes against the tradition her parents would expect of a young woman.

Compared with all this, the men have little real strength of character. Whether masters or servants, young or old they almost all live by the code of "manliness" or "honour" spelt out by Tybalt at the beginning of the play.

"What, drawn and talk of peace! I hate the word  
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee..."

Family honour, wealth, importance and rank are what count.

Even Mercutio is little different from the rest, he misjudges Romeo in Act Two Scene Four: -

"He is already dead; stabbed with a white wench's black eye; shot through the ear with a love song... blind bow boy's butt shaft: and is he a man to encounter Tybalt?"

The question is rhetorical: Romeo won't fight because he can't, because of Juliet. What actually happens in Act Three Scene One is that Tybalt acts as we would expect by starting the fight; Mercutio is drawn into it despite (or because of) Romeo's admirable efforts to stop them:

"Good Capulet, which name I tender dearly as my own/

O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!"

Eventually Romeo is unable to sustain the role of the peacekeeper, and takes revenge on Tybalt by killing him.

All this is in contrast to the complete consistency of Juliet's brave behaviour: either she will have Romeo or die without killing anybody but herself.

Finally, in Act Five Scene Three, she wakes up from the effects of Friar Lawrence's potion to find Romeo's corpse beside her. At this point she has few words and one very brave action.

"Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,  
To make me die with a restorative.....

..... I'll be brief. O happy dagger!"

I think this is so brave because she has previously imagined how horrible the tomb might be. In Act Four Scene Three she shows how strong she is as she imagines the tomb in increasingly frightening detail but resolves to go through with the plan no matter what.

"The horrible conceit of death and night,  
Together with the terror of the place...

At some hours of the night spirits resort..."

She shows both a vivid imagination and lots of intelligence here: not the signs of a weak character.

It's certainly too much for Friar Lawrence as he says previously:

"I'll go alone. Fear comes upon me..."

Juliet is definitely the strongest character in the play.

## Commentary

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*This answer provides a critical response, which takes a well-supported, personal view throughout. There is some clear understanding of what Shakespeare wants to say and how he says it. The quotations are aptly chosen if a little unwieldy at times and there are some sensible comparisons made between the different characters. The essay starts with and sustains a clear sense of the social, cultural and historical context. (A sound middle response).*

## Candidate B

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“For never was a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.’

We are accustomed to saying the names of the central characters of the play in the order male, female. “Romeo” and then “Juliet”. The final lines of the play make a striking reversal of this predictable, male first pecking order.

“Her” Romeo. This denotes the way the play challenges the concept of male precedence, proprietorial superiority and control: characteristics not only of Shakespeare’s world and culture but also of many cultures in the C21st. Shakespeare challenges not only the role of women but also of men both then and now.

Although Romeo’s first reaction to Juliet perhaps reflects that he is still a young man who is in love with being in love (his reaction to Rosaline).

“It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear....”

she elicits a different response:

“Did my heart love till now? Foreswear it, sight!  
For ne’er I saw true beauty till this night.”

The image of seeing beyond what is superficial marks the change Juliet elicits. Her words to the Nurse confirm the decisive, forceful nature of her character.

“Too early seen unknown, and known too late.”

In Act Two Scene Two Shakespeare uses a double dramatic irony to present firstly Romeo’s private feelings about Juliet, then Juliet’s for Romeo as each overhears what the other says: the audience is first involved in the most private business imaginable as the feelings each has for the other develop as they are uttered and is then put into the situation of anticipating and judging the nature of their relationship.

What Juliet suggests (and Romeo agrees to) is nothing less than revolutionary. In a world which Capulet so plainly dominates and to such a control freak extent:

“O’ Thursday let it be: o’ Thursday tell her,  
She shall be married to this noble Earl.....”

she uses the commonest, most traditional image of conventional romantic love to assert the obliteration of their public personalities and the predominance of their private commitment and desires. This is the full importance of the lines

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title.”

Names and titles are very important in the male dominated world of “County” Paris, Tybalt and (even more obviously) Capulet and Montague. Reputation, family name and honour, status and wealth rule here. Juliet’s challenge embodies a world in which a new identity for each of the lovers is forged in their burgeoning mutual passion. Shakespeare reinforces this contrast throughout the play with the persistent use of images of darkness to “cloak” the love of Romeo and Juliet and light for the much less savoury “public” actions of the antagonists.

“I have night’s cloak to hide me from their sight....”

Juliet takes the lead in their relationship here. She extends the day/night, light/dark imagery to stress her modesty, which she is anxious Romeo does not mistake

“Thou know’st the mask of night/ maiden blush bepaint my cheek....”

She insists that (in an entirely different sense) her love isn’t “light” (insincere). She discourages Romeo from “swearing” his love, lest the doing so should be “too rash, too unadvised, too sudden” with yet another play on light, this time “lightning”.

“Too like the lightning which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say “It lightens”.....”

Romeo persists: “I am afeard/ all this is but a dream....”

it is Juliet who takes the conventionally male role of proposing:

“If that thy bent of love be honourable  
Thy purpose marriage, send me word.....”

Shakespeare gives her the very words of conventional courtship (“bent”) and of the male dominated world of her father (“honourable”) in a context and situation that challenge both.

Compared to all this, the men have little to offer in strength of character. Whether masters or servants, young or old they almost all inhabit the public macho male world of brawling rivalry, claim and counter claim, hatred, vengeance and death. Our introduction to Tybalt exemplifies this:

““What, drawn and talk of peace! I hate the word  
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee....”

For all his mockery of Tybalt, Mercutio is little different in his failure to distinguish between conventionally “romantic” love and what Juliet has aroused in Romeo. He misjudges his friend in Act Two Scene Four: -

“He is already dead; stabbed with a white wench’s black eye; shot thorough the ear with a love song... blind bow boy’s butt shaft: and is he a man to encounter Tybalt?

The question is entirely rhetorical.

Romeo, he believes, is now disempowered as a “man”. In fact one of the turning points of the tragedy is Romeo’s reversion to “manliness” when he kills Tybalt to revenge Mercutio.

Capulet’s chauvinistic, patriarchal but utterly ineffectual attitude is shown as he hurls empty threats at his already married daughter in Act Three Scene Five:

“Hang thee young baggage! Disobedient wretch!

I tell thee what: get thee to church o'Thursday,  
Or never look me in the face.....

Even Friar Lawrence, motivated by his perfectly admirable wish to reconcile the feuding families, is at least partly responsible for the tragic outcomes that consume the end of the play.

In contrast, Juliet is presented as both logical, strong minded, intelligent, brave and incisive: all qualities that men would wish to be associated with and which women like Lady Capulet would accord them. Her response to the death of Tybalt is typically thoughtful and well balanced:

“My husband lives.....  
And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband:  
All this is comfort...”

These qualities are even more pronounced as she debates drinking Friar Lawrence's potion:

“What if it be a poison...  
I fear it is: and yet methinks

Mind over matter, reason trumps passion;

“How if/ or, if I live...”

The prospective terror of the situation and her resolve to outdo it grow in proportion: hardly the docile wallflower the “manly” characters would expect.

Finally, of course, Juliet has few words. On seeing Romeo's corpse she realises she has but one course of action open to her.

“Yea noise, then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!.... let me die. This surpasses even Romeo's suicide in its bravery and commitment.

No wonder Escalus is moved to pronounce his epitaph as he does.

## Commentary

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*This response is cogently argued throughout. It evaluates and explores the text in an original and well-supported fashion consistently. The writer's perspective is referred to in detail and the quotations support the argument, bringing detailed, lucid evidence for what is said. There are some telling comparisons between all the major characters and comparative reference to Shakespeare's choice of language. There is a clear understanding of the social, cultural and historical context. (A good higher response).*