

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

How does William Shakespeare present the different ambitions of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Caesar*?

Candidate A

You see the truth of Antony's ambitions in Act Four Scene One, after he has stirred up the crowd to mutiny in the market place. He is cold blooded as he agrees that Publius, his sister's son will be put to death. He also asks that Lepidus

“Fetch the will (i.e. Caesar's will) and we shall determine/ how to cut off some charge in legacies”.

In other words his intentions are to use the money Caesar left the people of Rome to pay for the war that is coming with Brutus and Cassius. This is a far cry from his words to the crowd in Act three scene two. There he uses lots of clever words to turn them against Brutus and Cassius and convinces the crowd that they were traitors. He mentions the will but first of all he refuses to read it to the crowd

“I must not read it/ It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.....

‘Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;

For if you should, O, what should come of it?”

He uses this and other rhetorical questions to work the crowd up to a frenzy of curiosity about what is in the will, having used their self-interest as a means of doing so. It is ironic for the audience who can see that Shakespeare is presenting one person using others' self interest to further his own personal ambitions. Eventually he pretends to seek the permission of the crowd....

“You will compel me then to read the will..... you will give me leave?” and proceeds to tell them about what Caesar has left them. But before he does so he uses Caesar's bloodstained cloak to persuade them further of the conspirators' treachery. He is so successful in this that he can say the exact opposite of what he means.... “let me not stir you up/ to such a sudden flood of mutiny to ensure that his ambition to “let slip the dogs of war” is successful. His final point goes even further in saying what he clearly can't mean.

“I am no orator as Brutus is,

But, as you know me all, a plain, blunt man...

..... I only speak right on.

I tell you that which yourselves do know....

Whatever Antony's real feelings for Caesar were (and we never really know), he has certainly put himself in a strong position by the end of this scene.

On the other hand Brutus is quite clear about his ambitions throughout the play: “I did love Caesar when I struck him” and he never deviates from his ambition of loving Caesar but loving Rome more. His idealistic ambitions (as opposed to Antony's realistic, pragmatic view of the situation) is

presented in Act Two Scene One when he is visited by the other conspirators. Brutus rejects each suggestion they make about murdering Caesar because they are all offensive to his ambitions and sense of what the assassination is all about.

For example Cassius urges them (rightly in view of what I've described above) to kill Antony at the same time as Caesar. But Brutus is too worried about what people will think of him and his reputation:

“Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,.....
Antony is but a limb of Caesar,
Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.

Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcass fir for hounds.”

He seems to want to be above the bloody business of the murder but wants to achieve his goals of not wanting Rome to have another king in spite of rather than because of what has to be done. Unlike Antony he weakens his position before they've even killed Caesar by his stubborn refusal to compromise his ideals and ambitions.

The contrast between the two is brought out most clearly in Act Three scene one, the scene of the actual murder. When Antony meets the conspirators he's in a weak position, having been a friend of Caesar. Whereas Brutus believes he is speaking the truth: “I know that we shall have him well to friend” and is completely wrong, Antony is quite prepared to lie to get where he wants to: “I doubt not of your wisdom.” He even repeats the point more strongly “Friends I am with you all and love you all”. Crucially, Cassius warns Brutus NOT to let Antony speak to the crowd but again Brutus overrules him really and foolishly believing that Antony will simply “speak all good you can devise of Caesar/ And say you do it with out permission”. While Antony expresses sorrow for Caesar when he is left alone, he is far more interested in the civil war that is coming and, as I said earlier, his place in it.

Audiences would be very familiar with the issues here: the lying, and double standards of politicians (like the MP expenses row) and, for Shakespeare's audience even more that us, the business of who succeeded when the king or queen died a matter of life or death. Shakespeare seems to be saying that any uncertainty about this could lead to terrible bloodshed and rivalry.

Brutus's ambition is to avoid this and he fails but Antony (at least in the short term) uses it to further his own ambitions. What happens next, however is also implied by Octavius's last words in Act four scene one, the scene I started with:

“..... we are at the stake,
And bayed about with many enemies;
And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear,
Millions of mischiefs.”

Perhaps this is a warning to Antony about their rival ambitions.

Commentary

This gives a thoughtful personal and critical response. There is a lot of successful quotation, comparison and contrast between characters, themes and ideas. There is a clear sense of the purpose of the text and ways it might be interpreted. The ways grammar, language and structure convey meaning are covered effectively. (A sound middle response).

Candidate B

Brutus is quite clear about his ambitions from the outset and never deviates from his ambition of maintaining Roman democracy and guarding against the threat of dictatorship. Shakespeare gives him the high moral ground throughout and while this seems admirable at first it becomes an increasing threat to the potential success of the conspiracy.

His initial refusal to throw in his lot with Cassius is presented as an admirably balanced judgment in Act One Scene Three:

“I would not, (have Caesar crowned) Cassius; yet I love him well.....
For let the gods so speed me as I love
The name of honour more than I fear death.”

Prophetic words indeed, when we consider the outcomes of his ambitions in the final conversation with Cassius in Act Five. Brutus is presented as a man of honour and integrity, whose idealistic ambitions are shown in Act Two Scene One when he is visited by the other conspirators. By this time Brutus has committed himself. Crucially, in his soliloquy at the beginning of Act Two Scene One he homes in on Caesar's ambitions as the main justification for the assassination:

“He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend: so Caesar may;
Then, lest he may, prevent.

Brutus is portrayed in a naïve light here: he feels that his ambitions for Rome are justified because of Caesar's. Shakespeare is making the point that in his culture ANY ambition that sought to interfere with the rightful ruler was wrong and that, more generally, the ambition to step out of one's pre-ordained place was a sin.

Later in the scene Brutus repudiates any and every suggestion from the other conspirators, because they all offend his honourable nature and idealistic vision of the assassination. Cassius urges them (correctly) to kill Antony at the same time as Caesar. But Brutus is too worried about what will become of his reputation:

“Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,.....
Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.
Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds.”

Even at this stage Brutus hands his enemies the initiative because of his stubborn refusal to see and act on the demands of the *real politik*.

The effects of lying; telling people what they want to hear on the one hand and on the other telling them the truth is given compelling embodiment in Act Three Scene One, immediately after the murder. Antony, determined to wreak revenge for the slaughter of his friend and also very interested in (a) his personal survival and (b) his subsequent career is in a weak position: Brutus should be in a strong one and yet again the latter cedes a position of strength on account of his idealistic ambitions for Rome and, as we have seen, for his own reputation. He naively tells Cassius “I know that we shall have him well to friend” which is a complete misreading of the situation. Antony is quite prepared to lie to get what he wants: “I doubt not of your wisdom.” He even repeats the point more strongly “Friends I am with you all and love you all”. Cassius warns Brutus not to let Antony speak to the crowd but, again Brutus overrules him in the absurd belief that Antony will simply “speak all good you can devise of Caesar/ And say you do it with out permission”. Antony expresses sorrow for Caesar when he is left alone: “O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth/ Thou art the ruins of the noblest man...” but has far more relish of what is to come. Shakespeare’s iambic pentameter is never more effective in the play than in support Antony’s intense evocation a bloody, vengeful civil war. The imagery is interesting, too, given each of their ambitions:

“And Caesar’s spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Ate by his side, come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a *monarch’s voice*
Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war.....”

My italics suggest the need there will be in Antony’s view for a future Roman dictator: ironically of course it was what Rome got, it just wasn’t Antony, whose ambitions were thwarted then crushed by Octavius who, as we see later in the play, took the generic title of “Caesar” to denote his supremacy.

From then on it is easy for Antony. Shakespeare presents a man of enormous ambition who possesses all the political and rhetorical skills to turn the tables on his enemies. Not only this but terrific self-confidence to bluff his way through the funeral oration. Brutus’s stolid prose: “as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious I slew him” and his attempts to give an honest explanation pale into insignificance by comparison with the rhetorical feast served up by Antony:

“I must not read it/ It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.....
‘Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;
For if you should, O, what should come of it?”

This and other outrageously hyperbolic rhetorical questions work the crowd up to a frenzy of curiosity about what is in the will, having used their self-interest as a means of doing so. There is a sharp dramatic irony as Shakespeare presents one person using others’ self interest to further his own personal ambitions. Eventually he pretends to seek the permission of the crowd....

“You will compel me then to read the will..... you will give me leave?” and eventually tells them about what Caesar has left them. But before he does so he uses Caesar’s bloodstained cloak to persuade them further of the conspirators’ treachery. He is so successful in this that he can say exactly the opposite of what he means..... “let me not stir you up/ to such a sudden flood of mutiny to ensure that his ambition to “let slip the dogs of war” is successful increasing the frenzy at compound interest. Finally he risks going even further in saying what he clearly does not mean.

“I am no orator as Brutus is,

But, as you know me all, a plain, blunt man...
..... I only speak right on.
I tell you that which yourselves do know....

Such is the measure of his success.

Ambition, with its lying, double standards and hypocrisy has never been better portrayed and, for Shakespeare's audience even more that us, the business of who succeeded when the king or queen died a matter of life or death. Any uncertainty about this could lead to terrible bloodshed and rivalry.

Act Four Scene One shows the naked ambition that lies behind this façade. Octavius's chilling summary

"..... we are at the stake,
And bayed about with many enemies;
And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear,
Millions of mischiefs."

is a summative statement of ambition.

Commentary

This is a sustained personal and persuasive response which argues its case consistently throughout. It is filled with apt comparisons and contrasts and telling quotations all of which illuminate the meaning of the play and a variety of possible responses. There is some clear analysis of Shakespeare's purposes in writing the play and the perspective he chose to adopt as he did so. There is consistent exploration and evaluation of the details of language, grammar and structure that engage and move the reader. (A good higher response).