



General Certificate of Education

English Literature 5741

Specification A

LA2C Shakespeare

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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LA2C Shakespeare (Coursework)

The overall standard of coursework and its administration was again high and centres and candidates are congratulated.

Tasks

Phrasing of titles was generally good and so enabled candidates to focus on AO2i and AO3. There were, however, still some tasks inviting candidates to discuss a given opinion. Such tasks directly addressed AO4 which carries little weight in this unit. Some titles were unnecessarily complicated. Having denoted the task, titles went on to specify what in particular needed to be addressed. It is up to the candidate to establish the agenda in the introduction.

It was good to see evidence of differentiation in task-setting and so fewer candidates this year seemed to be impeded by tasks which were too difficult for them. As a rule of thumb, very able candidates cope well with themes, while less able candidates cope better with Shakespeare's presentation of character.

Administration

Most cover sheets had been signed by staff and by the candidates. In very few cases did moderators have to contact centres over signatures. Centres are reminded that if candidates do not sign their cover sheets, marks will not be awarded.

It does help moderators, who are in many cases also examiners, if centres send lists of names and marks as soon as they are available so that the cycle can commence in March. There should be no reason why coursework cannot be completed and internally moderated by the end of the spring term.

Presentation

The vast majority of work was presented at published standard, but there continue to be unacceptably presented folders. Informal fonts, less than Point 12 and emboldened work can be difficult to read. Centres should refuse to accept work which is not of published standard. Emboldened and/or italicised quotations interrupt the flow of reading as does the practice of using footnotes to identify the sources of quotations. AO1 Communication is as much about presentation as it is about good English. The recommended length is 1500-2000 words. There should be no need for essays to exceed this.

Assessment

Some excellent practice was noted. Some centres have designed their own internal moderation record sheets which record dialogues between teaching staff and are very helpful to moderators. In other cases there was clear evidence on the essays themselves that the work had been read by at least two people. Sadly, there are still cases where the work bore no signs of close- marking and carried minimal summative comments.

Assessment Objectives

AO1 Communication

Successful candidates wrote clear, fluent English deploying extensive vocabularies and good subject-specific vocabularies. Critical terms were aptly integrated into the work. Such essays had interesting introductions that established the approaches to tasks taken and showed a sense of overview.

Less successful candidates had not even used a spell-check to ensure correct spellings. Essays could be poorly paragraphed and often lines were not left between block paragraphs or paragraphs indented where blocking was not used. Block paragraphs are easier to read.

The following words could well be expunged from candidates' vocabularies: key, clearly, issues, positive, negative, this (this shows, this means) and, also. It is not possible for anything to "centre around", while "incredibly" is often used as an empty intensifier. Failure to use capital letters for proper nouns does not impress readers.

AO2i Understanding

There were very many essays seen that attracted high marks for excellent understanding of the plays studied and of the tasks chosen. Such candidates had fully assimilated received ideas and wrote interesting, fully conceptualised essays. It is a delight to report that we see more and more of such work each year.

Less successful candidates may collect plenty of evidence relevant to their chosen tasks but do not explore it and offer conclusions. Quotations followed by phrases such as "this means" tend to attract lower marks because all the candidates are doing is translating and listing. "Another way" used to open paragraphs suggests, again, that all the candidates are doing is listing.

If ideas from critical reading cannot be assimilated, candidates should leave them alone. This year saw many post-colonial interpretations of "The Tempest", for example, where the concepts were too difficult for some to understand particularly those who thought "Britain" had an "Empire" in "those days". Such essays could be boring to read because there was no ownership, no driving sense of purpose. As Shakespeare himself put it "the play's the thing" candidates should engage with, not rafts of critical theories in this Unit.

Ideas presented in the absence of support are mere assertions or speculations and gain no credit. Too many candidates argue by what Shakespeare has not presented. Shakespeare's own choices as the playwright are of paramount importance and it is pointless to argue that if, for example, Lear had not divided his kingdom all the trouble could have been avoided.

AO3 Language, Form and Structure

The most successful candidates were able to select short, apt quotations and embed them in their writing. Where longer quotations were used they were set out properly and if verse was quoted it was correctly presented. The language in the quotations was unpacked to show how meanings were derived. Good candidates were ever aware of Shakespeare as a presenter and responded well to his choices of language for his constructs. Claims about poetic techniques were supported by quotations.

Good candidates were able to reflect on the structure of a play by noting how Shakespeare has chosen to present sequences of events and arrange his scenes.

Less successful were candidates who quoted verse as prose or who set out verse in block form using slash lines to show line endings. Claims about poetic techniques were unconvincing in the absence of examples or where poor examples were chosen. Whereas it may be true that Shakespeare uses verse for nobles and prose for low life, far too many candidates trot this out without thinking carefully enough. Benedick is hardly low life while Iago is no nobleman.

AO4 Opinion

This is the least important of the Assessment Objectives in this Unit. There were good, informed personal responses arrived at as a result of close study of the texts.

In some cases candidates had read several different critical opinions. There is no need to do this and it does not enable a moderator to decide how much a candidate really understands when all the essay represents is a digest of different views. If other critics are used, their ideas should be discussed and questioned, not reproduced as if they were universal truths.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.