



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **English Literature 6741** *Specification A*

**LA5W      Literary Connections**

# **Report on the Examination** *2008 examination - January series*

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*Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.*

## General

Senior examining personnel reported that this was a fair but demanding paper and that they had marked some excellent answers to most of the questions which had been attempted. This examination improved slightly on the standards of previous winter examination sequences and it was also notable that for the first time on a January examination all of the options, though not all of the questions, were attempted by candidates.

This year popular options were Option 6: *Minds under Stress*, Option 4: *Perspectives on Nineteenth Century England* and to a lesser degree Option 3: *Visions of the Future*. Option 1: *History in Literature* and Option 2: *Women's Perspectives* were minority choices and there were only four or five candidates in the entire country who elected to answer on Option 5: *Quest Literature*.

As in previous years, the two most popular options attracted the highest number of Band 1 essays with candidates, in general, relying on centre-inspired notes and ignoring or forgetting the comparative nature of the examination. In Band 1, unassimilated notes and half-understood technical terms abounded as did a reliance on pedestrian re-working of narrative. The unwarranted, unnecessary biographical details about, for example, Thomas Hardy and Sylvia Plath which had ruined candidates' chances of higher marks in previous examination sequences were not as much in evidence this year. There were more Band 4 answers for Option 6 and Option 3 than for Option 4, due to candidates who answered on *Minds under Stress* and *Visions of the Future* being generally more organised and prepared to engage writers' style than candidates who had elected to answer on *Perspectives on Nineteenth Century England*. Several of the four or five candidates who answered on *Quest Literature* showed great promise and senior examining personnel reported that those answers boded well for the summer examination.

Some candidates who had been entered for this January sequence were simply not ready for the demands of the examination and showed no command of their texts and demonstrated very little literary understanding. Some of these candidates had very poor formal command of written English and, like last year, some even had difficulty spelling the names of characters in their chosen set texts. However, there were some excellent answers to many of the questions on this paper and senior examiners reported seeing slightly more Band 4 essays than is usual for a January examination.

The following list will be very familiar to those who have been reading Examiners' Reports for the last several years.

### Successful candidates:

- understood the **comparative** nature of Unit 5
- planned carefully and effectively, making good use of their time
- could spell, punctuate and use correct English grammar
- were fully engaged with the language used by the writers of their texts and dealt with a comparison of style as well as including a comparison of themes
- always kept the key words of the question in mind when planning and writing their answers
- could use carefully selected and apposite, integrated quotation with skill and were able to demonstrate fine discriminatory abilities
- considered writers' attitudes so as to be able to offer a coherent, reasoned and informed response
- were fluent and engaged when considering the various contexts of their set texts
- had evidently read and enjoyed the experience of studying their set texts at Advanced Level.

**Less successful candidates:**

- did not compare and contrast
- asserted and were vague
- ignored the specifics of questions by not concentrating on key words and phrases
- as usual, wrote erratically and frequently demonstrated poor formal control of English, especially with regard to spelling, grammar and the punctuation of titles
- did not plan their answers
- did not engage the style of the writers and frequently got bogged down in writing about what they imagined to be the important themes in a text
- were irrelevant or generalised
- brought received ideas about texts into the examination room and did not allow the specifics of the question to determine the specifics of the answer
- found it difficult to use relevant quotation, integrated or otherwise
- did not convince the examiner that they understood that characters in fiction are constructs.

**Specific**

**Option 1: History in Literature**

Set Texts: *The Siege of Krishnapur*: J.G. Farrell  
*True History of the Kelly Gang*: Peter Carey

**Question 1**

**Successful candidates:**

- remembered to compare and contrast subject matter and style
- engaged the language of both extracts by showing an awareness of both writers at work
- used integrated quotation with skill and discrimination
- found useful things to say, for example, about statistics, decisions, compliance, pressure, enthusiasms, duty, sadness...
- analysed how the writers constructed characters in both texts
- started with the language of the extracts and worked their way out towards the novels' wider themes.

**Less successful candidates:**

- tried to tell the plot of the cited extracts or of the entire novels
- forgot to compare and contrast
- did not plan their work
- ignored the request to write about style
- off-loaded centre-prepared notes and paid no attention to the specifics of the question
- as in previous years, offered accounts of the unfairness of the British Empire or, in a new departure, offered partially-understood socio-historical assertions about Edward Said's theory of "The Other" in Orientalism.

## Question 2

### Successful candidates:

- compared and contrasted the *presentation* of male-female relationships throughout their entire answer
- were clearly appreciative of the presentation of male-female relationships to the writers' authorial intentions
- showed a clear appreciation of the writers at work
- moved beyond romantic relationships into an analysis of the presentation of relationships involving mothers and sons and fathers and daughters
- found enough to write about from **both** novels
- clearly understood the nature of the comparative task
- discriminated with style and knowledge.

### Less successful candidates:

- presented a list of male-female relationships
- ignored the instruction to write about *presentation*
- fell into narrative or generalisation
- failed to plan their work carefully
- were uncomfortable when writing about the different sorts of male-female relationships
- did not compare and contrast.

## Option 2: Women's Perspectives

Set Texts: *The Left Hand of Darkness: Ursula le Guin*

*Oryx and Crake: Margaret Atwood*

## Question 3

### Successful candidates:

- placed the extracts within the overarching structure of both novels
- kept the comparative nature of the task at the heart of their answer
- engaged the language of both extracts and were able to use telling detail which linked both extracts
- understood that both extracts were significant in terms of plot, presentation of character and the presentation of dominant themes into both novels
- wrote about the extracts before moving on to consider some of the implications of the wider novels
- understood that each writer wanted to achieve slightly different things within the overarching genre.

### Less successful candidates:

- off-loaded partially-understood notes about cloning and feminism among other things
- forgot to compare and contrast
- ignored the request to write about style and in doing so demonstrated that they did not understand the narrative structures of the novels in particular *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- did not understand genre
- wanted to write about narrative and plot.

#### Question 4

##### Successful candidates:

- understood that some of the most important key words which needed to be engaged were *brilliant*, *explorations*, *daring* and *survival* and managed to address all four key words with intelligence
- compared and contrasted throughout their entire answer in response to a key word prompt
- were clearly able to utilise the informed personal voice in response to a third strand in the question
- showed a clear appreciation of the writers at work
- found enough to write about from **both** novels.

##### Less successful candidates:

- forgot to compare and contrast
- did not plan their work
- ignored key words they did not want to address, in particular *brilliant* and *explorations*
- made a list of things that featured acts of bravery
- tried to tell the stories of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Oryx and Crake*
- did not offer a personal opinion.

#### Option 3: Visions of the Future

Set Texts: *Riddley Walker: Russell Hoban*  
*A Clockwork Orange: Anthony Burgess*

#### Question 5

##### Successful candidates:

- started with the language of the extracts and worked their way out towards the novels' wider themes
- kept lively and interesting comparisons of the extracts at the heart of their answers
- used integrated quotation with skill and discrimination
- found useful things to say, for example, about pity and self-pity, the human condition and conditioning, weakness and power, friendship and alliances...the very best candidates found plenty of interesting material to write about in both extracts
- were alive to the innovative style of both extracts and the novels from which the extracts were chosen.

##### Less successful candidates:

- forgot to compare and contrast
- did not plan their work
- ignored the request to write about style
- found the language of both extracts beyond them
- as in previous years, offered character sketches of Riddley and Alex
- tried to tell the stories of *Riddley Walker* and *A Clockwork Orange*
- asserted and/or generalised.

## Question 6

### Successful candidates:

- compared and contrasted the *presentation* of hope and despair throughout their entire answer
- were clearly appreciative of the themes of hope and despair to the writers' authorial intentions
- showed a clear appreciation of the writers at work
- were able to write with engagement and clarity not only about the hope and despair of the novels' characters but also about the hope and despair of the novelists themselves
- found enough to write about from **both** novels
- clearly understood the nature of the comparative task
- discriminated with style and knowledge.

### Less successful candidates:

- presented a list of supposedly hopeful or desperate events from both novels
- ignored the instruction to write about the *presentation* of hope and despair
- fell into narrative or generalisation
- failed to plan their work carefully
- did not compare and contrast
- tried to construct answers solely around the characters of Riddley and Alex and fell into character sketches
- were out of their depth with the unorthodox language of both novels.

## Option 4: Perspectives on Nineteenth Century England

Set Texts: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: Thomas Hardy  
*The French Lieutenant's Woman*: John Fowles

## Question 7

### Successful candidates:

- responded in an intelligent and astute manner to the extracts and to the wider novels
- kept a comparison of the extracts at the heart of their answer
- wrote intelligently about such things as natural selection and choice, religion, persuasion, consequences...as with question 5 the best candidates found plenty of material in the extracts to analyse with engagement and enthusiasm
- were clearly aware of the significance of the extracts in terms of the plot, character development and authorial intention in both novels
- started with the language of the extracts and worked their way out towards the novels' wider themes.

### Less successful candidates:

- forgot to compare and contrast the extracts
- fell into generalisation, assertion or narrative
- off-loaded centre-prepared notes and paid no attention to the specifics of the question
- offered character sketches of Sarah and Tess and/or Charles and Angel or Alec
- did not plan their answers
- struggled with authorial voice and intention.

## Question 8

### Successful candidates:

- compared and contrasted the *presentation* of important religious ideas throughout their entire answer
- were clearly appreciative of the importance of religion and religiosity to the writers' authorial intentions
- understood the subtle interplay of Christian and Pagan ideas in Hardy and of ideas concerning religiosity and denial of religion in Fowles
- showed a clear appreciation of the writers at work by paying due attention to the facts that Hardy is a genuine Victorian commenting on his own society from within and that Fowles is a modern novelist re-creating a Victorian world for his fiction
- found enough to write about from **both** novels
- clearly understood the nature of the comparative task
- discriminated with style and knowledge.

### Less successful candidates:

- presented a list of allegedly important religious moments in the novels (especially Tess' experiences with Sorrow's christening and burial in chapter fourteen of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*) without being able to offer literary analysis
- ignored the instruction to write about the *presentation* of religious ideas
- fell into narrative or generalisation
- failed to plan their work carefully
- did not compare and contrast
- wrote at great length about one novel (usually *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*) to the exclusion of the other.

### Option 5: Quest Literature

Set Texts: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Mark Twain  
*Northern Lights*: Philip Pullman

The Principal Examiner saw insufficient answers on Option 5 this January to make any statistically-meaningful observations.

### Option 6: Minds under Stress

Set Texts: *The Bell Jar*: Sylvia Plath  
*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*: Ken Kesey

## Question 11

### Successful candidates:

- kept a comparison of the extracts at the heart of their answer
- responded in a sensitive and astute manner to the extracts and to the wider novels
- started with the language of the extracts and worked their way out towards the novels' wider themes
- understood authorial intent
- found interesting things to say about, for example, identity, sexual tension, drunkenness, excess, tyrannies, entrapment and liberation...
- planned their work coherently.
- were aware of the importance of the placement of both extracts as being from near the beginning of *The Bell Jar* and near the end of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

**Less successful candidates:**

- did not engage style
- wrote about one extract then the other without really engaging a comparative analysis
- did not adequately plan their answers
- got bogged down in unsuccessful attempts to describe subject matter
- could not place the extracts within the novels as a whole
- asserted and found it difficult to use text.

**Question 12**

**Successful candidates:**

- understood that they had to compare and contrast
- showed a genuine, enthusiastic engagement with both novels
- paid special attention to the *presentation* of the role of drugs, alcohol and medical treatment
- could signpost and organise their way around both texts with skill and purpose, a difficult skill to master with Kesey's novel in particular
- used the informed personal voice with authority
- found interesting and convincing things to say about the presentation of the role of drugs, alcohol and medical treatment in novels which deal with mental illness
- found particularly interesting things to say about the administration of drugs and Electric Shock Therapy to mental patients and wrote with engagement and talent about the social uses of alcohol in both novels but especially in *The Bell Jar*.

**Less successful candidates:**

- found it difficult to steer their way around the novels and so could not present the most helpful evidence
- did not plan their answers
- offered narrative
- ignored the key word *presentation*
- wrote about only one or two of the key words in the question
- could not make adequate distinctions between the novels and claimed a parity of treatment between the role of drugs, alcohol and medical treatment in both novels
- forgot to compare and contrast
- asserted or generalised
- despite the instructions in the question wanted to write character sketches of Chief Bromden or McMurphy and/or Esther.

**(For Re-sit candidates only) Option 5: Reflections**

Set Texts:     *Precious Bane*: Mary Webb  
                  *Cold Comfort Farm*: Stella Gibbons

There were no candidates who elected to answer on the re-sit option.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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