



General Certificate of Education

English Literature 5741

Specification A

LTA1 The Modern Novel

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - January series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

General

The current specification continues to deliver excellent performances on all papers, and to differentiate very effectively between all levels of ability. The levels of success on all papers are testimony to the commitment and confidence of teachers.

There are, of course, some areas which continue to need attention, and we offer the following advice:

- the quality of written communication (AO1) is a problem for a significant minority of candidates; the ability to construct coherent sentences, paragraphs, and whole essays, to integrate quotation, and to spell and punctuate accurately are fundamental and important skills
- it is important to match the text choices to the abilities and interests of candidates rather than to the enthusiasms of teachers
- examiners felt that there were a number of centres where candidates were not ready to take this examination. They did not show evidence of knowing the text particularly well and clearly needed practice in answering examination questions – especially in identifying key words and writing relevantly
- the preparation for this course from the GCSE base is not always appropriate; a diet of short stories and extracts is no foundation for A level study of English Literature
- the quality of handwriting does not improve; there were several scripts that it was almost impossible to read

LTA1 The Modern Novel**General**

We continue to see much work of the highest standard – excellent textual knowledge, close and thoughtful analysis, obvious enjoyment and engagement, offering new insights into texts.

As a result of popular texts being replaced, there are new favourites. *Spies* is clearly the most popular text with *Cold Mountain* and *Wise Children* following closely behind. We want to offer a note of caution about *Wise Children*. When it first appeared on the specification it was chosen by a few centres and the work was engaged and often of a high standard. The last two or three series have seen a deterioration in the standard of answers on this text. Many examiners commented on this marked change, noting that answers were not as fresh or engaged, with many candidates determined to offload literary theory to no purpose or information about “magic realism” or “carnavalesque” which they clearly did not understand. Examiners note the same sort of problems in many answers on *Spies*. The more able candidates can use literary theory to good effect, but the answers of average and weaker candidates are often blighted by sterile terms candidates can neither explain nor relate to the writer’s technique. Work on *Cold Mountain* is often of a very high standard. *The Spire* continues to have a strong minority following, and there are a few, excellent centres studying *Possession*.

Successful candidates:

- addressed the specific demands of the question
- integrated quotation and textual detail in a purposeful manner
- spent time organising thoughts and ideas
- knew how to spell characters’ and writers’ names

Less successful candidates:

- failed to identify the key words of the question and to address them relevantly
- became bogged down in wordy narration and description
- offloaded overlong quotation
- seemed not to have read the chosen novel carefully, mis-spelling characters’ and writers’ names
- were clearly trying to answer a different question from the one set
- seemed not to understand or to be able to apply the literary theory that they had been taught and which obstructed and confused their responses

To turn to the texts and questions in turn:

The Spire: William Golding**Question 1**

Candidates were required to consider the **presentation of the thoughts and actions of a man with an obsessive vision** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- showed good knowledge of the whole text and an overview of the novel
- offered a wealth of close textual reference
- analysed “obsessive” beyond the building of the spire
- explored the impact of Jocelin’s vision on characters and the community
- chose episodes across the whole text linked to Jocelin’s growing awareness
- supported an argued position with close reading
- selected appropriate detail to illustrate their answers

- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- could explain the role of the obsession in Jocelin's and others' downfalls but at the level of narration and description
- neglected presentation
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Question 2

Candidates were required to consider the **significance of the extract** in the novel as a whole.

Successful candidates:

- wrote answers which were rooted in the extract and then broadened out to involve the whole novel
- saw the pit as a source of recurring significance, often at a symbolic level, showing understanding of the role of the extract in the wider novel
- analysed language and symbolism
- explored the episode and linked ideas and themes across the whole text
- explored the style of the text with some sophistication
- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- remained rooted in the extract and neglected the whole text - or
- neglected the extract and important details within it
- could not deal with **significance**
- told the story or described the people
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Cold Mountain: Charles Frazier

Question 3

Candidates were required to say how far they agreed with the description of *Cold Mountain* as a **'romantic quest' novel**.

Successful candidates:

- explored the nature of the genre of the book, using detailed references and providing alternative interpretations
- challenged or sought to modify the definition in the question whilst retaining a focus on "romantic quest"
- explored the multi-faceted content of the novel
- sustained credible and detailed arguments
- often wrote highly original essays, challenging the question in a fresh, persuasive way
- knew the text and engaged at a sophisticated level
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- simply described relationships and events
- asserted or described alternatives such as 'survival' or 'spiritual journey' with little reference to the actual question
- neglected "romantic quest"
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Question 4

Candidates were required to use the extract as a **starting point**, and to discuss the **presentation of Ada** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- used the extract well as a starting point and then moved out into the whole novel
- were able to link the construction of character to key themes and ideas
- focused on presentation
- explored the whole novel
- retained a sustained focus on Frazier
- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- wrote basic character studies and told the story, neglecting the author
- wrote only about the extract
- neglected the extract
- moved from Ada to Ruby, Inman, and even Stobrod
- sometimes misplaced the extract, locating it **after** Ada has begun to adapt following her father's death, or claiming qualities for Ada that may have been presented in the earlier pages, thus revealing that they had not mastered Frazier's non-chronological narrative ordering
- resorted to narrative treatments in which Ruby was particularly prominent
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Wise Children: Angela Carter

Unlike the first few outings of this text, we currently see a good deal of poor work. Candidates sometimes seem determined to answer a past rather than a current question. They also seem to focus on Carter's cancer, her feminism and her views on life rather than on the text itself. The same candidates seem determined to introduce "magic realism" and "carnavalesque" at every opportunity without being able to understand either term. The grafting on of theory continues to mar responses to this text. Many candidates seem to have been entered too soon. They were crammed with theoretical/thematic notes and still at a stage of total personal confusion – for which they often blamed Carter!

Question 5

Candidates were required to examine **Carter's use of ideas about time, youth and age** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- explored all three ideas/themes as well as the links between them
- selected appropriate episodes and characters and examined the writer's presentation
- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- found it difficult to focus on the specific question set
- showed they knew the story, but found the ideas difficult to deal with
- wrote vague, generalised summaries of the whole novel
- managed to consider only two of the three themes
- were unable to consider time, youth and age as themes and confused them with descriptions of magical realism, descriptions of old people and Father Thames
- made general, asserted and unassimilated comments
- tried to adapt prepared topics, such as legitimacy/illegitimacy or *Wise Children* as a celebration of life

- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Question 6

Candidates were required to use the extract as a **starting point**, and to consider **Carter's presentation of the characters of Lady Atalanta, Imogen and Saskia** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- explored the function and presentation of the three characters
- differentiated between Imogen and Saskia
- considered class, humour and notions of family
- used the extract well and then ranged through the whole text
- selected appropriate episodes to support their ideas
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- tended to conflate the twins
- made unassimilated comments about fairy tale characters that did not add to the quality of the answers
- wrote unbalanced answers in favour of Lady Atalanta, finding little to say about Imogen and Saskia
- wrote more about the extract than the whole novel
- introduced "carnavalesque" and "magic realism" at every opportunity without understanding or relevance
- neglected the extract
- had some difficulty with clear and accurate expression

Possession: Antonia Byatt

This novel is a minority choice, but generally the candidature is excellent and the answers of a high standard.

Question 7

Candidates were required to explore the **ways Byatt uses settings – buildings, interiors, landscapes** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- considered both the ways Byatt uses settings and the effects of the settings
- explored symbolism, analogy and the linking of past and present
- catalogued and discussed key moments in the plot and important revelations about characters in connection with **where** they had occurred
- wrote clearly and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- tended merely to tell the story and describe the characters
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Question 8

Candidates were required to use the extract as a **starting point** and to write about the **presentation and importance of Beatrice Nest** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- conveyed Beatrice with sympathy and understanding, both as a moral being and gate keeper, and also as a plot device

- used the extract well and ranged through the whole novel
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- neglected the extract or remained rooted in it
- described rather than focused on importance and presentation
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Spies: Michael Frayn

This was the most popular text on the paper.

Question 9

Candidates were required to explore the **presentation and importance of Keith** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- explored both how and why the character might have been presented as he was
- related the presentation of Keith to that of Stephen, using information about the narrative viewpoint to elucidate the presentation of Keith
- explored importance as well as presentation
- produced intelligent hypotheses about xenophobia, the war and Britishness
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- found it difficult to focus on Keith; wanted to write about Stephen and did not see why a question about Keith should stop them
- confused Stephen and Keith
- showed limited knowledge and understanding of the text
- strayed away from Keith to discuss the Haywards generally, and, in some cases, even Uncle Peter
- took a long journey through the novel with occasional references to Keith
- unloaded half or ill understood “theory”, referring to the *fallible* (sic) narrator who was rarely defined or used to advantage
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Question 10

Candidates were required to use the extract as a **starting point** and to explore **the ways Frayn uses the idea of ‘something not quite right’ with Stephen’s family** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- considered issues of identity, displacement and self-esteem
- explored the subtleties of Frayn’s writing
- made good use of the extract and complemented this with some well remembered evidence from the rest of the novel
- often approached the question by comparing the Wheatleys to other families in the close
- used Stephen as the starting point
- acknowledged the lack of resolution at the end of the novel
- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- merely compared the Wheatley and the Hayward families
- tended to over-emphasise the Hayward family

- focused almost exclusively on Stephen, neglecting the family
- lost sight of the writer
- had some difficulties with clear and accurate expression

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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