



General Certificate of Education

English Literature 5741 *Specification A*

LTA1 The Modern Novel

Report on the Examination *2008 examination - June series*

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General

This was a fair and enabling paper where candidates who wrote answers which addressed the specific terms of the question could fulfil their potential. We saw a good deal of excellent work and many examiners expressed satisfaction at the improvement in standard of the answers on *Spies*. There were very few answers on *Possession*, but all the other four texts had a healthy following. It is pleasing to see that the great majority of candidates recognise that the keys to success in this paper are:

- focus on the key words of the question
- exploration of form, structure and language (AO3)
- offering a personal but informed response to the text

Candidates who do not fulfil their potential:

- fail to answer the question set
- offer narration and description but not analysis
- offload prepared notes whether they are relevant or not

It seems that many candidates entered for this examination did not have sufficient experience of writing on whole novels without the assistance of scaffolding. We saw many examples of candidates writing prepared essays on old examination questions and attempting to squeeze them into the current ones. As a result, responses were off focus and, on occasions, not answering the question at all. Where questions asked candidates to use the extract as a starting point, many ignored the instruction completely. Candidates do need to be reminded to look carefully at the requirements of the question.

To turn to the five texts and the ten questions:

***The Spire*: William Golding**

This text has a strong minority following. We saw many interesting and varied responses to the text. Question one proved to be the more popular.

Either

Question 1

In this question, candidates were required to **explore** the **presentation and importance** of **Pangall** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- dealt very impressively with the construct of Pangall, considering his role and function in both plot and theme
- looked at the ancestry and background of the cathedral
- explored Pangall's symbolic importance through language and imagery
- examined Golding's methods in creating the character
- used a wealth of useful references to broomsticks, apple trees and mistletoe, exploring them relevantly and thoroughly
- addressed the whole text
- wrote focused, detailed and conceptualised answers
- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- struggled as they attempted to bring their knowledge to bear on the question
- drifted into irrelevance as they spent too long on Goody and her relationship with Pangall
- wrote muddled and confused essays
- used Pangall as a springboard to write about other characters
- could not trace Pangall's importance after he died
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Or

Question 2

In this question, candidates were invited to remind themselves of the short passage. They were then required to use the extract as a **starting point**, and to **explore the ways** Golding **presents ideas about change and transformation** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- related the extract well to the whole
- located the extract and were able to develop ideas about change and transformation
- wrote interesting, varied and original answers which considered character, situation, landscape and architecture
- achieved a good balance between extract and whole novel
- explored both character (often Jocelin) and the cathedral
- maintained a good focus on "change and transformation"
- dealt with landscape, setting and religious beliefs
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- often ignored the extract altogether, thus ignoring the opportunity for close reading
- wrote about the extract in an unseen critical way
- could not understand transformation
- wrote generally about change/transformation, mainly on a character-based level
- showed very little understanding of the text
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Cold Mountain: Charles Frazier

This is a popular text; responses were split fairly evenly between the two questions.

Or

Question 3

In this question, candidates were required to **explore the ways** Frazier **presents the America of Inman's time** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- took the opportunity to write philosophical and political responses
- considered the America of the civil war from both an urban and a rural perspective
- were focused, detailed and conceptualised
- considered how change had affected the education of women, referring to Ada as an educated woman undergoing a rural education
- explored the wider spectrum of cultural and social mores, including violence and excess

- considered the presentation of values, ideology and religion – Swimmer, Veasey versus Monroe, the Goatwoman’s harmonious relationship with Nature
- described various characters as representative of the traits of society
- wrote cogently and coherently

Less successful candidates:

- preferred to write about Americans rather than America, approaching the question through character
- found the notion of “America” to be a problem – had a wealth of knowledge but were unable to deploy it in order to answer the question
- offered a good deal of narrative and description of characters and setting with a few vague mentions of America/American society
- ignored the rich vein of landscape description and the context of the civil war
- wrote about the war – badly and without background knowledge
- wrote confused or unbalanced answers
- tried to impose their own agenda on the question
- struggled to get past the civil war
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Or

Question 4

In this question, candidates were given an extract which was the opening of the novel. They were required to use the extract to **consider its appropriateness** as the opening of the novel.

Successful candidates:

- wrote perceptive, closely-observed examinations of the given passage, linking it skilfully to the rest of the text
- presented a wealth of textual knowledge and much appropriate quotation, applying it relevantly
- considered the window, the wound and the war
- saw the extract as a minutely observed analogue of Inman’s journey, showing knowledge and imagination
- explored style, form, motif, and characterisation
- showed in depth textual knowledge and excellent overview, encompassing character, nature and thematic links
- used the extract as a way in to a consideration of imagery, the dual narration and patterns and symbols
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- failed to engage with the extract and wrote very generally about the first chapter
- found it difficult to analyse the opening and to make links to the wider novel
- wrote judgemental answers about the shortcomings of the opening
- ignored appropriateness
- failed to link the extract to the rest of the novel
- struggled and repeated ad nauseam the idea of the opening making the reader want to read on
- became bogged down in the extract
- neglected the extract
- failed to provide textual detail, relying on assertion
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Wise Children: Angela Carter

This is a popular text and there were many responses which demonstrated a real engagement with the text and a delight in Carter's methods and techniques. There were also centres where over-teaching and/or extensive notes on feminism, patriarchal society, existentialism, magical realism and the unreliable narrator militated against success.

Or

Question 5

In this question candidates were required to consider **how Carter uses and explores the theme of parenthood** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- were comprehensive in their responses
- demonstrated a thorough grasp of all the characters in the novel who act (or don't act) as parents
- wrote informed analyses that were fascinating to read
- celebrated Carter's skill in structuring the narrative on patrilinear lines while simultaneously subverting them
- saw absent fathers and the theme of illegitimacy as the keys to Carter's use and exploration of the theme
- included Grandma Chance
- wrote conceptually about what constitutes a parent
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- dealt only with Melchior and Perry
- were unable to grasp the "theme of parenthood" angle and to consider the characters in the light of their parenting skills
- failed to deal with Carter's "use of" parenthood
- adopted a high moral position and ignored Carter's tone
- tended to ignore the role of the mother
- wrote descriptive accounts of characters
- allowed magic realism to intrude, causing digression
- wished to write about incest
- chose to write about illegitimacy without making it relevant
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Or

Question 6

In this question, candidates were given an extract; they were then required to use the extract as a **starting point**, and to **explore the importance and presentation of "popular entertainment"** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- picked apart the extract in detail and related the ideas within it to the theme of the question
- engaged with "popular entertainment" writing lively and engaging essays about Carter's presentation of the topic, using the many examples available to support their comments

- analysed the magnificent range of popular entertainment: considered dancing and singing, theatre and music hall, Gorgeous George, Hollywood, game shows and the whole gamut of entertainment illustrated in the text
- adopted a comprehensive approach, discussing the appropriation of Shakespeare
- showed how entertainment (popular or highbrow) was part of the spine of the novel
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- ignored the extract provided and launched straight into a more general examination of entertainment, ignoring the word “popular”
- could not pinpoint the extract, sometimes confusing it or conflating with the *Midsummer Night's Dream* film episode
- wrote vaguely
- failed to grasp the idea of “popular entertainment”, writing loosely about anything related to the theatre
- wrote answers which were little more than descriptive accounts of episodes selected randomly from the novel
- had problems in defining popular entertainment
- listed all kinds of entertainment with little attention to the question
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Possession: Antonia Byatt

We saw only a handful of responses to this text.

Or

Question 7

In this question, candidates were required to consider **in what ways** *Possession* was an **appropriate** title for the novel.

Successful candidates:

- examined ideas that included mental, physical, material, spiritual and sexual possession
- put forward the idea that the novel had possessed them while reading it – demonstrated ably in their detailed, analytical and wide-ranging responses to the text
- considered most of the characters and the extent to which possessing occupied their lives
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- could not summon sufficient detail to support their assertions
- wrote on a simple level, usually focusing on Ash's artefacts and the sexual possession of characters in the text
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Or

Question 8

In this question, candidates were given an extract and were required to use it as a **starting point** in their **exploration of the ways** Byatt **uses the theme of “hunter”** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- used the extract well
- wrote spontaneous and inspired answers
- adopted a detailed, conceptualised approach
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- told the story
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Spies: Michael Frayn

This text is the most popular choice for centres and candidates seem to be gathering confidence in writing about it. Examiners reported that these were the best responses seen to the text in its life on the specification, with candidates moving away from solely relying on narrative.

Or

Question 9

In this question, candidates were required to **explore the ways** Frayn **presents fathers and fatherhood** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- looked at the whole novel, including Stefan
- thought about fathering styles and the influence fathers have on sons
- examined Uncle Peter as well as Stefan himself and absent fathers in the close
- considered fathers in terms of heroism, boys' ideas and the difference between illusion and reality
- explored the fatherhood angle in depth and detail with excellent textual support
- showed real engagement with Frayn's language and methods and demonstrated an enjoyment of and engagement with the text
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- dealt only with Mr Hayward and Mr Wheatley
- wrote character studies or reworked essays on Stephen and Keith
- described the characters and became confused if they attempted to move beyond this very general level of response
- wrote imbalanced answers in favour of Mr Hayward
- concentrated on the first half of the book and Stephen's perceptions when younger
- focused on description of character and failed to examine the idea of the constructs as fathers
- did not consider what Frayn might be saying about fathers and fatherhood
- wrote long narrative responses, showing good knowledge if not understanding

- dismissed Mr Wheatley as a furry nonentity, casting Uncle Peter as an absent father, paying scant regard to the context of the war shaping behaviour
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Or

Question 10

In this question, candidates were given an extract which they were required to use as a **starting point** before moving on to **consider the ways** Frayn **presents the theme of isolation** in the novel.

Successful candidates:

- understood the concept of isolation
- wrote about isolation in relation to a wide range of characters and families, with the very best setting this against the backdrop of the war
- used the extract intelligently
- made intelligent links to Uncle Peter's isolation
- considered isolation via bullying, social isolation, self-imposed isolation
- linked all the characters in the text through this theme and wove them together in a skilfully conceptualised fashion
- saw how the situation of the war isolated everybody in some way, and a sensitive boy in particular
- wrote superb answers full of sensitivity and subtlety
- wrote coherently and cogently

Less successful candidates:

- ignored the extract
- were vague about the identity of the female in the extract – was it Mrs Hayward, Barbara Berrill, or Mrs Wheatley?
- described and narrated
- had ill-defined notions of isolation
- could not contextualise the extract appropriately
- asserted and described
- tended to conflate isolation with loneliness or detachment, ignoring the ways in which Stephen becomes more isolated after this meeting with Mrs Hayward and why
- descended at times to such comments as “Barbara Berrill was the only girl in the close with a blue bobbly purse which isolated her from the others”!
- wrote answers which lacked clarity and coherence

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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