



General Certificate of Education

English Literature 6741 *Specification A*

LTA4 Texts in Time

Report on the Examination *2008 examination - January series*

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General

Again, much excellent work was seen with considerable evidence of careful and appropriate preparation. The most delightful aspect of this series was the freshness of responses to the new texts offered for study in Section B. Each of the Shelley and Clare selections has proved pleasingly popular in addition to the most popular Section B text, *Lyrical Ballads 1798*. Candidates and their teachers are to be commended for the scholarly engagement, focused application of knowledge and understanding of text and its links to context and the visible enjoyment which characterised so many of the answers.

Section B

However, there have been a few teething problems. **Please note**

- the version of *Lyrical Ballads* for study is the **1798** edition as stated in the specification itself and all AQA publicity and support material. Later editions, heavily edited by Wordsworth, require a slightly different contextual approach and much of the spirit of a joint collaboration and a groundbreaking poetic experiment is lost – hence the **prescription** of the 1798, first edition. This remains easily available and as the set text is therefore the **only** admissible collection for this examination.
- Some centres used a selection of poems by Clare which were not from the set text. Again, whilst it is perfectly acceptable in a closed book exam for a centre to study a selection from any publisher or source, the poems/selection taught should be the same as the poems/selection offered in the set text (recommended edition: Clare, John, *Selected Poems*, Everyman's Poetry, 1997, ISBN 0460878239. Reprinted 2004, £2 in 2006).
- As this is the first series of the new texts, and mindful of the specific current demands on centres preparing candidates for A Level English Literature examinations, no penalties or rubric infringements have been imposed for use of unauthorised versions of set texts.
- However, it is not realistic to assume that this policy will continue in the 2008 summer series and beyond. Centres are strongly urged to ensure that they have the correct edition or selection, or its content equivalent, of their chosen text for any further entries in this examination. It is also unreasonable to imagine that examiners working to very strict and tight deadlines, themselves usually teachers and therefore doubly hard pressed for time, can read as they mark, poems which they have not prepared and to which they may have no reasonable access.

Entering in January

It did feel, very pleasingly, that fewer centres were using the January examination as a preparation for a more serious attempt in June. As ever, there were still candidates, and in some cases whole centres, who did seem to have accessed the examination too early. These examples simply, as always:

- did not have the AO1 skills to write to their full capabilities
- had not consolidated their AO2 skills (most evident in the poetry questions on Byron) which demonstrated inadequate textual knowledge and understanding
- responded to AO3 through tangential comments on punctuation, pace, rhythm and so on with little attention paid to drama
- had not yet grasped the concept of debating the set viewpoints in the questions for AO4
- had not yet assimilated the contexts for AO5ii and wrote irrelevant, lengthy narratives about historical and biographical events.

Successful candidates still:

- have a clear idea of what they are going to write before they begin
- address the focus of the question quickly
- support arguments with brief, relevant quotation or close reference to the text
- follow a clear, logical argument
- pay close attention to the exact wording of the question
- come to a crisp conclusion
- demonstrate close involvement with and interest in the texts.

Less successful candidates still:

- ramble aimlessly in a general, chatty fashion
- attempt to pad out their essays with **true but pointless** fact
- put down points at random
- fall into simple narrative or paraphrase
- write long, generalised introductions, particularly biographical
- spend valuable time in the opening paragraph repeating the question
- spend valuable time in the closing paragraph saying how the question has been dealt with
- use jargon and slang
- write without full understanding, especially of pronouncements from critics.

To turn to the questions and candidate performance:

Section A

Hamlet: William Shakespeare

was by far the most popular text. Both questions proved similarly popular.

Question 1

Successful candidates:

- were able to move between debates on “meddling fool”, “loyal advisor” and “caring father”
- focused clearly on the presentation of Polonius
- selected detail from the text to support ideas about the character of Polonius.

Less successful candidates:

- were easily distracted by Hamlet
- wrote about missing mothers
- asserted that Polonius is a fool and no more.

Question 2

Successful candidates:

- grasped the genre debate
- understood keywords “Christian morality” and “theatrical spectacle”
- focused on text not films.

Less successful candidates:

- could not grasp the text as a play or the keywords which denoted that
- wrote only about religion
- insisted that Hamlet and Ophelia had sex
- wrote more about Branagh than Shakespeare.

Measure for Measure: William Shakespeare

Question 3

This was the more popular question.

Successful candidates:

- dealt well with the invitation to “judge”
- applied the keywords to a range of characters whom the “trickery” reveals.

Less successful candidates:

- addressed “comedy” at a narrative level
- wrote essays on a single character usually Lucio, Angelo, Isabella or the Duke.

Question 4

Successful candidates:

- grasped concepts “self control” and “excess”
- understood relevance of “measured”.

Less successful candidates:

- asserted only on im/morality of Isabella and Angelo.

The Winter’s Tale: William Shakespeare

Question 5

Successful candidates:

- grasped “romantic comedy” and “sad tale”
- offered detailed textual support.

Less successful candidates:

- failed to provide textual support in their answers
- did not understand nor found any comedy in the text
- did not take any issue with “romantic comedy”.

Question 6

Successful candidates:

- wrote interesting and thoughtful points about each character in the question
- addressed the key words “fade from importance” at a structural and thematic level.

Less successful candidates:

- could not engage “determine the course of events” beyond a narrative level.

Edward II: Christopher Marlowe

Question 7

Successful candidates:

- saw implications of “preoccupation”
- engaged keyword “isolate” and offered political developments of the play.

Less successful candidates:

- again described why the nobles did not like Gaveston
- did not consider “the King’s flaw”.

Question 8

Successful candidates:

- addressed “distract” and “conflict”
- explored presentations of Gaveston in the play.

Less successful candidates

- wrote only about Edward and his other lovers
- could not grasp significance of “crown”.

The White Devil: John Webster

Question 9

Successful candidates:

- understood and debated the keywords “fully developed” and “strongly motivated”
- focused on presentations of Francisco.

Less successful candidates:

- described Francisco and events which involve him
- missed “Webster uses for minor details” to debate importance of this character.

Question 10

Successful candidates:

- understood “heroism” and “unsympathetically”
- had a view on a range of female characters.

Less successful candidates:

- did not understand the terms
- could not engage “distant”
- could not go beyond Vittoria.

The Alchemist: Ben Jonson

Question 11

Virtually none seen.

Question 12

Successful candidates:

- understood the terms “transformation”, “base” and “alchemy”
- debated Jonson’s exploration of alchemy and Alchemists
- engaged the use of “transformations” in the play.

Less successful candidates:

- described the cons
- described Subtle
- wrote out Subtle's use of alchemic terms.

Section B

Impressively, right across the new texts, candidates:

- chose the right poems for the question (most candidates did this well)
- chose at least "3 poems" as per instruction (everyone succeeded, for the first time on this paper, in following this rubric).

Lyrical Ballads 1798: William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Question 13

Successful candidates:

- were engaged, themselves sympathetically, with the poetry and the contextual ideals from which it had sprung
- if choosing poems from both Wordsworth *and* Coleridge (**not** a prescription), saw the similarities and the differences in their style and poetic purpose
- were a joy to read, having assimilated 18th Century concerns about human dignity and justice into their young and sensitive 21st Century souls.

Less successful candidates:

- did not engage the "sympathy" and "suffering" and simply told stories about hardship
- lost focus and drifted onto 'nature' – other question!
- got bogged down in revolution – Industrial, Agrarian, French, American and forgot poetry.

Question 14

Successful candidates:

- grasped "reveal beliefs" and applied them aptly to poetry
- systematically analysed the "power" of nature and explored poetry which told us W. and C.'s views on nature as teacher, punisher, comforter, artistic inspiration, pantheistic presence, pathetic fallacy and more.

Less successful candidates:

- amazingly, drifted into the other question
- imagined that the countryside was all destroyed and written about from memory – poor AO5ii here.

Ode to the West Wind and Other Poems: Percy Bysshe Shelley

Question 15

Successful candidates:

- grasped the term and concept of "Romantic poet"

- wrote structure responses dealing systematically with the tenets of Romanticism and the “appropriate”ness of Shelley’s poetry within that.

Less successful candidates:

- substituted “romantic poet” for “Romantic poet” – not the same thing at all
- had nothing to say beyond some general and assertive ideas about nature.

Question 16

Was by far the more popular of the two

Successful candidates:

- wrote impressive analyses of the relationship between Shelley’s political concerns and the poetry
- chose imaginatively, ranging from the clear ‘Mask of Anarchy’, ‘Song for Men of England’ etc to ‘Ozymandias’, ‘Ode to the West Wind’, ‘Mutability’ etc
- differentiated between Shelley’s use, including irony and parody, of ballad and sonnet forms for political-poetic purposes
- worked in detail on Shelley’s use of register and address
- had benefited from some superb, holistic teaching

Less successful candidates:

- wrote about the horrors of The Peterloo Massacre, George III and corrupt politicians, poverty etc and forgot the poetry
- did not understand the symbolism, particularly in ‘Mask of Anarchy’, ‘England in 1819’ or ‘Ozymandias’.

Everyman Selected Poems – John Clare

Question 17

Successful candidates:

- synthesised the relationship between Clare’s poetic sensibility (“thoughts and feelings”), his response to Agrarian changes and the natural world and the poetry itself
- worked in impressive detail on Clare’s language use, particularly its symbolic and metaphorical value – this was often the case
- saw all the beauty in his verse and handled it with a mature delicacy.

Less successful candidates:

- address “thoughts and feelings” at a simplistic and narrative level
- got entangled in the Enclosures and Industrial Revolution and lost the poetry
- forgot all about the The Enclosure Act
- imagined there was no countryside to be seen and Clare was in an isolated pocket of it.

Question 18

Successful candidates:

- chose appropriate episodes to illustrate their arguments
- addressed “feelings on inequality and injustice” in a political and social context linked to appropriate episodes in the text.

Less successful candidates:

- unloaded a tragic biography of Clare
- had difficulty selecting appropriate poems
- defined love so widely as to make it meaningless, effectively writing an essay on his appropriateness as a Romantic poet
- defined the term “love” as ‘love of nature’, which - given the specifically designated section entitled ‘Love’ in the prescribed selection, Clare’s clear views on romantic, sexual, human love, and the focus on ‘nature’ in the alternative question – is clearly not the intended focus of the context in this question.

Don Juan (Cantos 1-4): Lord Byron

Question 19

This was the less popular question but when done was very successful

Successful candidates:

- saw Byron’s poetry and influences in the Romantic context and his views and recent inheritances from the poetry and ideas of Wordsworth and Coleridge
- traced *Don Juan*’s poetic links from Homer and Greek epic through bawdy Chaucerian sex romps to Shakespearian approaches to love, comedy, storms and shipwreck and into the Augustan satires, finishing on a flourish with the Italian stylistic legacy. Superb, all top end Band 4. I don’t know how they did this in a term
- Focused on any one of the above and explored it in some depth.

Less successful candidates:

None seen

Question 20

Successful candidates:

- focused on all the keywords “sex”, “marriage”, “society of his time”
- grasped the complexity of a liberated Byronic view of sexuality
- saw the poem in its Romantic and its romantic context
- used apt evidence for points made
- ranged across the Cantos for proof of ideas.

Less successful candidates:

- could not discriminate between “sex and marriage” in the question and got side-tracked into ‘love’
- wrote reams about Byron’s life and unhappy marriage, incestuous heartbreak and so on
- chastised Byron for his sexual behaviour
- utterly ignored, as usual with the Byron answers, any references to “in the society of his time”.

The Prelude, Books 9 and 10: William Wordsworth

Very few were seen on this re-sit text

Question 21

Successful candidates:

- engaged the keywords “Romantic ideals” with appropriate textual analysis.

Less successful candidates:

- substituted “Romantic” for ‘romantic’ and some even digressed into Wordsworth treatment of Annette Valon.

Question 22

Successful candidates:

- focused on appropriate episodes in Book 10
- gave lucid evidence of Wordsworth’s “disappointment at the outcomes”.

Less successful candidates:

- could not focus on Book 10
- had insubstantial knowledge and understanding of the text.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience: William Blake

Question 23

Successful candidates:

- focused on “views on industrialisation” and how they were communicated through the poetry.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote about, and only about, London or chimney sweeps
- got inappropriately side-tracked into Church and State.

Question 24

Successful candidates:

- focused on how “thoughts and feelings” were revealed aptly by the text
- focused on “parenthood” to explore the poetry.

Less successful candidates:

- substituted “parenthood” for “childhood”
- wrote the all-purpose Blake essay which was as suited to the previous question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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