

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

Virtual communities 2020

Pre-event booklet

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What can we learn about teaching Shakespeare from the reports on the exam?

In advance of the virtual community online meeting, we'd like you to reflect on your experience and practice of teaching Shakespeare.

The entire meeting will last one hour and we'll dedicate 20 minutes to breakout rooms, giving you the opportunity to talk to other English teachers and share your experiences.

The reports on the exams (available to download from Secure Key Materials on e-AQA) reflect students' performance at a national level. These observations highlight what makes a good answer and areas that could be better. The reports on the exam are a useful starting point to inform discussions about pedagogy and improving outcomes for students.

The aim of this session is to use the reports on the exam to explore what best practice in the teaching of Shakespeare looks like and to share practical examples of approaches that work.

For the purpose of this event, in the limited time available, we have distilled the reports on the exam to two overarching mantras:

- 1. Know the play**
- 2. Answer the question.**

Exploring how teachers support students to do both underpins future exam success.

In the grid below we invite you to consider some of the feedback from reports on the exam and the questions about teaching pedagogy and practice these statements elicit. You could consider this in relation to your own practice or discuss with your wider department, preparing your thoughts for the breakout chat rooms in our virtual community.

Know the play

Feedback from the report on the exam	Questions to consider
<p>Students need to know the play before they can answer an exam question. A confident understanding of the plot, characters, key events, and sequencing of these, underpins better answers and equips students to develop a cogent response to questions.</p> <p>A feature of the highest-level responses is their knowledge and understanding of the text, which enables students to dip in and out of both the extract and the whole text to select details which support their argument as appropriate:</p> <p>‘students who knew their text well had no problems with incorporating relevant references and quite often these fell into the category of ‘apt, integrated’.</p>	<p>How do you prepare to read the text, engage students during the reading of the text, and explore the rich possibilities the text offers during reading?</p> <p>Reading a text is about building understanding – how do you plan to do this with a play by Shakespeare?</p>
<p>Fluency in knowledge about plot and character informs AO2 responses as well. Reports on the exam highlight an increasing focus in answers on the structure of texts, and of characterisation, as a means of conveying ideas and meaning.</p> <p>Exploring aspects of structure encourages students to look at the broader picture, rather than focusing solely on the intricacies of word-level analysis. Examples of structural aspects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the order of events• the juxtaposing of events• the use of characters as conscious constructs, contrasts or foils, so that what one character does illuminates and reflects on the actions of other characters• characterisation – how characters develop and change over the course of the text and how the writer portrays this.	<p>If the student doesn't know where the extract is within the story, it's hard for them to analyse in a meaningful and conceptual manner. How do you secure knowledge of plot, character and key events?</p>

Answer the question

Feedback from the examiner's report	Questions to consider
<p>Examiners are seeing well-constructed responses and, increasingly, essays that open with a thesis where the student establishes their argument/interpretation in response to the task set.</p> <p>Examiners continue to see pre-prepared structures and tacked-on sentences. Though well-intended, these often hinder expression of students' views.</p> <p>The most common essay structure students use, however, is one where they begin their response by addressing the extract and then move on to discuss the play as a whole. This is a valid approach but it can come across as though the extract and rest of the play are two separate entities, rather than part of the same whole.</p>	<p>What actually is good essay writing? How do you model the writing process?</p> <p>Do you model <i>different ways</i> students can approach the task?</p> <p>Do your students tend to be more confident with the extract or the wider play?</p> <p>How can we help students to use the extract in a more holistic way?</p>
<p>Examiners (universally) reported increasing fluency and assurance in the ways students address context in their answers.</p> <p>AO3 is the relationship between texts and their contexts – it's clear it's understood that this means exploring the ideas of the text. The question directs them towards certain ideas and themes in the text, so students who engage with the focus of the question do well.</p> <p>However, there continues to be evidence of unnecessary biographical information, extraneous historical detail and sweeping generalisation which don't contribute to the quality of the student's response.</p>	<p>If students answer the question, they address AO3. How do you teach students to think through the question and plan their answer before writing?</p> <p>Shakespeare can often seem remote to students. How do you inspire and engage students to explore the text and relate text to self, text to text and text to world?</p> <p>How do you ensure students can explore and engage with the 'big ideas' and themes of the texts?</p>

Advice for students

The advice for students in the report on the exam for Paper 1, June 2017 is still relevant.

- **Know the text.** If you know the text well, you'll be able to demonstrate this knowledge and understanding in the exam. The text should be the focus.
- **Answer the question.** Perhaps underline the key foci before you start. Make sure you've read the question accurately.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the text by 'pointing' to particular moments. If you use a direct reference, make sure it's relevant to your answer, and that you can say something useful about it. You don't get extra marks for more quotations, but you do get more marks for making plenty of interesting comments about the references you have selected.
- Appreciate the big themes and ideas of the text. Think about what the writer wanted their audience to understand after watching the play or reading the novel.
- Recognise that there are various ways in which you can show your appreciation of a writer's methods. While language analysis is perfectly valid, analysis of structure or characterisation can also be very effective means of showing an understanding and appreciation of what the writer has done.
- Link your comments on contextual factors/ideas to the text. Remember that context informs, but should never dominate, your reading of the text. The text comes first.
- Time spent planning an answer can be very helpful in organising your ideas and helping you to build an argument.

Notes

Contact us

Our friendly team will be happy to support you between 8am and 4pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 0161 953 7504

Email: english-gcse@aca.org.uk

Twitter: [@AQAEnglish](https://twitter.com/AQAEnglish)

aca.org.uk