AQA

A-level
English Language & Literature
7707/1 Telling Stories
Report on the Examination

7707/1
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Version 1.0

General

Students showed that they were well prepared for the second year of this exam paper and examiners noted that there was generally an improvement in language focus compared to last year. The vast majority of students:

- completed all three questions
- included relevant ideas
- wrote at some length and produced reasonably developed answers
- showed an understanding of how to comparatively approach Question 1
- showed knowledge of their set texts and poetry

There were very few students who scored Level 1 marks across all three questions. There were hardly any rubric infringements and very few incomplete papers.

Assessment Objectives

AO1

This AO assesses three distinct strands:
1. Selection and analysis at appropriate language levels
2. Use of concepts, methods and terminology
3. Expression and presentation of ideas

It is worth noting that AO1 assesses more than the use of terminology and tests various kinds of knowledge a student might have. AO1 includes concepts (for example, characterisation), methods (tools of analysis), together with an ability to highlight features (specific textual examples). Students can therefore address AO1 in different ways; their use of terminology can be viewed as a vehicle for exploring and analysing these aspects of AO1.

- Those who achieved well on this AO were able to explore an aspect of their text through clearly identifying language levels and exploring patterns within them, using precise linguistic terminology to identify particular features. There is no hierarchy of methods or language levels on this specification, so students who chose a purposeful approach and were able to linguistically analyse their texts were able to access good marks
- Once again, a number of students who struggled to use many precise linguistic terms in their Section A and B answers, often did much better in Section C. In general, Section B answers were likely to contain the least precise language analysis
- Some terms appear to be not well understood:
  - juxtaposition – often used to denote any kind of contrast
  - oxymoron – often used to denote any kind of contrast in words
  - deixis - often misapplied as a number of students labelled any kind of spatial or temporal reference as 'deixis'. Students and teachers may find the following link helpful in discussing deixis: https://thedefinitearticle.aqa.org.uk/tag/deixis/
  - semantic field - a term sometimes used very loosely for any kind of collection of words, rather than being grouped by meaning. Some students identified a 'semantic field of nouns' or a 'semantic field of pronouns'

- o modality and modal verbs – these terms caused confusion for some students. There were a number of students who labelled verbs like 'makes' as modal verbs
- Some terms were not helpful in aiding students' analysis:
    - o broad labels like 'high frequency' and 'low frequency' lexis were often applied in an inaccurate or unhelpful way
    - o a number of students commented on the assonance within a particular example when it was not clear that there was any obvious assonance present or the claims for its effects were over-stated
    - o plosives were often correctly identified but did not always aid analysis. Sometimes students were spotting these kinds of phonological features without using them as a way to explore concepts and at the expense of closer analysis of meaning.

AO2

This AO assesses three distinct strands:
1. Maintaining a focus and selecting appropriate detail
2. An ability to interpret
3. Analysis of narrative techniques / construction of poetic voice and authorial craft
    - Students who did well on this AO provided an interpretation based on clear methods of analysis and gave close, text-based evidence to support their ideas
    - Students who did not make appropriate selections from the texts on which to base their discussion inevitably found it more difficult to access higher marks
    - Some students included very little comment on narrative point of view or poetic voice which is an important aspect of this AO.

AO3

This AO assesses three distinct strands:

For Section A
1. Factors associated with mode
2. Generic conventions including different ways of storytelling afforded by different genres
3. The influence of contextual factors (production and reception) on the negotiation and shaping of meaning

For Section B
1. Features of the extract and the wider novel associated with the fantasy genre
2. Genre conventions
3. The influence of contextual factors (production and reception) on the negotiation and shaping of meaning.

- some students carefully and relevantly included comments about context and genre into their discussion
- some students included comments on context and genre in a way that was not well focused on the question. This was especially noticeable in Section B where students from some schools began their answers with a clearly prepared generic introduction that covered genre, context of production and reception in a very broad, descriptive way and then moved onto answering the question, making no more AO3 comments. It was difficult for this kind of

approach to attract an AO3 mark higher than Level 2 or 3 as aspects of genre and context had not been 'analysed' but simply 'described' or 'explained'
- some students made little or no reference to genre or context in their Section B answers, beyond perhaps briefly labelling the text 'dystopian' or 'gothic'
- it is worth reiterating that students can approach 'context' in a number of equally valid ways: social, historical, biographical, literary, as well as contexts of reception.

AO4

This Question 1 AO assesses students' abilities to explore connections between texts and highlight similarities and differences – in the context of discussing the representation focus of the question.

- the vast majority of students had clearly been well prepared to use a comparative approach in their answers. Very few failed to make any connections
- those who were able to explore representations through comparing linguistic details of the texts were often more able to attract higher marks.

Section A – Question 1

There are three marks awarded for this question on the following assessment objectives:

AO1 (15 marks) – Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.
AO3 (15 marks) – Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received.
AO4 (10 marks) – Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods.

As a general overview, successful responses:
- showed a clear understanding of the contexts, genres and modes of both texts
- discussed how the use of language was influenced by the writers' stances and contexts of production
- used a comparative framework and compared linguistic details of the texts
- covered the texts equally
- supported ideas by exploring the language of relevant examples
- applied terminology accurately
- used precise terminology and explored in detail how meanings are shaped
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and methods of analysis
- explored mode differences in some detail
- provided interpretations that were well supported by detailed evidence from the text
- produced sustained and developed answers
- produced well expressed, clearly structured answers

As a general overview, less successful responses:

- included very generalised ideas on context, genre and mode
- misunderstood the audiences of the texts or showed limited appreciation of the audiences
- made limited comment on mode features

- included only very broad comparisons
- did not give roughly equal consideration to each text
- did not use precise terminology or made errors in the application of terminology
- used general labels (e.g. 'word', 'tone', 'imagery') rather than more precise terms
- feature spotted, with very limited exploration of meaning
- made broad assertions, not supported by clear examples
- produced very brief responses
- produced answers that were poorly expressed.

Students generally responded well to this question and it was clear that the majority of students were confident in working with these texts and were familiar with Steves and Bryson. The best responses were based around the key concepts for this question - representation, register, journeys, memories – and took a comparative and flexible approach in addressing these. There were some very well focused answers that explored how the texts represented the Louvre through its visitors and its art. Most recognised Bryson's entertaining presentation of the crowds and the tourist experience and compared this with the much calmer, directive guide. Students from some schools approached their answers with a very formulaic and rather rigid structure to stick to, comparing audience/purpose/mode/register/affordances/constraints etc. in a strict order which often led to a lack of focus on the question and limited exploration of representations. Students would be well advised to ensure that they do not spend too much time on more general points about context and mode. They need to ensure that they devote enough time to precise language analysis showing how representations are conveyed. While the majority of students explored language features with some accuracy, it was much rarer for students to explore clear patterns within the texts, and this was one of the barriers to high attainment under AO1. However, a number of students did compare the similes and metaphors in the texts and many identified the imperatives and spatial deixis in Text B and the hyperbole in Text A. Common errors in applying terms were: the verb 'worshipping' (instead of its use as a participle adjective in the extract) and the simile 'act like a Frenchman'.

Most students clearly understood the texts, although some appeared to be confused by Bryson's descriptions of the American queues, implying that the people in trench coats were in the queue outside the Louvre, and others appeared to believe that the ancient Greeks really did have Barbie dolls.

In terms of AO3, most students recognised the differences between the texts afforded by their genres and their contexts of production and reception. However, it was surprising that mode was not more prominently explored given the sharp contrast between the Bryson and the Steves extracts. Some students did clearly explore the features of Text B's spoken mode, but few students explored the written mode aspects of Text A.

When considering AO4, it was clear that some students did not recognise that they should be primarily comparing representations of the Louvre, Paris and Parisians as opposed to comparing the presence (or absence) of linguistic features.

Section B – Imagined Worlds

There are three marks awarded for this question on the following assessment objectives:

AO1 (10 marks) – Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.

AO2 (10 marks) – Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts.
AO3 (15 marks) – Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received.

This section focuses on how language choices help to shape the representations of different worlds and perspectives in prose fiction. Students also consider genre conventions and key aspects of the contexts of production and reception.

As a general overview, successful responses:

- focused on the question
- discussed the construction and effects of narrative point of view
- supported ideas by exploring the language of relevant quotations from both the extract and other points in the novel
- applied terminology accurately
- used precise terminology and explored in detail how meanings are shaped
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and methods (e.g. types of narration, modality, representation of speech and thought)
- provided interpretations that were well supported by detailed evidence from the text
- showed awareness of the conventions of gothic or dystopian fiction and explored this in a relevant way
- included relevant and thoughtful comments on contextual factors
- produced sustained answers
- produced well expressed, clearly structured answers

As a general overview, less successful responses:

- did not adequately address the question
- made little or no comment on narrative point of view
- made little or no comment on different points in the novel
- did not use precise terminology or made errors in the application of terminology
- used general labels (e.g. 'word', 'tone', 'imagery') rather than more precise terms
- feature spotted, with very limited exploration of meaning
- made broad assertions, not supported by clear examples
- did not contextualise well quotations taken from different points in the novel
- drifted off the focus of the question into more general considerations of genre
- did not consider contextual factors
- produced very brief responses with only a few superficially relevant ideas
- produced answers that were poorly expressed

The most popular novel was *The Handmaid's Tale* and examiners noted that this text usually provided better answers than the other modern novel, *The Lovely Bones. Dracula* was the minority choice.

The majority of students showed engagement with their chosen text and most demonstrated at least some sound understanding of how the writer had crafted the novel and achieved particular effects. However, as examiners noted last year, students' ability to maintain a close linguistic focus was often less successful in this section than with Sections A or C. A number of students answered the questions with very little linguistic focus and were therefore unable to gain higher marks for AO1. AO3 seemed to be better addressed this year, although there was still a tendency for some to do little more than mention the words 'fantasy', 'gothic' or 'dystopia' rather than apply

this in a more developed way to the detail of their texts. Most students were able to refer to other parts of the novel but some did not 'select' examples from those points to analyse and thereby limited their AO2 mark to Level 2. Some of the different points in the novel that were chosen did not always relate to the question. Sometimes students failed to clearly explain which part of the novel they were referring to in their different points which made it difficult for examiners to appreciate what was being said.

Question 2

This was by far the more popular of the *Frankenstein* questions. There were some excellent responses that explored the language of the extract and other sections in detail and provided a thoughtful discussion on the attitudes of the creature towards his creator. The most useful contextual points often related to the gothic conventions of the novel, although those students who dealt with literary contexts such as the relationship of the novel to *Paradise Lost* often benefited from being able to discuss parallels with Satan's resentment of his creator. These answers also often included a clear awareness of the context of production and the backdrop of scientific experimentation that influenced Shelley. Many students chose to refer to different points where the creature first sees Frankenstein and the creature's final words to Walton. In the better answers, selections were made from elsewhere in the text in order to analyse further how the creature's attitudes are presented. In some weaker responses, students struggled to maintain a focus on the creature's attitudes and drifted into Frankenstein's attitudes or general comments about how the creature is treated by mankind. As was the case more generally with Section B answers, weaker responses also failed to explore the language of the novel, in spite of the fact that there was much of linguistic interest in the extract.

Question 3

There were only a few responses seen to this question. Students who chose this tended to produce good answers that discussed the significance of actual and metaphorical journeys, supporting their ideas with clear analysis of examples from the text.

Question 4

This was the least popular of the *Dracula* questions. Those who chose it generally found the question accessible and took the opportunity to comment on gothic locations and the symbolism of place. Most students were able to provide some detailed analysis of the extract, although they often lacked more detailed consideration of other selections from the novel.

Question 5

This was the most popular question choice for *Dracula* and most students appreciated the importance of Dracula's attacks on Mina. Many responses explored symbolic contrasts of colour and linked this to gothic features. They also examined the use of violence and there were some interesting contrasts between gender roles and stereotypes associate with men and women. A number of responses discussed the sexualised nature of the descriptions of the attacks and also commented on the fact that Jonathan Harker is presented as lacking in strength to protect Mina in the extract. There was evidence of some excellent use of contextual factors to support analysis,

including good vs evil, gothic motifs and some references to Stoker's personal life. Weaker responses lacked a clearer linguistic focus and sometimes struggled to identify different parts of the novel connected with the attacks on Mina.

Question 6

This question was slightly less popular than Question 7, but given the popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale*, there was quite a range in the quality of answers. The best responses showed a clear understanding of Offred's narrative point of view in presenting her relationship with Nick. There were some subtle readings that focused on modality and how Offred's uncertainty about Nick is portrayed. There was much in the extract for these students to discuss and many also made good selections from different points in the novel. Many chose to refer to Offred's first meeting with Nick and her final encounter with him before she is taken away. It was interesting to see that many students this year were better prepared to explore the genre and contexts of this novel. Nearly all students were able to link the relationship to dystopian societies, the controlling nature of Gilead and the influence of religion. Better responses explored and analysed how these genre conventions are presented within the novel; weaker responses merely labelled the novel as 'dystopian' and left it at that. Some students spent a little too much time explaining more generalised contextual factors as opposed to using them to underpin their examination of the text. Some weaker responses lost focus on the question and wrote character studies of Nick or provided more simple interpretations of the relationship which emphasised the romantic element. Weaker responses also included very little focus on precise language analysis.

Question 7
This was the most popular question in Section B. Students were generally able to comment on the way the treatment of the handmaids is presented in the extract and in some relevant other selections. Better responses analysed the way their treatment is filtered through Offred's narrative perspective and how the dystopian view of women is conveyed. Weaker responses tended to lack linguistic analysis and some lost focus on the question, drifting into a more general consideration of the way women are treated in Gilead, including the wives, the Aunts and the women in Jezebels. A number of students included a lot of contextual information about Puritans, Nazi Germany, Islam, second wave feminism, the rise of the new right in America, etc., but sometimes at the expense of answering the question and focusing on the text. Better responses focused on textual detail, such as the use of religious language and how this is manipulated, and then linked this to contextual factors.

Question 8

This was slightly more popular than Question 9 but tended to be less well answered. Most responses focused on the 1st person account and the fantastical narrator but in a rather straightforward, explanatory/descriptive manner. Most responses also picked out exclamatories and references to Barbie dolls as evidence of youth and innocence. Apart from a lack of closer linguistic analysis, the main issue with this question and Question 9 was the lack of a more useful sense of genre and context. A number of students appeared to be including pre-learned phrases about Susie 'breaking the laws of space and time', references to 9/11 and many just dropped in the phrase 'fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world' without real engagement. Better responses mentioned romantic fiction, bildungsroman, magical realism, 1970s suburban life, how the book could help young readers cope with grief, etc., but few provided a clear sense of how young people's perspectives are significant in the novel.

Question 9

Answers to this question were usually better focused than those for Question 8. Many tended to become character studies of Grandma Lynn but there were some more thoughtful responses that included comments about her role in uniting the family and some students made interesting use of Propp's character theory. Most understood that Grandma Lynn is seen through Susie's omniscient narrative perspective but didn't go much further that asserting that. Students appeared unsure on context for this question. Some made the kind of generic context points made in Question 8 answers. One or two better responses discussed 1970s American culture and gender politics and linked this to the presentation of Grandma Lynn and her relationship with Abigail. In reference to different places in the novel, most responses used Grandma Lynn talking to Abigail on their walk or Grandma Lynn's phone call to Jack.

Section C

As many examiners noted last year, students who had previously not really analysed language features in Section B, were much more focused on this in their poetry answers. However, there were many excellent answers in this section. Once again, some responses were framed as comparisons, although there is no necessity for students to compare the poems. For some students this provided a suitable structure, but for the majority it had no advantage and for some probably led to more superficial analysis because they did not develop ideas on one poem before moving onto the other. Across all the poets, some students worked their way through both poems chronologically, which led to some rather list-like responses which didn't fully address the question set. Better responses showed students more thoughtfully prioritising details to select according to the question focus. This year, students seemed to be better focused on the construction of poetic voice. Some students appeared to think that they needed to include contextual comments in their poetry answers and included biographical and/or contextual details. This tended to take their focus away from analysing the poems and is not necessary for this question.

Question 10

Donne continues to be a minority choice and this question was the least popular of the questions on this poet. Weaker responses showed that some students had limited appreciation of the subtleties of Donne's poetry and struggled to do little more than pull out a few quotations from the poems and explain that they show infidelity. A number of students revealed limited understanding of *A Jet Ring Sent*. Better responses recognised the attitudes of the poetic voice, often choosing *The Apparition* or *Women's Constancy* as their second poem. Some examiners noted that they saw quite a lot of inaccurate labelling of linguistic terms in these responses which they felt was possibly due to students finding it harder to recognise how words were being used in this more archaic style.

Question 11

This was the more popular and generally better answered of the questions on Donne. *The Relic* was mostly well understood and was often paired with *The Apparition*, which was less well understood. The speaker in *The Apparition* was frequently interpreted as having literally been killed by his lover and returning to haunt her. Many students recognised the speaker's feelings about

death in *The Relic* and how death could provide the speaker with the opportunity to display his love. Only a few responses, however, were able to explore the poems in more subtle depth.

Question 12

This was by far the most popular question on Browning and, on the whole, it produced some very successful answers. Examiners reported that students of all abilities were able to explore attitudes with engagement and enthusiasm and were well focused on the question. *Porphyria's Lover* was clearly understood; more often than not paired appropriately with *My Last Duchess*, although a few chose *The Laboratory*. Some weaker responses tended to show a misunderstanding of the relationship between the speaker and Porphyria which made interpretations challenging. Some students appeared to think that they needed to include contextual information, which was unnecessary.

Question 13

This question was generally less well answered than Question 12, often because students struggled to engage with the poetic voice and what Browning was achieving through his descriptions of nature in these paired poems. Some students commented only on *Meeting at Night*. Most chose *Home Thoughts* or *De Gustibus* – as the more successful pairings.

Question 14

This was the most popular question in Section C and, on the whole, it produced successful answers. Clearly, as for any popular question, there was a range in the quality of responses, but most students were able to make at least some valid interpretative points based on analysis of language. Most students were able to keep focused on the question. Many compared *First Love* to *Valentine* or *Mean Time* and looked at the different representations of romantic love. Many students successfully analysed the strength of the feelings of the poetic voice in *First Love*. Most commented on the strength of the dream and the effects of the verb 'waking'. The simile 'as close to my lips as lipstick' was often explored, as was 'the garden shaking with light', although this proved rather problematic for some. There were some interesting interpretations of windows and reflections, with most answers recognising Duffy's ability to convey the vulnerability of the poetic voice. In weaker responses, there was often a lack of more explicit references to poetic voice. Some spent a considerable amount of time writing in more general terms about the structure of the poem and enjambment but without clear references or relevant analysis of how this helped to convey romantic love. On the whole, *Valentine* tended to be more thoroughly analysed than *First Love*. Those who chose *Mean Time* tended to produce responses that were a little less well answered than those who chose *Valentine*. There were some thoughtful responses to *Close* although understanding of this poem sometimes seemed less secure. Once again, quite a few students compared their poems, which was usually not the best approach as they lost clarity and focus. Most students used at least some precise linguistic terms in their answers, although some examiners reported that they marked whole schools where general labelling such as 'lexical choice' was used by students throughout their responses, which led to lower AO1 marks.

Question 15

Students mostly engaged well with this question and there were a number of thoughtful answers that were well focused on attitudes to change. The most successful choices of poems to pair with *The Captain* were *Before You Were Mine, Never Go Back* and *Meantime. Stafford Afternoons* was a less successful choice, as was *Nostalgia*, although there were a few answers where this poem produced some thoughtful ideas based on thorough language analysis. Most students were able to make clear comments on the presentation of poetic voice in *The Captain, Mean Time* and *Never Go Back*, although there tended to be less certainty about this in comments on *Stafford Afternoons*. Some students labelled any first person poem as a 'dramatic monologue'. Those students who saw the difference in form and perspective between *The Captain* and, for example, *Before You Were Mine* were able to explore more subtle differences in the presentation in poetic voice and views about change.

Question 16

Students were able to identify the metaphorical element of the skunk and how this might relate to the wife in the poem. Most assumed the poetic voice was Heaney because of autobiographical links to these experiences and this helped them work with a bigger picture for language analysis. Fortunately, not many students engaged in a lengthy discussion of Heaney's life. The range of language techniques in the poem was enabling for students to explore more tacit language features. There were some weaker responses, mainly because students didn't engage with anything more extended than the literal meaning. The most popular pairings with *The Skunk* were *Night Drive* and *The Otter. Night Drive* was the most consistently successful of these two choices, with most students recognising Heaney is writing about his journey to his wife and managing to focus on this separation. *Mid-Term Break* proved to be a less successful pairing as students struggled to write about the more subtle aspects of separation in this poem.

Question 17

On the whole, this was a successful question for a number of students. Most were able to appreciate the changing tone of *Follower*, and responded to the poem thoughtfully. Again, *Mid Term Break* was not always the best pairing here, as students often struggled to make it relevant. The most popular choice was comparing with *Blackberry Picking* or *Death of a Naturalist* which was enabling because students were able to discuss growing up and change in a similar way to *Follower. Digging* was another popular pairing, with both poems being quite accessible and clearly autobiographical. Some better answers were able to engage with patterns of language in *Follower* really well, by looking at subtle changes to verb forms and morphology, for example 'stumbling' as opposed to 'stumbled' and the triplet of verbs 'tripping, falling,/Yapping'. Weaker responses had some difficulty connecting with the question focus. While many were able to write fairly clearly about the change between childhood and adulthood, or indeed the change from middle-age to old age, many adopted a descriptive approach of gradually working through the poems, which often seemed to limit attainment on AO2 as appropriateness of choices was not always apparent.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.