
AS

ENGLISH LITERATURE A

7711/2 Love through the ages: Prose
Report on the Examination

7711
2017

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General Remarks

This report should be read in conjunction with the report on 7711/1. It was evident from the marking of Component 2 that the historicist philosophy of the specification, using the shared context of love through the ages, continues to be positively embraced for providing clarity and coherence. Importantly, this new specification aims to encourage confident, independent readers who are able to 'make meaning' through both close textual analysis and a wider understanding of the contexts that might inform their literary study to produce work with a clear, authentic voice. Teachers, students and examiners have welcomed the holistic marking of five assessment objectives using a 25 mark scale divided into five bands. The holistic use of assessment objectives allows for a more flexible mark scheme which aims to encourage independent work which is not constrained by some of the formulaic constraints that had evolved within the legacy specification.

Holistic marking enables responses to be assessed as organic whole texts in themselves. Assessment objectives are not tracked in the marking or reported on separately in summative comments. This enables the genuine inter-relatedness of assessment objectives to be respected. The advice to students is to concentrate on answering the question set and let the assessment objectives look after themselves.

Compared to last year, students were less inclined to

- 'bolt on' contextual knowledge rather than find relevant contextual references within the text
- balance the given view with a counter-argument out of a sense of obligation rather than authentic conviction
- make explicit connections to other texts out of a sense of obligation rather than to illuminate meaning
- assert erroneous sweeping statements about historical context.

These findings suggest that students were well prepared for the academic and practical demands of the papers and that the papers make reasonable expectations of candidates.

Section A Unseen Prose

The unseen extract (from DH Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*) appeared to capture the interest of the vast majority of students. The introduction provides background information about this passage and the novel from which it comes as well as helps to inform the students' interpretations. While most read this introduction carefully in the way it was intended, some students used it unhelpfully: either by repeating parts of it verbatim in their answers, or by extrapolating from its details to make unsupported claims. For example, occasionally students misread the detail about Paul's father's job and said that Paul was a miner and went on to make assertions about his mining background and how this was important in the extract.

Strong readings demonstrated a confident understanding of the whole extract and used well-selected details as examples. The very best also explored how a range of features shape meaning and create effects. Students who produced such readings were comfortable exploring ambiguity and complexity and could comment on aspects such as symbolism and other elements of figurative

language sensitively, without reducing literary effects to simple meanings. They were able to show how ambivalent the characters' emotions, and the ways in which Lawrence evokes them, are. Less successful were responses that were preoccupied by defining characters' feelings simply (sometimes using informal twenty-first century terms) and which saw them as clear and fixed. Similarly, when commenting on Lawrence's methods, less successful responses assigned interpretations that were too concrete – and occasionally, crude – for Lawrence's subtle and nuanced descriptions.

Students explored a wide range of authorial methods. The best responses used critical terminology and concepts flexibly, with some commenting on prose aspects skilfully. For example, they explored aspects of narrative, such as the third person narrative which offers insight into mostly the feelings of Miriam while leaving the reader to deduce those of Paul from his actions and his (relatively few) speeches.

Context was an area that sometimes closed down interpretation rather than opened it up. For example, the religious imagery sometimes led to unsubstantiated claims about the extreme authority of the church, with many of these reading Paul's final words, 'till Sunday', as being indicative of his devout faith. Similarly, the dusky atmosphere led some to read the extract as being from a Gothic novel and led to seeing the relationship as sinister and threatening as well as failing to appreciate any of the romantic elements in the passage. Readings that saw Miriam as being affected by the suffragette movement or as one who was rebelling against patriarchy by dominating Paul and forcing him to do her bidding, or which saw Paul as a domineering patriarch, were unhelpful. Claims were also made about the text as a modernist novel; some of these might have borne fruit had the experimental elements in the passage been explored, but such labelling often led to digressive comments in which pre-learned material was offered with little relevance to the unseen extract.

A few students felt that they had to make a specific and detailed reference to another text. This is not necessary and, in many cases, an impediment in this examination which allows 45 minutes per answer. Making a link to another text on the specification rarely cast much light on the extract, and often a detailed link lead to a digression rather than a purposeful reading. More helpful references included those that used context sparingly and in ways that were integrated into the answer, or those that explored the typicality of elements such as the significance of flowers as a romantic image, Lawrence's use of religious or transcendent imagery connected with love and the effects of the use of pastoral imagery.

More successful answers

- had a clear overview of the whole extract and selected relevant details judiciously
- analysed the ways in which several authorial methods worked together to create meaning and effects
- explored the unseen extract through a clear, relevant debate of the critical view
- argued with conviction, taking a clear stance on the critical view and not necessarily treating each side of the debate equally
- integrated brief, well-chosen and relevant contextual information into their response.

Less successful answers

- considered characters as real people rather than the constructs of an author
- identified word classes without commenting on meaning or effects
- gave a mechanical response to the view, treating each side of the debate equally but without a sense of conviction

- used context in an assertive, inaccurate, irrelevant or digressive manner
- made explicit, and sometimes lengthy, reference to other texts – often from elsewhere on the specification – that were of little or no relevance to the unseen extract.

Section B Comparing prose texts

The full range of set texts was studied, with *The Great Gatsby* and *Wuthering Heights* being the most popular and *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca* and *Atonement* also proving widely studied. Most students grasped the comparative nature of the question, and most wrote a roughly equal amount on each text, though there was a minority of unbalanced answers as well as some which amounted to separate essays on each text. The best answers addressed the question directly at the beginning, offering overview and taking a comparative stance; such answers went on to compare throughout, or – if they focused on one novel to begin with – made the second part of their answer's main body address the second novel, bringing in comparisons throughout. Some students under-performed by presenting dutifully balanced arguments that explored one side then the other without offering a strongly-argued opinion. Other students did, however, take advantage of the freedom from having to present a balanced argument and were able to craft well-argued responses that considered the viewpoint with conviction. On the whole, context was better handled in this section, which suggests that students are learning about specific contexts and are doing so in a way that is integrated within their study of the texts. For example, when writing about *The Great Gatsby*, some strong answers explored relevant contextual aspects, such as the differences between old and new money and the impact of advertising on 1920s American culture, with strong understanding and specific detail.

More successful answers

- were well planned and concise, with a clear introduction and a conclusion which gave the answer a pleasing sense of closure; such conclusions were usually short and often offered a final thought or expanded on the significance of what had been argued
- selected their material – including quotations and passages – judiciously, making good use of the open book nature of the examination
- considered all the terms of the critical view thoughtfully, often grappling with specific words such as 'always' and 'any'
- engaged fully with the viewpoint and were confident enough to take a strong stance
- made well-developed comparisons that explored authorial methods as well as subject matter and characterisation
- used fully-understood, apt, specific and integrated contextual detail to illuminate their analysis and argument.

Less successful answers

- wrote without planning, often producing rambling, lengthy responses
- quoted inaccurately or used material not wholly appropriate to the question set
- felt the need to balance their argument in a mechanical manner, considering one side and then the other but arguing without conviction
- did not respond to all of the terms of the question

- adopted narrative or generalized approaches and viewed invented characters as real people
- made explicit reference to other texts that were irrelevant, or which led to digressions or made digressive, generalised or inaccurate use of context.

Question 2

‘Literature often suggests that love can break down any barrier.’

By comparing **two** prose texts, explore the extent to which you agree with this statement.

The critical view prompted a range of responses, and, as ever, there was no single formula for producing a high-performing answer. Some students chose to concentrate on a single barrier – often social class. Sometimes such answers gave the impression that students were adapting pre-prepared material – perhaps from sitting mock or specimen question papers. Yet others were more successful and engaged thoughtfully with the ‘any’ part of the view. Typically, such answers did focus on a single issue, but considered other elements that presented barriers for part of their answer, often in their introduction and conclusion. Many students created strong responses by exploring two or three different types of barrier, making close reference to their texts throughout. Some weaker responses simply listed examples of barriers.

Context was often a discriminator. Weaker answers used context digressively or inaccurately, with unhelpful details ranging from confusion over the intricacies and nuances of social class distinctions to the belief that new money was the same as criminal activity. Strong answers integrated contextual material and used it to develop and often to illuminate their arguments. Such answers often used contextual details sparingly and moved fluently between text and context.

Question 3

‘In literature, lovers always deceive each other and themselves.’

By comparing two prose texts, explore the extent to which you agree with this statement.

Students wrote about many kinds of deception; the most popular were lying to others or committing adultery. Weaker answers often listed numerous examples of deceit by different characters without developing the discussion beyond simple, character-based points. Stronger answers often considered self-delusion, the reasons for deceit (such as societal pressure), and even the literary effects of deception within narratives, such as commenting on how it might be said that Nick from *The Great Gatsby* deceives both the reader and himself.

As with answers to Question 2, the best responses to Question 3 were able to select material judiciously with the question in mind and to demonstrate a strong sense of understanding whole novels. Weaker responses often seemed dependent on well-known, or much-quoted, parts of their texts which they seemed determined to use regardless of their appropriateness to the question. As ever, the best students knew their texts very well and were able to use their understanding flexibly, quoting from and making reference to a wide range of material from throughout the texts. The best answers showed impressive textual and contextual understanding and were written in a concise

and fluent academic register, using a flexible vocabulary of literary terminology and concepts aptly and precisely.

Note

Although the main purpose of this report is to summarise the ways in which students responded to the demands of the question paper, it also offers advice on how schools and colleges can prepare students effectively for future examinations. It should be used in conjunction with the June 2017 mark scheme, which contains not only the relevant assessment grids but also indicative content for each question. While not intended to be prescriptive, teachers and students might find this document useful when considering potential ways to approach unseen items and how references to contexts and wider reading might be made.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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