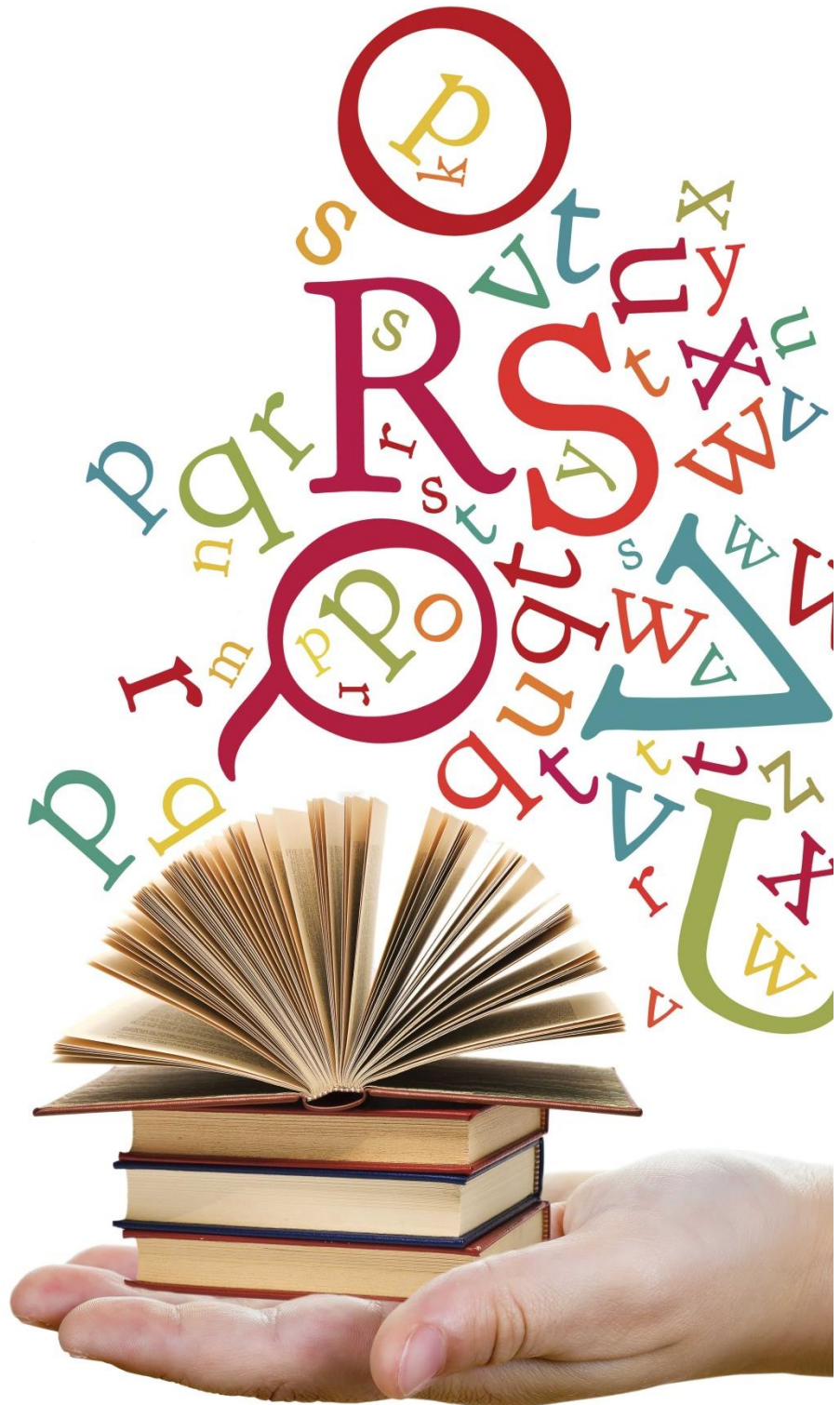


Making Connections: non-exam assessment guidance

A-level English Language and Literature (7707)



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About

Making Connections is the non-exam assessment (NEA) component of our A-level English Language and Literature specification. Making Connections focuses on language use in different types of text and requires students to make active connections between a literary text and some non-literary material.

The NEA offers students the opportunity to undertake a small-scale research project in stylistics. It is designed to build on and extend skills and knowledge developed on other areas of the course. The guidance below provides further advice on the nature of the component, the choosing of texts and tasks, secondary reading, structuring the report, assessment and the planning of teaching time.

Vision for the unit

What does a piece of research in stylistics look like?

Research in stylistics is grounded in language study as exemplified by the use of language levels in the AQA specification, and other established frameworks and methods for exploring texts (see the AQA Glossary of key terms and guide to methods of language analysis for examples of these). Undertaking work in stylistics means avoiding offering vague, impressionistic and simple, intuitive comments about meanings. All students submitting NEA work need to adopt a transparent language-based approach.

Using stylistics as a research methodology means that students need to pay attention to both precise linguistic description and sustained interpretation, highlighting the interpretative significance of every language choice and emphasising the importance of contextual factors.

These principles underpin AQA's vision for the subject generally and support students in exploring the key concepts on this specification, which are also the key concepts for this unit:

- genre
- narrative
- point of view
- register
- representation
- literariness.

The final bullet point is an important one. The whole question of the nature of literature and literariness is central to this specification. That means that as part of the 'Making Connections' component students should be thinking about literariness as a continuum and exploring connections between so called 'literary' and 'non-literary' material in terms of the creative use of language.

What is the focus of the NEA?

When working on and writing up their NEA, students should not focus broadly and impressionistically on general themes. Rather, they need to demonstrate that they are able to undertake research-led work that foregrounds the skills of close language-driven analysis in a report-based format. The report should be concerned with the questions of how and in what ways writers make small- and large-scale language choices, and how these may be influenced by a range of contextual factors.

Specifically, 'Making Connections' requires students to make active connections between a literary text and some non-literary material. The connections must be based either on a chosen theme or on the idea that particular linguistic strategies and features may occur in the different types of material.

There are two possible ways that students can organise and undertake their thinking, planning and writing; both approaches are valid and both will allow opportunities for them to build on areas of study from the two examination units.

The first approach

This would be to explore a theme or some aspect of representation across texts, for example the representation of travel in a literary text and personal memoirs/travel blogs (eg Bill Bryson, Tim Moore, Paul Smith).

Possible areas of study using this example might be: dangers of travelling; travelling alone; journeys as self-discovery, as metaphor and in the construction of identity; travel and place, memories, connections with people.

Other possible investigations using this approach could include the representation of:

- war in a literary text and in media coverage of Armistice Day
- London in a literary text and in transcripts of dialogue between two friends who have visited the city
- children in a literary text and in Gina Ford's parenting guides
- the supernatural in a literary text and in film trailers for horror films.

The second approach

This would be to explore the use of a particular language feature or aspect of narrative/point of view across material. For example, the nature of storytelling in a literary text and in news reports of serious crimes.

Possible areas of study using this example might be:

- why certain events are seen as important to talk about
- structure of stories
- ways that events are narrated
- any focuses on specific people, places and events,
- the use of speech or other techniques.

Other possible investigations using this approach could include:

- the discourse structure and speech features in a literary text and in transcripts of gamers
- the use of modality in a literary text and in official government documentation
- the coining of new words and meanings in a literary text and in message board posts
- the construction and development of characters in a literary text and in selected songs of Eminem
- the use of standard and non-standard dialects in a literary text and in tourist board advertising.

Choosing texts

Which texts can be chosen?

Texts prescribed for study for the examined units may not be chosen, but further texts by the same authors or from a similar source are acceptable.

For poetry texts, students should avoid using any material by the four set poets (Donne, Browning, Heaney and Duffy) for their NEA. The work of these poets in the *AQA Anthology: poetic voices* is largely drawn from different sources rather than a single collection. Consequently, it would be difficult for students to find a single volume that didn't contain Anthology material. In addition, it is in the spirit of the design of the investigation to broaden students' experiences of writers, so we would encourage students to build on their study of poetry by exploring other poets if they wish to explore this literary genre for their NEA.

The nature of the non-literary material to be collected depends entirely on the focus of the task. A wide range of everyday texts and discourses in different genres and modes is possible. The non-literary material needs to qualify on the basis of forming a good source of data for students to use in their investigations. This material should also be appropriate in terms of its content given the choice of literary text and the intended focus of investigation.

What is meant by literary and non-literary material?

For the purposes of this specification, literary texts are defined as those that are drawn from the three main literary genres of **prose fiction**, **poetry** and **drama**. 'Non-literary' is an overarching term that describes more than simply non-fiction. It includes non-fiction but also texts and data that are not formally published and marketed – for example, personal letters, spontaneous speech and multimedia texts. Non-literary texts do not have to occur in continuous prose: they can be charts and diagrams, transcripts and lists.

How much material needs to be covered?

Students need to select an appropriate amount of material given the suggested word count for each section and the overall limit. There is no set amount of material but all data must be manageable to allow sustained and detailed coverage and analysis.

When exploring their literary text, students may wish to focus exclusively on a relatively long single extract or range more widely, examining a number of different extracts from various parts of the text. Either approach is fine as long as a focus on close language-driven analysis is maintained.

How do students use poetry texts?

If poetry is chosen, then students must work with a published collection, eg Ted Hughes, *Birthday Letters*, and should ensure that they treat the collection as a coherent whole rather than simply commenting on individual poems in an unconnected way. There is no set number of poems that ought to be studied but students should work with the same amount of material as if they were using a prose novel or drama. This means that it would be possible to select and work with a single long poem or a number of shorter poems. Students should, however, remember that they must contextualise the collection in their 'Introduction and aims' to show that they have read the entire text and can justify their choice of material for analysis.

Anthologies of material may be suitable as long as there is a common thread that connects poems in the collection. For example, *The Penguin Book of First War Poetry* (ed George Walter, Penguin) would be suitable as its contents all focus on aspects of war. In contrast, a general collection such as *The Nation's Favourite Poems* (BBC Books) covers too wide a set of themes and students would not be able to comment on the poems as a unified set.

Can students use collections of short stories?

As with poetry, students must work with a published collection, eg Jon McGregor *This Isn't The Sort Of Thing That Happens To Someone Like You*. There is no set number of stories that ought to be studied but students should work with the same amount of material as if they were using a prose novel or drama. This means that it would be possible to select and work with extracts from one short story or from a number of different stories. Students should, however, remember that they must contextualise the collection in their 'Introduction and aims' to show that they have read the entire text and can justify their choice of material for analysis.

As with poetry, any anthology of short stories used must have work that can be viewed as a collection rather than a set of unrelated narratives.

Collections of short stories that would be suitable include:

- *The Penguin Book of Modern Women's Short Stories* (ed Susan Hill, Penguin)
- *The Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories* (ed Michael Cox and R. A Gilbert, Oxford University Press)
- *Gothic Short Stories* (ed. David Blair, Wordsworth Classics).

Can students use collections of short stories?

Yes, although books for young children (pre-teenagers) would clearly not be suitable. Established classics, young adult and crossover fiction would all be suitable for study on this unit. Those students choosing to use children's or young adult literature need to carefully consider aspects such as implied readership, point of view and the representation of certain ideas and issues. It would be possible to establish and discuss interesting connections between such literature and non-literary material aimed at younger audiences.

As always, centres should check with their NEA adviser for further guidance if they have any queries regarding suitability.

What strategies can we use to support students who struggle to choose a literary text?

It would be useful to encourage students to draw on other parts of the course when considering potential choices (remembering that they cannot use any text that is on the specification even if they have not themselves studied it). Schools and colleges can also draw together lists of suitable texts from which students choose or recommend texts to both individuals and groups of students.

How do we support students in selecting and working with non-literary material?

Students should be taught the descriptive tools, methods and frameworks with which to analyse a range of non-literary texts (including spoken and blended mode texts) as part of their study of the *AQA Anthology: Paris*. As part of their preparation for conducting a research project, they should

be taught how to collect and select data, annotate and code to highlight patterns, present their work in an appropriate form and use references according to established academic conventions.

How much balance in coverage should be given to literary and non-literary material?

Even coverage should be given to literary and non-literary material.

Secondary reading

The research element on this unit means that students need to appreciate the importance of academic reading around their chosen topic. They should be aware of others' ideas, theories and research and how these relate to their own thoughts, analyses and findings.

Generally, secondary reading will either be:

- reading that is used to introduce and **show understanding** of a framework, concept, period or genre, eg discussion of what metaphor is, or the discourse conventions of Twitter, or what Romanticism is or what the overarching themes of WW1 trench poetry are etc
- reading that is essentially **interpretation** - this will largely be drawn from the literary critical tradition but could also work from other fields as well.

How much secondary reading is needed?

One or two is too few.

Whilst there is no set number of sources required, one or two is too few and would not allow students to demonstrate good knowledge of their chosen area of study. The secondary reading should provide a frame for discussion – students don't necessarily need to use the secondary reading to support or contest findings although they could for example use their findings to support what a reader (academic or otherwise) has said about a text. It is a fundamental theoretical framework rather than a 'bolt on' requirement.

How is this assessed?

Secondary reading is explicitly assessed for AO1 as it is part of the research method, but has implications for other assessment objectives too. Although the majority of discussion around secondary reading will be in the *Review* section, discussions of secondary readings could feasibly fit into any section, and successful NEA folders may have references to readings throughout, demonstrating evidence of knowledge and a strong theoretical framework.

Why is secondary reading important?

Secondary reading shows evidence that the student has an awareness of published work in appropriate disciplines (eg stylistics, linguistics, literary criticism, media studies, etc) and beyond. Knowledge gained from secondary readings should support, contest and underpin the NEA folder. It is an important skill for those wishing to pursue further study in higher education (as a reading and research skill) and as a general skillset in the workplace. Secondary reading is an important aspect of academic study itself - any piece of academic work needs to show an understanding of the field, what others have said, and how this relates to the original research being presented.

Can secondary reading for NEA go beyond literary critical and language theory reading, eg historical secondary reading, or Psychology or Gender Studies, if appropriate to chosen texts?

Secondary reading for the NEA can come from any academic field: literary criticism, linguistics, stylistics, narratology, psychology and so on **but** it must be credible, and relevant to the task and

the language feature(s) being discussed. For example, if a student is investigating the representation of females in a novel and advertising they might draw on ideas from gender studies or if they were looking at how historical events are framed in a novel and some song lyrics they might make use of historical facts. Students and teachers are free to choose the most suitable secondary reading for the NEA (see also 3.8).

Although most students are likely to focus on language-based books/articles, we are also keen to encourage the use of literary criticism as secondary reading so that students can show or reject in more rigorous ways what literary critics might be saying about the texts they are studying.

The following example gives an indication of how secondary reading might explicitly draw from several different fields:

NEA task: An investigation into the representation of London in Ian McEwan's novel Saturday together with some transcripts of spoken data where speakers are discussing living in the city.

- **Critical reading on McEwan (literary criticism)** eg:
 - Groes, S. (2013) (ed.) *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 2nd edn, London: Bloomsbury.
 - Head, D. (2013) *Ian McEwan*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- **Reading on the shaping of experiences through narratives (narratology)** eg:
 - Abbott, H.P. (2008) *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - Toolan, M. (2001) *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, London: Routledge.
- **Reading on interaction/conversational analysis (sociolinguistics)** eg:
 - Garcia, A. (2013) *An Introduction to Interaction: Understanding Talk in Formal and Informal Settings*, London: Bloomsbury.
 - Stockwell, P. (2007) *Sociolinguistics: A Resource Book for Students*, London: Routledge.

Where can we access secondary reading material?

Secondary reading can be drawn from a variety of sources. Students might refer to academic journals and magazines both in print and online forms, reviews in learned magazines, transcripts of interviews, and reviews of performances (eg for drama), as well as traditional academic books.

It may be worth taking the time to develop a digital library within your department that teachers and students can access and add to as they go.

The sources given here are all online, but of course different centres may well have relevant material in their own libraries.

AQA guide, [An introduction to stylistics and further reading](#)

This details sources and further reading that teachers and students might find useful. For those who printed this resource, it's here: <http://bit.ly/2ISxPTx>.

AQA-endorsed [student book](#) and free *Teacher's Resources* from Cambridge University Press

Extensive reading lists throughout, categorised by topics. Both of these have chapters dedicated to the NEA and conducting research in stylistics. Type bit.ly/2IO3Hb0 for the student book, or bit.ly/2msxlGI for *Teacher's Resources*.

[The Definite Article](#) blog

AQA's dedicated Language and Literature blog has 'digests' (short, accessible summaries) of research in stylistics, as well as suggestions for further reading. Each blog post has a 'taking it further' section, which outlines ways that teachers and students may make use of them in the classroom. Find it here: thedefinitearticle.aqa.org.uk.

Academia

A searchable database of academics' profiles, many of which have free book chapters, articles and research papers available for download.

academia.edu

Other sources of reading could include:

- Google Scholar, scholar.google.co.uk
- Publishers' websites for some open access journals.

Non-academic material

A wide range of non-academic material may be used as secondary reading. This includes sources such as:

- book reviews
- data from online reading groups and discussion forums
- newspaper articles
- blogs and social media posts.

How much does the student need to say about this secondary reading in the Review section of the report?

It is important to remember that secondary reading should broadly support the students at various stages of their investigation: understanding a framework or concept; thinking about material that could be chosen; providing a context to validate a particular approach; illuminating discussion of material or used as a basis for supporting or challenging interpretations of texts through rigorous scrutiny of the ways that they are organised and position their readers.

The suggested word count for the *Review* section is 300-500 words. Students should write about their reading in an integrated way so that it provides a context for the reader to understand the ideas they have encountered about their material and/or their methods of analysis.

It is possible for students to make use of their secondary material in their *Introduction and aims* section (750 words), for example if giving an overview of their literary text, they might draw attention to a particular literary-critical reading.

Can secondary reading come from non-academic sources as well?

Yes, other non-academic material may also be used if appropriate, for example reviews of performances, reader reviews from online fora and reading groups and so on. For example, a

student could be working on a novel from the horror genre (eg *The Shining*) and exploring the presentation of the supernatural in connection with some advertising for 'Ghost hunters' (an American 'paranormal' TV show). This student might well draw on some genre-based study of the gothic, some work from literary criticism, some work on narrative form, some work on the conventions of advertising and also perhaps a small corpus of readers' responses on the novel taken from Amazon. The corpus could be used as evidence of real readers' responses to the novel and could 'prove' that its language does have the kind of impact that the analysis (and criticism) is suggesting it has.

How should students reference secondary reading?

An established set of conventions (eg The Harvard system) should be used consistently. Footnotes and endnotes (either for referencing or additional comments on texts) should be avoided.

Do students need to transcribe spoken data?

Yes – if used in the research project – and a transcription key should also be included.

Structuring the report

How should the report be structured?

Students are required to structure their report using the section headings outlined in AQA's [specification](#) section 6: bit.ly/2n5VD6E.

For the NEA, there are six compulsory sections with a recommended word count for each.

Introduction and aims (750 words)

Here students need to introduce their chosen literary text, identify the focus of the investigation, and justify and contextualise their selected non-literary material. In providing a rationale for their area of study, they should think about the importance of the theme/language feature they have chosen both to the text as a whole and in specific episodes. For example, a student exploring the use of dialect in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* might outline:

- how dialect is used throughout the novel
- why the use of dialect is important in this novel
- the significance of the use of dialect in the narrative and to the development of characters and themes
- why s/he has chosen to focus specifically on a particular episode or episodes from the novel.

Students also need to justify and contextualise their choice of non-literary material, although this does not have to be at the same length as the discussion of the literary text. However, they should indicate some thoughts on:

- why the non-literary material has been selected for the study
- how it is a good source of data
- how it connects to the literary text.

Review (300-500 words)

Here students should discuss their secondary reading providing a context for their own analysis and the ideas they have encountered. This can focus on their chosen material and/or their research and analytical methods. If they are exploring a language feature, they should provide some definition and discussion of that feature, drawing on secondary reading, so as to provide a frame for their own analysis.

Analysis (1250 words)

Students may choose to analyse the literary text and non-literary material separately or together; either approach is acceptable. They should also ensure that they shape this section with relevant and enabling subheadings. These should be focused and precise rather than general. So, for example, a sub-heading such as '*The non-standard use of pronouns*' is far better than a general heading such as 'Lexis' or 'Grammar'. As a rule, general headings that simply list language levels should be avoided.

Conclusions (200-500 words)

Here students should provide a summary of the main points they have investigated. They should include:

- an overview of what has been revealed by bringing the textual sources together including where appropriate, discussion of the notion of literariness
- some reflection on and critique of their rationale for making connections between their material.

Appendix

This contains literary extracts and non-literary data. It should **not** contain any other material or additional analyses.

References

This contains a list of primary and secondary reading. This must be presented using the conventions of academic referencing.

Assessment

Which assessment objectives are covered on this unit and what do they refer to?

The NEA covers four assessment objectives:

- AO1 (15 marks): this assesses students' abilities to give an account of their source material, use their methodology well and structure their writing clearly.
- AO2 (15 marks): this assesses students' abilities to analyse their material, explore meanings and cover both sources.
- AO3 (10 marks): this assesses students' abilities to explore a range of different contexts as is appropriate in relation to their material.
- AO4 (10 marks): this assesses students' abilities to make connections and reflect on and critique their reasons for doing so.

Will students be penalised for exceeding the word count?

No.

The word count is provided as guidance only. There are no penalties for exceeding the word count, or indeed falling short of the stated word count. Teachers are advised, however, to guide their students towards the recommended word counts for each section, as this will maximise their chances of addressing each Assessment Objective in enough detail. Centres should also be mindful of the relative value of the NEA in the context of the entire specification (20%) and ensure that students divide their time and energies sensibly between this component and the examination components, which carry more weighting (40% each).

Are quotations included in the word count?

No, quotations from both data and secondary reading are not included.

What guidance and support are you permitted to give students for their NEA?

As detailed in section 6.1 of the specification: bit.ly/2n5VD6E.

“You may provide guidance and support to students so that they are clear about the requirements of the task they need to undertake and the marking criteria on which the work will be judged. You may also provide guidance to students on the suitability of their proposed task, particularly if it means they will not meet the requirements of the marking criteria.

When checking drafts of a student's work, you must not comment or provide suggestions on how they could improve it. However, you can ask questions about the way they are approaching their work and you can highlight the requirements of the marking criteria.

[...]

Once a student submits work for marking and it has been marked, you cannot return it to the student for improvement, even if they have not received any feedback or are unaware of the marks awarded.”

It is also important to note the JCQ instructions – please refer to [jqc.org.uk](https://www.jcq.org.uk) for the latest guidance.

Will area moderation continue?

No, the conditions of recognition that all awarding bodies have to comply will no longer permit area moderation.

Will there be face-to-face teacher standardisation?

No, teachers will be standardised online. Teacher online standardisation (TOLS) offers a number of benefits to schools and teachers. However, we recognise that face-to-face training and networking opportunities are important to teachers, and that's why we are developing the new English hub network that will be able to offer support to schools at a local level, including opportunities to meet and share best practice.

When will standardising material be available?

This will be available from autumn term 2016 on TOLS, part of our secure logged-in area at aqa.org.uk/log-in.

How can I get help with non-exam assessment?

NEA advisers are in place to assist you with guidance about this component. You will be assigned an NEA adviser in the Autumn term of each academic year and be informed of his/her name and contact details. NEA advisers will be able to offer advice and guidance on all non-exam assessment matters, including guidance on task setting and on connections between literary and non-literary material.

They cannot provide detailed guidance about individual investigations or mark work for you, but will be able to use their experience and professional expertise to work with you in supporting your students. You can contact your NEA adviser at any point during the academic year.

Teaching time

How can we build NEA skills into the rest of the course?

Key NEA/research skills such as data collection, analysis, use of a range of different tools and frameworks at various language levels and the importance of referencing can be integrated into any part of the course. The unit's key concepts are those which are covered in various parts of the A-level course and links between NEA and other areas of study should be promoted at all times. In particular, the NEA provides an opportunity for students to reflect on the notions of 'literature' and 'literariness' and these can be explored in earlier parts of the course (eg *AQA Anthology: Paris*) as preparation.

When is it best to start teaching/preparing students for the NEA?

Students would be best placed to do their investigative study within the second year of their course. The NEA's focus is on making connections between literary and non-literary material and offering students the opportunity for independent study of linguistic study or themes. Starting the NEA once they have encountered a wide variety of texts of different types will allow students to make informed individualised choices based on their own interests. The summer term of the first year could include some preparation to introduce students to methods of data collection for non-literary material and the reading and/or studying of literary texts that might be chosen. This would allow students to undertake more reading and research over the summer. Alternatively, this could take place early in the second year to allow time for decision-making and consultation.

Will AQA be providing exemplars of NEA investigations?

Yes, these will be available from early 2016.

Notes

Notes

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