

Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day - resource package B

A-level English Literature A (7712)

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

We have developed a range of resources to help you plan your teaching and to create practice exam questions for each component of A-level English Literature A. In this package, you will find a variety of resources related to Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day, including:

- creating your own questions guidance document, which gives you the power to create your own practice exam questions
- sample assessment materials, which include question papers and mark schemes
- specimen question commentaries, which explain how a question taken from the sample assessment materials addresses the assessment objectives, and which give some suggestions of how the task might be approached
- exemplar student responses with marking commentary, including two responses of different mark bands are given to a specific question from the sample assessment materials.

Resources in this package

- Creating your own questions - Paper 2B, Section B - Unseen text
- Creating your own questions - Paper 2B, Section B - Comparative texts
- Exemplar student response - Paper 2B, Section B - band 4 - Unseen text
- Exemplar student response - Paper 2B, Section B - band 3 - Unseen text
- Exemplar student response - Paper 2B, Section B - band 5 - Comparative texts
- Exemplar student response - Paper 2B, Section B - band 2 - Comparative texts
- Specimen question commentary - Paper 2B, Section B - Unseen text
- Specimen question commentary - Paper 2B, Section B - Comparative texts

How to use these resources

These documents are clearly an excellent starting point when planning your teaching. If you haven't yet decided on which texts or text combinations to teach, the specimen assessment materials give you details about some of the aspects of Modern times the texts cover, which can help you decide. Don't forget to consult the specification for a list of possible aspects. Once you have decided, these documents will help you to focus your teaching on those aspects and to work towards the relevant exam question in the specimen assessment materials. The exemplar student responses with marking commentary act as models for the students and help you to assess their work.

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Creating your own questions

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find instructions on how to use the accompanying resources to create your own exam practice questions. This example shows you how to use the Modern times resource package A to set questions for Paper 2B, Section B.

Paper 2B, Section B, unseen text

If you have used the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials or want to set a question on a different unseen prose extract, you can use these documents in the following way:

1. Look at how the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials are constructed, for example:

Explore the significance of isolation in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Ali shapes meanings.

When setting a different extract, the question wording can remain unchanged with the exception of the area to be explored in the extract (here 'isolation') and the extract writer's name (here 'Ali').

2. Look for an extract which includes a key area of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day; ideas for areas to explore can be found in the specification. This is important if you want students to go on to compare the significance of this area in two other texts as practice for the second question in Section B. Possible sources include:

- extracts from any of the prose texts on the Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day set text list
- extracts from other texts which explore this period
- remember to set extracts from literary prose as the unseen text in the examination will always be in this form.

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Creating your own questions

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find instructions on how to use the accompanying resources to create your own exam practice questions. This example shows you how to use the Modern times resource package A to set questions for Paper 2B, Section B.

Paper 2B, Section B, comparative texts

If you have used the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials or want to set a question on a different aspect of the text and Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day, you can use these documents in the following way:

1. Look at how the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials are constructed, for example:

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied. Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

The question wording (Compare the significance of...you are comparing.) can remain unchanged, with the exception of the area to be explored (here 'isolated characters as being profoundly damaged'). You will need, however, to construct a different 'view' depending upon the aspect of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day you want the students to explore.

2. Read the examiner commentary to help you construct a different 'view' to debate. Look for aspects of Modern Times which occur in both texts but don't forget that the absence of aspects in a text is equally valid for debate. Other sources can be used to construct a view:

- Look at the list of aspects of Modern Times in the specification and make up a critical view around one of these
- Research critical views on these texts around which to structure a debate
- Research critical views on another text about 'Modern Times' (non-set texts included) and adapt the quote in a more general sense so that students can consider how far this can be said to be true of the texts they have studied.

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Exemplar student response and examiner commentary

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Paper 2B, Section B, unseen text

Explore the significance of isolation in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Ali shapes meanings.

Band 4 response

Isolation is a concept which is common in modern literature where characters express their feelings of loneliness and disconnection because of issues such as class, gender, race and sexuality. In this extract, Ali describes a character whose isolation is caused by a situation which, through the media, has become better known to readers in recent times: that of a young Muslim woman entering into an arranged marriage with an older man. Her isolation is compounded, however, by this arrangement taking place in Britain, a place away from her home in Bangladesh and with which she is unfamiliar. Ali therefore explores physical, psychological and cultural isolation in this extract.

Ali shows Nazneen's physical isolation through the setting of the couple's flat. Nazneen is portrayed as feeling hemmed in by the flat and dreaming of escaping into the outside world. The first thing she sees in the morning is Chanu, her husband, whose lips are 'parted indignantly' even in sleep so suggesting that Nazneen cannot escape his control. The physical space of the bedroom is also stifling where 'the monstrous black wardrobe...claimed most of the room.' This feeling of imprisonment is shown by Ali's repetition of the word 'never' to show how Nazneen had 'never been close enough (never closer than this, never further)' to a lady she imagines befriending as she looks out of the flat window. The flat itself is not isolated as it is described as being within easy walking distance of the tattoo lady's flat but Nazneen's inability to speak English stops her making that short journey: 'She thought of it but she would not go.' Having conveyed the idea that Nazneen is confined to this flat, Ali then describes the domestic scene that Nazneen has married into in great detail to emphasise that this is the only life Nazneen can now expect to live. Ali uses lists effectively to show not only the chores that Nazneen needs to do: 'There was still the dal to make, and the vegetable dishes, the spices to grind...' but also then the worry that Nazneen has about what might go wrong with the evening meal: 'The rice might stick. She might over-salt the

dal.' Through Nazneen's anxiety over the meal itself and how the home looks, 'She would rinse the glasses and rub them with newspaper to make them shine,' Ali is showing not only the expectations of a young Muslim bride by her older husband but also how Nazneen's isolation in this setting makes her focus on the little everyday things in order to be a good Muslim wife. Ali shows how Nazneen's only comfort in this setting is the Qur'an, which is a link to her home culture, but even here Ali is suggesting that Nazneen is still under someone's control, where she is 'exhorted...to fear God.'

Ali shows Nazneen's psychological isolation through the third-person narrator who tells Nazneen's situation through her eyes only. In this way, we hear Nazneen's thoughts and daydreams, which show us how lonely she is. We learn that 'every morning' she wishes for something but we don't hear what that wish is as if she would have to keep it a secret and this helps us to understand that Nazneen has nobody to share her hopes and dreams with. Ali describes how Nazneen 'thought sometimes' of leaving the flat to visit the tattoo lady but the positive detail of this imagined visit shows it is a fantasy for Nazneen who 'thought of it but she would not go' because in the end she realises that she is too different to the 'strangers' she lives among. Nazneen also tries to escape back to her former life in her thoughts when she links the tattoo lady to 'the sadhus' but her thoughts of home are not positive ones because of poverty and indifference and the personification of the sun as 'unkind.' Ali shows how Nazneen cannot even escape her isolation in her mind through the rhetorical question: 'what would be the point?'

The difficulty of integrating into a different society is a popular topic in literature in a world where multiculturalism is common. Trying to keep your home culture in a new country can isolate you and Ali's portrayal of Nazneen's study of the Qur'an, although it would be expected of her, and her preparation of Indian food show that she is likely to continue with the customs of her home country. The fact that Nazneen can only say 'two things in English: sorry and thank you', however, is perhaps the biggest barrier to overcoming cultural isolation. Ali has chosen these words because they show how a woman in Nazneen's situation is afraid of not being a good Muslim wife, perhaps having to apologise for spoiling the dinner, and is grateful if her husband compliments her cooking and cleaning. If she does not leave her flat, she is unlikely to learn British customs or the language which can help her integrate.

Examiner commentary

AO1

The essay is well structured and the task is clearly focused upon. Ideas are logically put together under the three types of isolation introduced at the beginning of the response. The candidate writes with confidence although this is stronger at the beginning of the response. There is appropriate use of critical concepts and terminology and the expression is accurate.

AO2

There is thorough understanding that the text is structured to shape meanings. The candidate coherently analyses Ali's use of setting and third-person narrator with detailed textual support, which shows a thorough awareness of the nature of Nazneen's isolation. Some relevant comments are also made about language.

AO3

There is a thorough understanding of what can cause isolation and some relevant focus on the isolation of women in Nazneen's situation. The significance of place is explored confidently.

A04

By writing about the representation of different types of isolation, physical, psychological and cultural, the candidate has connected with the concept of isolation as it is presented more widely in literature of the period. Reference is made to the prevalence of the concept in literature of Modern Times.

A05

There is thorough and confident engagement with the interpretations set up in Ali's presentation of isolation and, at times, different possible interpretations are offered.

Overall: Coherent and thorough. 'This response seems to fit into Band 4'

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Exemplar student response and examiner commentary

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Paper 2B, Section B, unseen text

Explore the significance of isolation in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Ali shapes meanings.

Band 3 response

In this extract, Ali shows us a young girl from Bangladesh who is isolated from her friends and family back home because she has been sent to London for an arranged marriage to an older man. It is a sad extract because Nazneen appears to be imprisoned in their flat and so isolated from people she might make friends with.

The extract begins with Nazneen waking up with her husband but wishing for something different: ‘I know what I would wish.’ She then waves to someone outside the flat and we know that she has never met this lady because she has been stuck in the flat: ‘Nazneen had never been close enough (never closer than this, never further) to decipher the designs.’ Nazneen then imagines escaping from the flat and going to visit the tattoo lady and enjoying each other’s company: ‘the tattoo lady would smile and Nazneen would smile and perhaps they would sit together by the window.’ Nazneen decides against this idea because she thinks that the fact she ‘could only say two things in English: sorry and thank you’ would annoy people.

Instead she decides to ‘spend another day alone’ and the extract then tells us about how she spends her day preparing the evening meal and making sure things are clean: she would rinse the glasses and rub them with newspaper to make them shine.’ She also reads the Holy Qur’an which seems to make her happier: ‘The words calmed her stomach.’

Although there are books where characters feel lonely even when they are in a familiar place or surrounded by people because those people don’t understand them or don’t like them, here the character is physically isolated because of being in a strange country and also stuck in her flat every day. Although other characters are mentioned, the extract focuses on Nazneen and the story

is told from her point of view only. This helps the reader to understand Nazneen's loneliness as we only hear her thoughts in the same way that she only has herself for company.

Throughout the extract Ali helps the reader to understand the impact of physical isolation because Nazneen lacks confidence. This is shown through the way she constantly questions herself. When she thinks about wishing, she asks 'Was it cheating?' When she thinks about visiting the tattoo lady, she asks 'what would be the point?' When she thinks about making dinner for Dr Azad, she asks 'What if it went wrong?' Ali uses some short sentences to show how Nazneen is trying to convince herself that everything will be alright: 'It was only dinner. One dinner. One guest.' Ali is helping the reader to understand that when you are isolated from everything you know and you do not have contact with other people from your new situation, your confidence can be knocked so that you doubt yourself. Moreover, as Nazneen has only been married to Chanu for six months, Ali is showing how young girls who find themselves in arranged marriages to older men probably are desperate to impress them so that their new life is less lonely.

The reader does not know for sure if Chanu does not allow Nazneen to leave the flat or if it is her lack of confidence in a strange place that stops her. Ali repeats the word 'never' to suggest that Nazneen is imprisoned and repeats 'another day' to show how this is ongoing. However, if Nazneen is not allowed she is not likely to be daydreaming about visiting the tattoo lady. If it is only a lack of confidence stopping her then that is really sad. Ali shows how, because Nazneen cannot escape the flat, she turns to her religion for comfort. This is a part of her culture that she has not had to leave behind and so something which helps her feel less isolated. Ali shows the importance of religion when you are feeling alone: 'She was composed. Nothing could bother her.'

In conclusion, this extract is about the consequences of physical isolation. Nazneen feels isolated because she is away from her familiar surroundings (Bangladesh) and because she is stuck in a flat so cannot make friends with people in her new home (London). The main consequence of this is a lack of confidence.

The extract is taken from the novel 'Brick Lane' and was written in 2003. It is very relevant today as the news is still full of stories about the difficulties of Muslims living in Britain because of the ongoing terrorism associated with their religion which makes it difficult for them to integrate into Britain. The extract is interesting as it deals with this idea through the eyes of a young Muslim wife.

Examiner commentary

AO1

The response includes a fair amount of relevant material and is organised though the candidate structures ideas by 'going through' the passage in the first part of the answer and then offers some straightforward analysis of the extract. The expression is clear and accurate though not sophisticated.

AO2

Although, at times, the candidate writes about the main character as if they are real, (s)he does offer straightforward analysis of relevant meanings and the writer's methods, as required by the question. (S)he looks at point-of-view, use of questions, short sentences and repetition but there is little developed comment on language. There is appreciation of the nature of Nazneen's isolation.

AO3

There is some straightforward awareness of the problems faced by Muslims who wish to integrate into British society but the ideas are not developed and are not explicitly linked to specific parts of the extract. The candidate does, however, link the character's lack of self-confidence to the loneliness of an arranged marriage to an older man.

AO4

By writing about the representation of physical isolation, the candidate has connected with the concept of isolation as it is presented more widely in literature of the period. A valid point is made about how differently loneliness can be represented in other works, although the point is not developed.

AO5

Some progress is made towards an interpretation of the thoughts and actions of the character, although in lieu of detailed analysis we are often given only straightforward description or quotations without comment. The candidate does however begin to engage with different possible ways of interpreting Nazneen's decision not to leave the flat.

Overall: Straightforward and relevant. 'This response seems to fit into Band 3'

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Exemplar student response and examiner commentary

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Paper 2B, Section B, comparative texts

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied. Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

Band 5 response

Modern literature often deals with the search of individuals for an identity within a world where the boundaries of social acceptability are becoming blurred. Their struggle to be accepted as the people they believe they are is often portrayed as an isolating experience and writers can emphasise this isolation by placing these characters within a seemingly stable family situation. This is true of both Yates in *Revolutionary Road* and Williams in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* where the characters of April and Brick respectively are shown to feel a disconnection from the roles society in general, and their spouses in particular, expect of them to the point at which both characters are profoundly damaged. Both written in the 1950s, these texts enable Yates and Williams to comment on the isolating nature of post-war American society.

Yates focuses his critique of this period on anaesthetised middle-class suburbia and the futile attempts of April to escape the mundane role of wife and mother. Yates makes it clear from the outset that April will not be able to escape this role. The novel opens with April's failure to succeed in an amateur acting role designed to help her settle into the ironically named *Revolutionary Road* community. April's initially promising performance deteriorates until 'she was working alone, and visibly weakening with every line.' In this description Yates sums up April's decline over the course of the novel until her suicide when, as on stage, 'she'd lost her grip.' The removal of her stage make-up when 'she was alone' is symbolic of the situation April finds herself in: she feels that she is playing the part of dutiful wife and mother but when she removes that mask to be true to herself this isolates her from her socially acceptable self. Yates confirms that this is the key message about isolation in this society when, immediately before her suicide, April concludes that 'if you

wanted to do something absolutely honest, something true, it always turned out to be a thing that had to be done alone.'

Yates shows this internal struggle through April's disconnection with people around her, especially with Frank, and extends this disconnection to the reader through the use of a third-person narrator who does not present events from April's point of view until the end of the novel when her suicide signals the futility of her voice. Instead, at various points of the novel, Yates includes Frank's imagined dialogues with April before their actual conversations, so that April's viewpoint is marginalised and Frank's view of what he expects from a wife is foregrounded. In one example, Frank imagines April 'devoting whole hours to the bedroom mirror' and then doing the housework 'in time for his homecoming' only to discover in 'a startling disclosure' that April has spent her day organising their move to Paris.

Ironically, the only person with whom April feels a connection is John Givings, a certified insane man; he proves to be the only character who sees the disconnection between April and Frank and understands that it is caused by her desire to escape the role of dutiful wife and mother that Frank wants her to play: 'I wouldn't be surprised if you had knocked her up on purpose, just so you could spend the rest of your life hiding behind that maternity dress.'

April does try to play the role that society has given her: 'Everything about her seemed determined to prove...that a sensible middle-class housewife was all she had ever wanted to be' but the frequent references to April's boredom and Yates' effective description of her mechanical reaction to Frank show how she is living a lie:

'there was a certain stiffness in the way she was holding him, a suggestion of effort to achieve the effect of spontaneity, as though she knew that a nestling of the shoulder blade was in order and was doing her best to meet the specifications.'

The effect of April's isolation manifests itself in her increasingly unstable behaviour. We might not like Frank's dishonesty and shallowness but our distance from April makes it difficult to understand her manipulative and 'hysterical' behaviour and to feel sympathetic towards her. Yates does, however, offer, through Frank's thoughts and through a late flashback, the possibility that April's instability is due to her unhappy childhood. As Frank observes, 'it's always been a wonder to me that you could survive a childhood like that...let alone come out of it without any damage' but at times this feels like an easy excuse.

In the end, April's failure to persuade Frank to escape the anaesthetised middle-class 'toyland of white and pastel houses' for a life in Paris leads her to take the lonely decision to commit suicide. Whilst it would be easy to blame Frank's lack of understanding of April's needs, Yates' portrayal of the stifling boredom of a middle-class suburban housewife in the 1950s suggests readers should think otherwise. Indeed, his inclusion of April's suicide note confirms this: 'Dear Frank, Whatever happens please don't blame yourself.'

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams presents Brick as another tragic figure who is profoundly damaged because he is living a lie. Like April, he finds himself unable to conform to the role society hands him out here because of his repressed homosexuality at a time when America did not tolerate relationships outside the heterosexual norm.

The dramatic form is able to visually convey key messages in a way that novels cannot and Williams symbolises the root of Brick's isolation through the marital bed and through Brick's crutch. All of the scenes take place in Maggie and Brick's bedroom, a constant reminder of what society expects of them. Big Mama confirms this when she 'points at the bed' and declares that 'When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!' Brick's crutch emphasises that he is a

broken man and his injury resulted from his attempt to re-live past times with Skipper. The crutch, like the bed, is ever present and acts as a phallic symbol; it is frequently taken from Brick to emphasise his inability to fulfil the role that society believes he should. We see Brick 'fighting for possession' of the crutch and 'he utters a cry of anguish' when it is removed, which perhaps suggests that he desperately wants to conform.

Unlike the remoteness of April, Williams lays Brick bare for the audience so that we clearly see how society's expectations are isolating him. His dialogue with Big Daddy reveals his knowledge that his homosexuality is unacceptable: 'Don't you know how people feel about things like that?' and a fear of being called 'A couple of ducking sissies', 'Queers' or 'Fairies.' He questions resignedly 'Why can't exceptional friendship, real, real, deep, deep friendship! between two men be respected as something clean and decent?' Like April, he concludes that to be true to yourself is isolating: 'friendship with Skipper was that one great true thing' but 'any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal.' Brick's way of coping with living a lie is to withdraw from society into an alcoholic haze, which means drinking until 'a click that I get in my head...makes me peaceful.' Interestingly, like April, being true to yourself for Brick 'don't happen except when I'm alone.'

Like Yates, Williams is commenting on the profound damage that can occur to individuals within an intolerant society and concludes that, as a result, 'mendacity is a system we live in.' Through Brick, he shows how repressing your true self is 'malignant and it's terminal' and, whilst Brick does not take the drastic step of suicide that April does, by the end of the play there is no resolution, only a further lie that Maggie is pregnant. Whilst readers and audiences today will recognise that attitudes to women and homosexuality specifically have become more tolerant since the 1950s, these texts still effectively convey the damaging nature of isolation which may occur as a result of intolerances in today's society.

Examiner commentary

AO1

This is an assured response which offers a perceptive argument in relation to the task. The level of technical accuracy is mature and impressive; ideas are organised confidently with appropriate use of concepts and terminology.

AO2

The candidate's perceptive analysis and discussion throughout are supported by close reference to the text. The candidate shows an assured engagement with a range of ways in which meanings are shaped and discusses them with a clear personal 'voice'.

AO3

The topic of isolation is thoroughly explored in both texts. The candidate takes a central focus of isolation as a result of deviance from society's norms and discusses the resultant consequences with well-chosen examples.

AO4

The candidate makes perceptive connections between the texts and shows an awareness of isolation as a central issue in modern literature. The lack of comparison in substantial stretches of the first part of the response, however, precludes it from achieving full marks.

AO5

The candidate perceptively engages with a range of interpretations and shows an awareness of how the respective genres of prose and drama affect the ways in which isolation is presented.

Overall: 'Perceptive and assured'. This response seems to fit the Band 5 descriptors.

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Exemplar student response and examiner commentary

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Paper 2B, Section B, comparative texts

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied. Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

Band 2 response

Both *Revolutionary Road* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* have characters in them who are damaged by being isolated. In *Revolutionary Road* April is really lonely because she is married to Frank who she does not love and she is bored and wants to escape to Paris. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Maggie is lonely because she is married to Brick who does not love her and so she can't have children. In this essay I will show how the writers have written about this type of isolation.

Yates tells us that April has always been lonely because she was abandoned by her parents as a baby:

'I think my mother must've taken me straight from the hospital to Aunt Mary's,' she told him. 'At any rate I don't think I ever lived with anyone but Aunt Mary until I was five, and then there were a couple of other aunts, or friends of hers or something, before I went to Aunt Claire, in Rye.'

He then tells us that April married Frank just because she was lonely and so it is sad that she is so unhappy in her marriage. They have lots of arguments in the book but mostly April is just bored with being Frank's wife. One example is where Frank has told April that he has had an affair and April doesn't seem to care:

'In other words you don't care what I do or who I go to bed with or anything. Right?'

'No; I guess that's right; I don't,'

April does have two children and some friends called the Campbells so the writer does not really explain why April feels so lonely but we can guess that if she was abandoned by her parents as a baby and she does not love Frank she is still going to feel really alone. She does, however, try to make her life happier by suggesting to Frank that they move to Paris. At first Frank agrees to go but when April gets pregnant again he says they can't go. April tries to persuade Frank that they should abort the baby so that they can go to Paris but Frank won't agree and so April feels stuck in her lonely life.

April's behaviour shows that she has been damaged by her loneliness and Frank says that she should go to see a psychiatrist. In the end, April does go a bit mad and decides to get rid of the baby herself at home which leads to her losing a lot of blood and then dying. This shows that loneliness can make a person profoundly damaged.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* all of the scenes are in Maggie and Brick's bedroom where we see Maggie and Brick arguing, like April and Frank do. At the beginning Maggie is getting dressed so that she looks attractive but Brick is not taking any notice of her because he does not love her: 'Living with someone you love can be lonelier – than living entirely alone!' The stage directions show how lonely Maggie is:

'Margaret is alone, completely alone, and she feels it. She draws in, hunches her shoulders, raises her arms with fists clenched, shuts her eyes tight as a child about to be stabbed with a vaccination needle.'

Brick doesn't love Maggie because he is really a homosexual and loves a man who is now dead. He won't sleep with Maggie and so she can't have a baby and that makes her feel useless especially as Mae has had lots of babies: 'You're jealous! You're just jealous because you can't have babies!' Maggie doesn't have any friends in the play and so she is just stuck with Brick who doesn't love her. His family who all want to know why she isn't having a baby and blame her for Brick being unhappy and drinking too much: 'Something's not right! You're childless and my son drinks.' Brick tells Maggie that he won't give her a baby: 'But how in hell on earth do you imagine – that you're going to have a child by a man who can't stand you?'

Maggie is damaged by being lonely and she does something mad at the end of the play like April does and pretends that she is pregnant. The family are all pleased to hear the news but of course Brick knows that it isn't true. Maggie bribes him into sleeping with her by locking away his alcohol and only letting him have some if he agrees.

Both of these books were written in the 1950s when women didn't go to work and so would be lonely if they didn't have good marriages. April and Maggie have bad marriages for different reasons and that's what makes them lonely and damaged.

Examiner commentary

AO1

There is a simple sense of comparison – both female characters are lonely within an unhappy marriage – and the ideas around this are simply structured. Appropriate concepts and terminology are scarce; expressions like 'feels stuck in', 'get rid of', and 'go a bit mad' reflect the candidate's simple expression. Spelling and (most) punctuation are correct.

AO2

The answer consists mainly of generalised descriptions of events although the candidate evidences characters' feelings through a limited number of quotations, at times over-long, and reference to stage directions.

AO3

Examples are given of the reasons for the characters' isolation, but there is little analysis of the true nature of that isolation or of its consequences beyond the immediate. There is simple awareness of the context of women in the 1950s.

AO4

Comparisons between the characters in the texts are made in a generalised manner.

AO5

As required, the candidate has written about examples of two genres, but no overt or meaningful comparisons are made between them, and in this respect the question has not been properly answered.

Overall: Simple and generalised. 'This response seems to fit the descriptors in Band 2'.

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Specimen question commentary

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package A

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every point that could be made but it gives teachers and students some guidance that will support their work on this paper.

Paper 2B, Section B: Drama and prose contextual linking (Option 1), unseen text

Sample question

Explore the significance of isolation in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Ali shapes meanings.

How the question meets the Assessment Objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. As a result, all the key words in the question should be addressed, indicating either focus (significance of isolation, ways that Ali shapes meanings) or direction (explore, relevant detailed analysis).

AO1 is tested through the way students organise their writing and express their ideas as they are analysing the extract and exploring the significance of isolation. Value is placed on technical accuracy, appropriate terminology and quality of discussion.

AO2 requires detailed analysis of the ways that Ali shapes meanings. Students are expected to illustrate their answers with as much textual detail as possible – with quotations and other close reference – to support the points in their analysis.

‘Significance’ in **AO3** is addressed when candidates demonstrate an understanding of the various contexts of isolation, including the physical and psychological. In exploring the nature of isolation as presented in this passage, students will engage not only with the specific context of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day, but also with the contexts of when texts were written and of reader response to the representation of isolation.

To address **AO4** students will make connections to the representation of one of the central issues of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day. Their answers should be implicitly informed by a wider awareness of the concept and the many forms its representation can take, as seen in other reading around this period.

AO5 tests students' skill in engaging with different ways in which significance can be found in this extract and showing an understanding that meanings are not fixed.

Possible content

Students might choose to write about any of the following and thereby address **AO2**: aspects of narrative form and/or genre, such as point-of-view where the reader sees the situation through Nazneen's eyes only with the help of a third-person narrator; the overall shape and direction of the extract, which begins with ideas of escape from her isolation but then moves to the confines of her new life and a way of coping; the domestic setting of the small flat and its impact on Nazneen; elements of back-story (sent away to London, the sadhus, Dr Azad, daydreams about the tattoo lady); unspoken thoughts (wishing for something, considering leaving the flat); use of questions ('Was it cheating?', 'Was it not the same as making the wish?', 'What if it went wrong?') to show Nazneen's lack of confidence in her new world; sparing use of figurative language ('monstrous black wardrobe that claimed most of the room'); straightforward choice of vocabulary and syntax ('Strangers would answer if she knocked on the wrong door.') to reflect her lack of sophistication; use of minor sentences (It was only dinner. One dinner. One guest.); repetition of 'never' and 'another day', which show Nazneen's lack of choice; inclusion of religious references to reflect Nazneen's home culture. Students should make it clear they are conscious that the text under analysis is fictional, the work of a creative imagination.

To address **AO3** students will need to explore relevant ideas such as: what can cause isolation and loneliness (being sent to an unfamiliar country, an arranged marriage to an older man, being unable to speak the native language); the isolation of women in particular because of class, race, gender or culture; ideas about place/location (Ali's choice of Britain as Nazneen's new home in a period when immigration and multiculturalism have challenged notions of a British identity.)

AO4 will be addressed if and when candidates explore ideas about isolation, so connecting with the representation of one of the central issues of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day. They may cite examples of changing ideas about the concept of the isolation that can be present in modern society.

The criteria of **AO5** are met if students are able to show that they have fully 'explored the significance of isolation' in the extract. They should be ready to write about: the East End setting ('climbing the Rosemead stairwell to the fourth floor'); Nazneen's restricted view from the flat ('Nazneen had never been close enough (never closer than this, never further) to decipher the designs.');

the loneliness of her arranged marriage to an older man ('She could spend another day alone. It was only another day.');

impositions of his expectations on her domestic life ('She should be getting on with the evening meal');

Nazneen's thoughts about the tattoo woman ('perhaps they would sit together by the window and let the time pass more easily.');

her preoccupations with cooking, and caring for the home (She would rinse the glasses and rub them with newspaper to make them shine.);

her memories of her earlier life (the sadhus who walked in rags through the Muslim villages');

the influence of her religion ('She had made her intention as fervently as possible seeking refuge from Satan with fists clenched and fingernails digging into her palms.'). They could

also give some account of the characters Ali has placed in the background of the narrative, all of whom in their different ways may contribute to her isolation (Chanu, the tattoo lady, Dr Azad).

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Specimen question commentary

A-level English Literature A (7712)

Modern times – resource package A

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every point that could be made but it gives teachers and students some guidance that will support their work on this paper.

Paper 2B, Section B: Drama and prose contextual linking (Option 1), comparative texts

Sample question

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied. Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

You must use one drama text and one prose text in your response.

[The exemplar scripts here use Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as the drama text and Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road* as the prose text. The specific guidance below gives examples only from those two texts and assumes that the requirement for students to study a poetry text and to include one text written post-2000 has been satisfied in Section A of this paper.]

How the question meets the Assessment Objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. As a result, all the key words in the question should be addressed, indicating either focus (significance, isolated characters, profoundly damaged, how meanings are shaped) or direction (compare, drama text, prose text).

AO1 is tested through the way the students organise their writing and express their ideas as they analyse the significance of isolation. Value is placed on technical accuracy, appropriate terminology and the quality of the discussion.

AO2 requires reference to the ways that meanings are shaped. Students should illustrate their answers with relevant textual detail wherever possible – with quotations and other close reference – to support the points in their comparison and discussion.

Picking up from their study of the unseen, **AO3** is addressed when candidates demonstrate an understanding of the various contexts of isolation, including the physical and psychological. In exploring the nature of isolation as presented in their two texts, students will engage not only with the specific context of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day, but also with the contexts of when texts were written and of reader response to the representation of isolation.

To address **AO4** students will make comparisons between their two chosen texts, as directed in the question, and will connect to a wider awareness of the significance of isolation and the many forms its representation can take in literature of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day. Different forms of isolation might be considered, e.g. gender, culture, language, religion, belief, attitude or age.

AO5 tests students' skill in engaging with different ways in which significance can be found in their chosen texts and in showing an understanding that through comparison different meanings can be opened up.

Possible content

This is an open book examination, therefore candidates are expected to quote appropriately and accurately from those texts. Students will address **AO2** if they focus on any of the following, according to the genre of the text:

For a prose text, attention could be paid to narrative structure (the division into three parts which each show a different stage in the marriage and in April's mental decline, the use of flashback to add context to character, the anti-climactic ending) ; the delineation and presentation of character (most notably of Frank and April but also of figures such as John Givings); point-of-view and narrator's 'voice' (the use of an ironic omniscient narrator who heightens tension by switching between characters, his thoughts on loneliness in suburban middle America, the absence of April's point-of-view until immediately before her suicide); the use of dialogue and of indirect speech (the imaginary dialogue in Frank's head which lets us see the breakdown of the marriage from his point of view and the better life that Frank imagines, the ordinary conversation between Frank and April which reveals cracks in the marriage); the sequence or chronology of events; the description of settings (New York City where Frank works and from which April is now excluded, *Revolutionary Road* which now ironically represents a failed attempt at independence and freedom, Paris as an imagined escape from the isolation of middle-class suburban life); ways of influencing the reader's response to character and incident, which includes figurative language features.

For a drama text, candidates could write about aspects of overall structure and the placing of scenes in time and place (the whole play takes place in one time and one room; the scenes move from a focus on Maggie and Brick to a focus on Big Daddy and Brick to an unsatisfactory resolution: none of the isolated characters find peace); dramatic irony (the impending isolating revelations of Brick's homosexuality and Big Daddy's cancer); the importance of stage directions; direct and indirect ways of communicating ideas and 'messages' (the symbolism of the bed, which acts as the ghost of an unnatural homosexual love which haunts Maggie and Brick, and of Brick's crutch, a phallic symbol, which is removed by both Maggie and Big Daddy as a symbol of Brick's castration); ways of presenting character and the interaction between characters (Maggie is presented as dispossessed in her childlessness in contrast with Mae as 'monster of fertility'; key

points in dialogue are punctuated by interruptions by other characters and the off stage telephone so that the height of tension is frozen).

To address **AO3** students will need to explore: the nature of isolation as it affects the key characters of Frank and April, and Maggie and Brick; the nature and impact of physical isolation on the one hand, and of psychological isolation on the other; other forms of isolation due to for example: gender (the stereotypical expectations of women in 1950s American society that April and Maggie cannot meet), sexuality (Brick is living in a time when America did not tolerate deviation from the heterosexual norm); comparison with others who are theoretically less isolated (the contrast between Brick and Maggie and Gooper and Mae); how the presentation of isolation is connected to other themes and subjects in the literature of Modern Times.

AO4 will be addressed when candidates explore the 'significance' of isolation in their two texts, thereby connecting with the representation of one of the central issues of the literature of Modern times: 1945 to the present day. They could cite examples of changing ideas (particularly between the 1950s and today) about the nature of isolation and of the profound damage experienced by those involved, whether directly or indirectly. They should, however, concentrate on the differences and similarities noted between their two chosen texts and attempt to make valid comparisons at all significant stages of their answers, as directed in the question.

The criteria of **AO5** are met if students are able to show that they have fully 'explored the significance of isolation' in their chosen texts. They should be ready to initiate and manage a debate around the nature and possible forms of isolation as expressed in those texts and to evaluate the extent to which the contrasting genres – here prose and drama – affect the ways in which isolation in particular is presented and meanings generally are understood by the reader.

Other aspects of Modern times which can be explored in *Revolutionary Road*

- The corrosive impact of alcohol dependency on addicts and their families.
- The destructive nature of dysfunctional family life: Frank blames April's emotional instability on her rejection by her parents and her subsequent unhappy childhood; April's inability to connect with her own children; how children are shown in the novel to ruin the Wheelers' plans; the disconnection and lack of understanding between Frank and April.
- The fallacy of the American Dream; the myth of post-war hope for a better life: neither Frank nor April can escape what they were born into. April's attempts to escape the solitude of her existence lead her to suicide.
- The role of women in the 1950s: a struggle between independence and societal expectation. April's self-deluded attempts to escape her containment through amateur dramatics and a move to Paris; the futility of April's rebellious behaviour; her reflection on her past mistakes and blaming herself for her unhappy situation; her eventual suicide.
- The attitude of the middle classes; a focus on the emptiness of American suburban life which renders everything and everyone insincere. Frank's denunciation of the shallowness of suburbia, and pretence at non-conformity, itself becomes insincere.
- The concept of history repeating itself even when characters try to escape it (Frank and his father; April and her father).

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- Personal and social identity: Frank and April act out the roles of the people they want to become; the move to Paris is supposed to enable Frank 'to find himself'; April admits to Shep that she does not know who she is.
 - The function of the tragi-comic novel: the tragedy of the inescapable loneliness of individuals in modern society is told in an absurdly comic fashion, which culminates in the anti-climactic final sentence.

Other aspects of Modern times which can be explored in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- The corrosive impact of alcohol dependency on addicts and their families: Brick has withdrawn from the world at large and his loved ones in particular into an alcohol-infused haze; Brick's dependency on drinking to the point of 'the click' to achieve oblivion; Maggie uses Brick's dependency on alcohol as a bargaining tool.
- Dysfunctional family life: Big Mama believes the fantasy of family unity; the greed and avarice of Mae and Gooper who try to manipulate their inheritance; the irony of Brick as the rightful heir who cannot continue the family line; the portrayal of the children as grotesque in their constant interruption of the adults.
- Dreams, hopes and plans: all of the main characters realise that their dreams cannot be achieved.
- The role of women in the 1950s: Maggie's childlessness contrasted with Mae's fertility; ideas around femininity and feminine desire (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*); Maggie's position in the love triangle with Brick and Skipper as a trophy wife.
- Manliness and homosexuality: Brick's repression of his true self because of society's expectations.
- The destructive concept of living a lie: Brick blames disgust at his own mendacity as a reason for not admitting his homosexuality; Brick blames mendacity for Skipper's death; Big Daddy also feels disgust at living his life with a woman he detests; Maggie's fabrication of a pregnancy.

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