
AS/A-level ENGLISH LITERATURE B

Preparing to teach

Session handout

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AS specification at a glance

Paper 1: Literary genres: drama	+	Paper 2: Literary genres: prose and poetry
<p>What's assessed</p> <p>Choice of two options</p> <p>Option 1A: Aspects of tragedy Option 1B: Aspects of comedy</p> <p>Study of one Shakespeare play and one further drama text</p>		<p>What's assessed</p> <p>Choice of two options</p> <p>Option 2A: Aspects of tragedy Option 2B: Aspects of comedy</p> <p>Study of one prose text and one poetry text</p>
<p>Assessed</p> <p>Written exam: 1 hour 30 minutes</p> <p>Closed book</p> <p>50 marks</p> <p>50% of AS level</p>		<p>Assessed</p> <p>Written exam: 1 hour 30 minutes</p> <p>Open book</p> <p>50 marks</p> <p>50% of AS level</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: one passage-based question on a Shakespeare text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: one essay question on a drama set text (25 marks)</p>		<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: one essay question on poetry set text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: one essay question on prose set text (25 marks)</p>

A-level specification at a glance

<h3>Paper 1: Literary genres</h3>	+	<h3>Paper 2: Texts and genres</h3>	+	<h3>Non-exam assessment: Theory and independence</h3>
<p>What's assessed</p> <p>Choice of two options</p> <p>Option 1A: Aspects of tragedy Option 1B: Aspects of comedy</p> <p>Study of three texts: one Shakespeare text; a second drama text and one further text, of which one must be written pre-1900.</p>		<p>What's assessed</p> <p>Choice of two options</p> <p>Option 2A: Elements of crime writing Option 2B: Elements of political and social protest writing</p> <p>Study of three texts: one post-2000 prose text; one poetry and one further text, one of which must be written pre-1900</p> <p>Examination will include an unseen passage.</p>		<p>What's assessed</p> <p>Study of two texts: one poetry and one prose text, informed by study of the Critical anthology</p> <p>Two essays of 1250–1500 words, each responding to a different text and linking to a different aspect of the Critical anthology</p> <p>One essay can be re-creative. The re-creative piece will be accompanied by a commentary.</p>
<p>Assessed</p> <p>Written exam: 2 hours 30 minutes</p> <p>Closed book</p> <p>75 marks</p> <p>40% of A-level</p>		<p>Assessed</p> <p>Written exam: 3 hours</p> <p>Open book</p> <p>75 marks</p> <p>40% of A-level</p>		<p>Assessed</p> <p>50 marks</p> <p>20% of A-level</p> <p>Assessed by teachers</p> <p>Moderated by AQA</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: one passage-based question on set Shakespeare text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: one essay question on set Shakespeare text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section C: one essay question linking two texts (25 marks)</p>		<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: one compulsory question on an unseen passage (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: one essay question on set text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section C: one essay question which connects two texts (25 marks)</p>		

Literary genres:

AS, Paper 1: drama

Option 1A: Aspects of tragedy

Option 1B: Aspects of comedy

AS, Paper 2: prose and poetry

Option 2A: Aspects of tragedy

Option 2B: Aspects of comedy

A-level, Paper 1

Option 1A: Aspects of tragedy

Option 1B: Aspects of comedy

Aspects of tragedy: specimen question commentary

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 explanation is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every point that could be made but the explanation will provide a workable way into the question and the intention is to offer some support for teachers preparing students for the examination.

Paper 1A, Section A

King Lear

This type of question from Section A of Paper 1: Aspects of tragedy invites students to write about the significance of an extract from *Othello* or *King Lear*. One hour is recommended for this question. This is a Closed Book paper and so students will need to know their texts well and be able to refer to them in the examination.

Sample question

Read the extract below and then answer the question.

Explore the significance of this extract in relation to the tragedy of the play as a whole.

Remember to include in your answer relevant analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic methods.

How the question meets the assessment objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. The key words and phrases in the question are: explore, significance, tragedy of the play as a whole, analysis and dramatic methods, and these are clearly connected to the assessment objectives. The key word here is 'significance' as it is an invitation to students to target **AO2, 3, 4** and **AO5**, to show what is signified in terms of contexts and interpretations and how those meanings are shaped. **AO2** is also set up in the reminder to students to include relevant analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic methods to show how the methods open up meanings about tragedy. **AO3** will be addressed through the ways the students show their understanding of both the dramatic and tragic contexts of *King Lear*, and in the way they will elicit from the extract contextual ideas about when the text was written and how it has been and is received. **AO4** will be hit as students will be connecting with the concepts of the tragic genre (and therefore other texts) through the 'aspects' which they are exploring. **AO5** will be addressed when students grapple with meanings that arise about tragedy in the extract and in relation to the whole play. **AO1** will be tested through the ways the students organise their writing and express their ideas as they are exploring significance and analysing dramatic methods.

Possible content

It may be helpful for students to begin by briefly establishing an overview of the passage and identifying where it occurs within the play. For example: 'At this stage of the play, Lear has journeyed to Regan and Cornwall's castle, after his acrimonious argument with Goneril. Regan has

received news of this from Oswald, and has decided not to be at home when Lear arrives. Kent has been stocked by Regan and Cornwall partly as a snub to Lear. The fool has tried to warn Lear that Regan will be as like Goneril 'as a crab's like an apple'.

The possible content of the mark scheme provides some ideas that students might write about. However, there are clearly many others and if students are reading their texts through the lens of tragedy they will be able to identify many ideas themselves.

Students might explore the following aspects of tragedy:

- Lear's tragic stature
- his loss of control and restraint
- the representations of goodness on stage
- Lear's pride and outrage
- Lear's realisation that Regan and Cornwall have disrespected him in stocking his messenger
- the gloomy castle setting
- the visual sight of Kent in the stocks to show Lear's entrapment
- Lear's anger – his fatal flaw perhaps
- the Fool's cryptic commentary on Lear's decline
- the description of the behaviour of Regan, Cornwall and Goneril which places them as tragic villains
- the references to cruelty and unkindness
- the mention of Lear's future madness
- the Fool's jokes and song which heighten the tragic atmosphere.

Any of these ideas can be linked with other parts of the play, for example Lear's anger here might be connected with his anger in the banishing and disinheriting of Cordelia or of his grotesque curse of Goneril; the Fool's warning shots (a sign of his love for Lear) might be linked with his later attempts to save Lear from madness and his decision to tarry with him on the heath despite the violence of the storm.

Significance

Students might develop any of the points mentioned above and suggest what meanings arise from the ideas they select. Comment might be on

- the tragic decline of Lear
- Lear's uncontrollable anger and how this can be interpreted
- the loyalty of Kent and the Fool and views about this
- the 17th century contextual significance of the Fool to the court
- Lear's inadequacy
- how Lear elicits audience sympathy – or otherwise
- the significance of the location to the tragedy
- the significance of being a host in the 17th century in relation to the tragedy
- the significance of the family relationships to the tragedy
- 'unkindness' – and the implications of this concept in the 17th century and to the tragedy
- the treatment of old people from both a 17th century and a 21st century perspective
- notions of punishment in the 17th century and how the stocking of Kent could be viewed now

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- Kent as a tragic figure in his own right, his representing honesty (having more man than wit about him), his endorsing the play's pessimism etc.

Dramatic methods

Any comment on dramatic method needs to be connected to the task about tragedy.

Students might explore the following dramatic methods:

- setting of the dark location outside the castle
- visual effect of Kent in the stocks and Lear and the Fool's reaction perhaps signifying Lear's entrapment
- irony of first words from Lear, given that the audience know how deliberate Regan's departure has been
- Kent's elevated salutation 'Hail to thee noble master' shows his respect and loyalty to Lear
- the Fool's comic insult reflecting the foolishness of Kent's earlier behaviour when he got himself stocked
- the use of stichomythia showing Kent's determination to tell the truth in comparison to Lear's denial
- the use of emotive language in Kent's long speech reflects his outrage at the treatment of Lear by Regan and Cornwall ('reeking post', 'Stew'd in his haste', 'poisoned', 'coward cries')
- the matter-of-factness of Kent's listing of the events that led to his being stocked reflects his plainness to which his honour is bound
- the Fool's cryptic lines which foreshadow later events
- the Fool's jokes and songs which heighten the tragic atmosphere, etc.

Students will also have to understand how to use their knowledge to relate to other parts of the play given that this is a Closed Book exam. Although it should be possible to refer to specific parts of the wider tragedy of *King Lear* and to quote, some comments might be more generalised.

Aspects of comedy: text overview – *Twelfth Night*

Read our overview which shows how teachers can consider *Twelfth Night* in relation to the genre of comedy. We haven't covered every element of this genre. Instead we hope this guide will provide a springboard to help you plan, and to get you and your students thinking about the text in more detail.



Twelfth Night Act II Scene IV by Walter Deverell (1850)

“Well, God give them wisdom that have it; and those that are fools, let them use their talents”.

Overview

Twelfth Night contains many classic aspects of dramatic comedy. Central to its design is a series of tangled love interests (Orsino loves Olivia, Olivia loves Cesario and then Sebastian, Viola loves Orsino, Sir Andrew and Malvolio love Olivia); disguise (the plot hinges on Viola's dressing as a male servant in order to survive after being shipwrecked on the shores of Illyria); mistaken identities (Viola and Sebastian are twins so alike that no-one can tell them apart); trickery and tomfoolery; the lavish use of singing and dancing; the ridiculing of hypocrisy, excess and affectation; the temporary domination of chaos and misrule; and an ending where all confusion is resolved and three marriages take place.

Slapstick and physical comedy

Perhaps the most obvious form of comedy in *Twelfth Night* is the slapstick humour generated by Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek (whose names are themselves a source of humour) and their cronies. The humour is immediately signalled by their use of prose, bawdy language and song that would no doubt have appealed to the working class audience in the pit. Their buffoonery during their midnight revel in Act 2 scene iii, where they drunkenly carouse, mock Malvolio and sing at the top of their voices, reflects their sense of fun and joie de vivre. Likewise, the physical comedy in the scene where Sir Andrew and Cesario attempt to duel, but prove themselves utterly inept and fearful, is clearly entertaining and invites laughter.

Malvolio's downfall and schadenfreude

If there is a comic villain in *Twelfth Night* it is, at least initially, Malvolio, whose puritanical stance and attempts to destroy the revelry of Sir Toby's party place him at odds with the lovable rogues and the joyous spirit of the play. Moreover, his hubristic attitude, evident in both the ways he reprimands his superiors and in his conceited belief that he could be his mistress' master, means that the audience, much like the onlookers in the Box-tree scene, enjoy his downfall. His appearance in 'yellow and cross-gartered' stockings, so different from his usual funereal garb, is a source of visual comedy. Similarly his suggestive comments as he fantasises about Olivia – 'To bed! Ay, sweetheart, and I'll come to thee!' – are amusing because of Shakespeare's deployment of incongruity. Whilst the way he is thrown into "a dark room" and then taunted by Feste may seem cruel to a modern audience, there is a sense of schadenfreude in witnessing the downfall of the pompous fellow who has overstepped the bounds of his social position and attempted to destroy the festive spirit of the play's world. It is also important to remember that humiliation is often at the heart of comedy and that comedy is born of cruelty.

The role of fools – Feste and Sir Andrew

A predominant figure of comedy is the fool. In the world of *Twelfth Night*, Feste is a licensed and professional fool. He contributes to the festive spirit, implied by his name, through his creation of music, song and jokes. He is attached to Olivia's household though he is something of a free spirit often frequenting the Duke's palace and singing to him. Feste embodies the spirit of misrule in which the play delights and he is the perpetrator of folly – the antithesis of the serious Malvolio who, as a Puritan, scorns merrymaking. However, it is not merely his witty word-play that generates comedy. He also exposes truth to the other characters and the audience: he mocks Orsino's lovelorn behaviour; he challenges Olivia's obsessive mourning and, much to Malvolio's horror, proves her a 'fool' in his witty repartee; and he lays bare Malvolio's hubris by publically humiliating him. He thus seems able to see the true nature of those around him, mocking their foibles and flaws, leading to the comic resolution of events. There is also humour in the fact that his role gives him licence to mock his superiors. Despite his status as jester, he is far wiser than his masters ('wise enough' as Viola says 'to play the fool').

The truly foolish character in the play is Andrew Aguecheek, whom Shakespeare creates to play the 'gull'. Andrew is frequently depicted as cowardly, incompetent and unintelligent. He is unable to understand the simplest of jokes or metaphors, responding to Sir Toby's 'I smell a device' with the literal 'I have't in my nose, too'. Maria aptly describes him as 'a fool', 'a great quarreller', and one who has the 'gift of a coward'. He is ludicrously led to believe that he could be a potential suitor for Olivia. In this he proves hopeless, as is evident when he attempts to listen in to Cesario to learn how to woo and thus becomes a parody of the courtly lover. Andrew Aguecheek is a figure of fun central to Sir Toby's revelries and a character whose denigration is amusing for both stage and theatre audiences.

Wit and wordplay

This is a play rich in punning, irony, wordplay and jokes. Language as a source of humour is especially evident in the bawdy dialogue between Maria, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby and in Feste's verbal out manoeuvring of Olivia and Viola. Words are often shown to be slippery and false and communications are frequently misinterpreted, epitomised in Malvolio's misreading of the letter.

Just as appearances cannot be trusted, neither can language. Often the audience is alive to the true meaning of innuendoes and equivocating comments when the characters are not. One example is when Viola (as Cesario) informs Orsino 'I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too', thus subtly hinting at her true gender, which Orsino fails to realise.

The Twelfth Night festivities – a topsy-turvy world

Twelfth Night, the eve of the Epiphany, was, in Shakespeare's time, a traditional festival, a time of misrule when social roles were relaxed, when masters waited on their servants, when men were allowed to dress as women, and women as men. The Christmas revels were often led by a chosen Lord of Misrule.

Twelfth Night reflects these traditions. There is an evident festive mood with boisterous revelry; Sir Toby has dominance over Olivia's household and the austere Malvolio is overthrown. Even the exotic setting of Illyria (a name that perhaps recalls the mythical Elysian Fields) seems to set up a fantasy world where normal rules do not apply, establishing a sense of liberality. Moreover, the fact that gender roles are inverted from the moment Viola assumes the guise of Cesario immediately creates a sense of confusion, which is sustained throughout the drama. Cesario openly confesses 'I am not what I am'; but in this play, it seems, neither is anyone else. This is a play where disguise creates significant perplexity: Viola finds herself loved by a woman while she loves a man who assumes she is a boy, making both relationships apparently impossible. It is a world where identities are constantly muddled so Viola and Sebastian are repeatedly mistaken for one another. It is also a world where the conventional social hierarchies are disrupted, given that neither Orsino nor Olivia (due to her state of mourning) appears capable of ruling their households as they should. As a result, for much of the play, the lords of misrule hold sway, revelling long past the midnight hour, meddling in affairs, manipulating those around them and so creating a jovial state of anarchy to which their masters, consumed by their own woes, seem oblivious. However, the audience is always aware of the truth (we know that Sir Andrew is being used by Sir Toby, that Cesario is a woman, that Malvolio is being fooled). Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony thus encourages feelings of superiority which enhance the comedy.

Mocking courtly love and desire

From his opening lines, Orsino's indulgence in his supposed passion for Olivia makes him an obvious source of humour. He is only mildly elevated above the other incompetent suitor, Andrew Aguecheek, and can be read and played as equally ridiculous: he languishes in his own supposed adoration of Olivia, employing hyperbolic language to describe a woman that, given her state of mourning, in the constructed world of the play, he cannot have seen, let alone spoken to, for many months. Moreover, the manner in which he forces another to undertake his wooing for him suggests his emotions are disingenuous – he is in love with the idea of being in love and with playing the role of courtly suitor. Orsino requires music to feed his sickness and is not really in love with Olivia at all. Her very inaccessibility seems to be what makes her appealing as it enables him to indulge his misery and luxuriate in his role as unrequited lover. Moreover, his fickleness, evident in his opening speech when he moves between demanding music in 'excess' and then suddenly commanding 'Enough! No more!' suggests a changeability that anticipates the speed with which he is prepared to shift his affections from Olivia to Viola at the end of the play. Orsino thus represents many of the notions associated with courtly love but in his fickle, melodramatic character they are parodied.

Furthermore, what Shakespeare appears to be suggesting is that love is not something that can be constructed or created as Orsino attempts to do, but is rather an instinctive natural emotion. However, initially, even this natural emotion, is meat for comedy: Viola's adoration of Orsino, which cannot be fulfilled owing to her disguise, and her attempts to get Orsino to speak words of love so that she can imagine herself in the role of lover, are funny. Likewise, there is humour in Viola's accidental success in winning Olivia's heart, not for her master but herself, through her genuine declarations of affection in her 'Make me a willow cabin' speech, which ironically is not actually directed at Olivia but at the absent Orsino.

What is more, love is seen as capable of making a fool of even the most straight-laced of individuals. Malvolio's belief that Olivia loves him, and his lustful desire for her (evident when he imagines himself rising 'from a day bed where' he has 'left Olivia sleeping') lead him to behave absurdly. When Sir Toby and Maria trick him into believing Olivia loves him, he vows to 'do everything' that she requires of him, despite the debasing and ludicrous nature of her (apparent) requests. Similarly, Olivia, who appears at first restrained and intelligent, behaves impulsively when she marries Sebastian without even knowing him and then begs Cesario to acknowledge their union, degrading herself in public in the process. The laughable and demeaning manner in which the courtly individuals act when in love enables the audience to smile at their idiocy and gullibility. Importantly, though their foolishness can be forgiven in the world of comedy, not least of all because it is a reminder that love can render all human beings ridiculous.

Comic resolution

The conclusion of the play consolidates its comic nature. There is the promise of marriage between Orsino and Viola as well as a re-confirmation of the marriage between Olivia and Sebastian. Even Sir Toby and Maria are united, her just reward for her loyalty to him. This series of marriages creates a sense of happiness, a jubilant conclusion clinched by the performance of Feste's seemingly jovial final song. Reminiscent of Puck's conclusion to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Feste moves us from the fantasy play world back to reality. A key feature of comedy is that it draws attention to its own artifice and that is exactly what happens in Feste's song. What is more, families are also reunified: when Orsino refers to her as 'sweet sister', he comes to replace the brother that Olivia has lost and mourned. Likewise, Sebastian and Viola, divided by the shipwreck at the play's outset, are also reunited, creating a happy resolution that is satisfying for the audience. In the final scene, Shakespeare also interweaves elements of visual and aural comedy. Feste attempts to read Malvolio's letter in the voice of a madman, Sir Toby arrives in a drunken state, and Sir Andrew appears with his 'bloody coxcomb', humorously claiming that the quivering Viola is 'the very devil incarnate'.

Although some readers and audiences are unsettled by what they see as dark shadows across the play (the mistreatment of Malvolio, his vow to be revenged on the whole pack of them, the sadness of Antonio and Sir Andrew and the silencing of Viola), many focus on the positives in the play's outcome, when order is restored and the lords of misrule are overthrown. Malvolio, after all, is released from prison and his behaviour is explained when the plot against him is revealed. Olivia acknowledges that he has been 'most notoriously abused' and Orsino insists he must be entreated 'to a peace'. Attention finally is on the match between Viola and Orsino (she is to become 'Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen'). Viola thus assumes her appropriate position within the social hierarchy as opposed to that of a servant. The play thus ends joyfully with Feste's music acting as a traditional symbol of peace and goodwill.

Aspects of tragedy: exemplar student response A

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 1A, Section B – Othello

Sample question

‘Othello’s virtue and valour ultimately make him admirable.’

To what extent do you agree with this view?

Remember to include in your answer relevant comment on Shakespeare’s dramatic methods.

Student response*

It is true that in Act 1 of the play, Othello’s actions and behaviour, his virtue and valour can be seen as admirable. He is after all a tragic hero, and his position in the tragedy demands that he begins in a position of greatness before he suffers his tragic fall. Shakespeare establishes Othello’s greatness through focusing on his military prowess and his valour at the start of the play before charting his hero’s descent as he tumbles into chaos. Othello is a soldier for whom the ‘big wars’ make ‘ambition virtue’. By Act 3, however, there is little in him to admire: his valour belongs to a seemingly different world and there is nothing virtuous about a husband who colludes in a plot to destroy his wife.

Although Iago is used by Shakespeare at the start of the play to cast doubt on the magnificence of Othello and to test his virtue, when Othello appears he is impressive. Iago tries to persuade him to run away from the raised father whose daughter Othello has married, but Othello has full confidence in himself and the virtue of his actions. In rhythmic and controlled language he tells Iago he must be found: ‘My parts, my title, and my perfect soul/ Shall manifest me rightly’. Although it could be claimed that this smacks of arrogance, Othello commands the stage and perhaps the audience’s admiration. When Brabantio comes with bad intent, accusing Othello of theft and witchcraft, Othello is unperturbed; he tells his pursuers and accusers to put up their swords for the dew will rust them; they shall command more with their years than their weapons. His measured language is a sign of his confidence, self-discipline and virtue.

When Othello appears before the Duke he is equally impressive. Shakespeare uses the senators to counteract Iago’s attempts to defame Othello, by having them refer to the general as ‘valiant’ (reminding us of his exploits in the field) and the Duke anyway has more interest to employ Othello against the general enemy Ottoman than listen to Brabantio’s claims of sorcery. Even so, Othello’s virtuous defence of himself and his love for Desdemona is all the more admirable (and certainly from a feminist perspective) because he asks that Desdemona be called to speak for herself. If Othello is found foul in her report, he says, the Duke should not only take away his trust and office but that sentence should fall upon his life. By twenty first century standards, Othello’s affording Desdemona a voice and showing her unwavering respect, is virtuous indeed. There is also perhaps something if not admirable then at least mesmerising in his declaration of love and his story of how he wooed her:

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,

And I loved her that she did pity them.

However, when Shakespeare shifts the scene to Cyprus and the influence of the Venetian state diminishes, Iago, the tragic villain, is able to work his poison on Othello and expose his weaknesses, those aspects of his character that are far from virtuous. Othello's trust in Iago, the ancient he overlooked for lieutenant, shows a terrible lack of judgement. Iago persuades him that Cassio is unworthy and then that Desdemona is unfaithful and from the point that Iago says 'I like not that', Othello's insecurities, raging jealousy and barbaric inclinations are exposed. Having swallowed Iago's poison, Othello damns Desdemona, threatening to 'tear her all to pieces'. It is interesting here to note the dramatic contrast Shakespeare sets up between Othello and the Duke. In Act 1, in Venice, when the Duke is called upon to exercise judgement, he listens to both the accounts of Brabantio and Othello. Here in Cyprus at the outpost of civilization, Othello listens only to the lies of Iago.

There is dramatic contrast too in the different ways Othello speaks. Othello's earlier speeches which contain so much gravitas are now worn down. His love, 'the fountain from the which [his] current runs' is degraded into a 'cistern for foul toads/ to knot and gender in'. He falls under Iago's spell, pulled into the orbit of Iago's filthy linguistic energies and there is not much that is virtuous about his behaviour from now onwards and not much to admire.

His humiliation and public striking of Desdemona and his cruel murder of her are all too terrible to forget in the final judgement of him. It is true that when he strikes her there are reminders of his valour and virtue in Lodovico's surprise that he could have misjudged Othello's character so greatly in thinking him good, but these reminders simply intensify the repugnance felt at Othello's actions. It is also impossible to admire the man who strangles his wife believing that he is an honourable murderer. His pride at enacting the hand of Justice makes him detestable – at a point when he hesitates, he blames her balmy breath for almost persuading Justice to break its sword.

His final speech, when he perhaps understands the appalling consequences of his folly, is seen by some critics as cathartic, a return of the virtuous and valiant Othello of Act 1. Interestingly, in this speech when he judges himself (and tries to shape how others might think), Othello seems to underplay the significance of his valour and contribution to the state. Though he reminds his stage audience that he has done the state some service, he quickly says 'no more of that'. However, it is clear that as the speech goes on, his assessment of himself is ultimately coloured by his pride and his highly developed sense of self worth and, although he has some dignity, there is not ultimately much honour. His concern at the end is for his public image and, as he has done from the start, he uses language to construct an artifice of his own identity. He speaks of himself as if he were legendary or part of a defined myth. The use of the definite article is instrumental in achieving this effect – 'the base Indian', 'the Arabian trees'; only fragments of detail are supplied here but he conveys the idea that these images are huge and famous. His final speech is calm and controlled, but it reaches a crescendo of dramatic impact when he does the most dramatic thing he can do, transferring his construction of his identity of himself into the here and now, and suddenly and climactically ends his life. This is the self dramatizing that Leavis so condemns.

So, while it is true that from the moment Othello first appears he is attractive, by ever increasing degrees as the plot develops, he becomes repellent. As we stand back to make our final judgement on whether his valour and virtue ultimately make him admirable, it is surely not possible to overlook his despicable behaviour. What perhaps should be done in the final evaluation is to reconsider the nature of his virtue and valour at the start of the play and question whether it was

always founded on sand. From his words early on 'I fetch my life and bearing/ from men of royal siege' to his final words of the play, 'to die upon a kiss' his sense of his own significance is overwhelming. Othello is certainly not 'ultimately' admirable and the question must be asked, is he ever?

It is also important to note that even when he is most glorious – and apparently admirable, there are many who cannot countenance his 'pride, pomp and circumstance'.

*see Appendix A for examiner commentary to this response.

Texts and genres:

A-level, Paper 2

Option 2A: Elements of crime writing

Option 2B: Elements of political and social protest writing

Example compulsory question on unseen passage

Paper 2A, Section A: unseen passage-based question (no choice of passage)

Sample question

Explore the significance of the crime elements in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Hill has shaped meanings. **[25 marks]**

This extract is taken from the early part of Susan Hill's novel, *A Question of Identity* (published in 2012). The witnesses have just given their evidence in a murder trial. The accused, Alan Keyes, has pleaded not guilty. Two crime reporters, Charlie Vogt and Rod Hawkins, are awaiting the verdict with every expectation of a conviction.

Extract:

The court was full to overflowing, the public benches packed. Charlie and Rod stood pressed against the doors poised like greyhounds in the slips.

You never got over it, Charlie thought, your blood pressure went up with the tension and excitement. Better than any film, better than any book. There was just nothing to beat it, watching the drama of the court, eyes on the face of the accused when the word rang out. Guilty. The look of the relatives, as they flushed with joy, relief, exhaustion. And then the tears. These were the final moments when he knew why he was in his job. Every time.

Alan Keyes stood, face pale, eyes down, his police minder impassive.

Charlie's throat constricted suddenly as he looked at him, looked at his hands on the rail. Normal hands. Nothing ugly, nothing out of the ordinary. Not a strangler's hands, whatever they were supposed to look like. But the hands, resting on the rail, hands like his own, one beside the other resting on the rail, resting on the ...those hands had ...Charlie did not think of himself as hard-boiled but you did get accustomed. But nothing prepared you for the first time you saw the man in front of you, ordinary, innocent until proved guilty, however clear his guilt was, nothing prepared you for the sight of a man like Keyes, there in the flesh, a man who had strangled three elderly women. Nothing. He couldn't actually look at Keyes at all now.

The lawyers sat together, shuffling papers, fiddling with box lids, not looking at one another, not murmuring. Just waiting.

And then the door opened and they were filing back, concentrating on taking their seats, faces showing the strain, or else blank and showing nothing at all. Seven women, five men. Charlie was struck by the expression on the face of the first woman, young with dark hair pulled tightly back, bright red scarf round her neck. She looked desperate – desperate to get out? Desperate because she was afraid? Desperate not to catch the eye of the man in the dock, the ordinary-looking man with the unremarkable hands who had strangled three old women? Charlie watched as she sat down and stared straight ahead of her, glazed, tired. What had she done to deserve the past nine days, hearing appalling things, looking at terrible images? Been a citizen. Nothing else. He had often wondered how people like her coped when it had all been forgotten, but the images and the accounts wouldn't leave their heads. Once you knew something you couldn't un-know it. His Dad had tried to un-know what he'd learned about Hindley and Brady for years afterwards.

'All rise.'

The court murmured; the murmur faded. Everything went still. Every eye focused on the jury benches.

In the centre of the public benches a knot of elderly women sat together. Two had their hands on one another's arms. Even across the room, Charlie Vogt could see a pulse jumping in the neck of one, the pallor of her neighbour. Behind them, two middle-aged couples, one with a young woman. He knew relatives when he saw them, very quiet, very still, desperate for this to be over, to see justice being done. Hang in there, he willed them, a few minutes and then you walk away, to try and put your lives back together.

Schoolteacher, he thought, as the foreman of the jury stood. Bit young, no more than early thirties. Several of them looked even younger. When he'd done jury service himself, several years ago now, there had only been two women and the men had all been late-middle-aged.

'Have you reached a verdict on all three counts?'

'Yes.'

'On the first count, do you find the accused guilty or not guilty?' The first murder of Carrie Gage.

Charlie realised that he was clenching his hand, digging his nails into the palm.

'Not guilty.'

The intake of breath was like a sigh round the room.

'Is this a unanimous verdict?'

'Yes.'

'On the second count of murder, do you find the accused guilty or not guilty?' Sarah Pearce.

'Not guilty.'

The murmur was faint, like a tide coming in. Charlie glanced at the faces of the legal teams. Impassive except for the junior barrister of the defence who had put her hands briefly to her mouth.

'Is this verdict unanimous?'

'Yes.'

'On the third count, do you find the accused guilty or not guilty?'

His honour Judge Palmer was sitting very straight, hands out of sight, expression unreadable.

'Not guilty.'

'Is –'

The gavel came down hard on the bench and the judge's voice roared out: 'Order...'

Susan Hill (2012)

Elements of political and social protest writing: specimen question commentary

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.

Different combinations of text will be considered.

This explanation does not include all possible combinations, neither are the suggested ideas that might be included exhaustive, but the explanation will provide a workable way into the question and the intention is to offer some support for teachers preparing students for the examination.

Paper 2B, Section C

This type of question from Section C of Paper 2 Elements of political and social protest writing invites students to write about the significance of an element of political and social protest writing across two texts. As with the Section C questions on Paper 1, the two texts do not need to be written about equally but each must receive substantial coverage in terms of depth. One hour is recommended for this question. There does not need to be explicit comparison but there will be connection through the element of political and social protest writing set up in the question (here that element is 'rebellion against those in power'). This is an Open Book paper and so students will need to know their texts well and be able to refer to them in detail in the examination.

Sample question

'Political and social protest writing often focuses on rebellion against those in power.'

Explore the significance of rebellion as it is presented in two political and social protest texts you have studied.

How the question meets the Assessment objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. The application of the AOs in relation to the task is similar to the way it works in Section C questions on Paper 1, though here **AO2** is signalled by 'as it is presented' and the invitation to debate and explore meanings and to consider relevant contextual factors (**AO5** and **AO3**) is signalled by 'significance'. In terms of **AO3**, as students engage with significance, different relevant contextual material will emerge in relation to the political and social protest genre depending on the chosen texts, when they were produced, how they have been received and whether they are prose, poetry or drama. As with Paper 1, **AO4** is explicit in that two texts must be connected in the exploration of the significance of the political and social protest writing element of 'rebellion'.

Possible content

The possible content of the mark scheme provides some ideas that students might write about. However, there are clearly many others and if students are reading their texts through a political and social protest writing lens they will be able to identify many ideas themselves. The texts the

students use could well be different types and, almost certainly, the writers will not have approached rebellion in the same ways. Therefore, students do not have to treat the discussion of rebellion in the same way in relation to their two texts. If students were using, for example, the post-modern text *The Kite Runner* and *Henry IV part 1*, they might be writing about how rebellion operates differently in a bildungsroman novel, where rebellion is on a personal and individual level, and how it operates in a drama, where the main action centres on the gathering of armies who rebel against a king who is himself a rebel. In Section C questions, students will need to think carefully about exactly how the given element operates in their two texts.

Students will also have to understand how to effectively use their Open Book texts. To do this they will need to have been specifically taught how to respond to Open Book examinations. They need to know that it means more than looking up quotations. Selecting key passages for detailed focus is essential and clearly students need to be able to navigate their way around their texts in an efficient way so that they are not wasting valuable examination time looking for those passages. It is expected that students will choose relevant sections of their texts on which to base their discussion and use specific details as they construct their answers.

The possible content from the mark scheme, outlined below, offers some ideas related to all the texts. Depending on their specific pair of texts, centres can build up further relevant details.

- Blake – the narrator of the poems (perhaps Blake himself) rebelling against authority by writing poetry, the call for rebellion by the earth, the little boy lost who dares to question the institutional wisdom of the priest, etc
- Harrison – the rebellion of the skin in ‘v.’ who desecrates the grave stones, Harrison’s rebellion against the conventional language of poetry, etc
- Hosseini – the rebellion of Amir against the Taliban as represented by Assef, the rebellion of Hassan’s mother, the rebellion of Baba against Soviet oppression, etc
- Crace – the rebellion of the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs in the taking of magic mushrooms and setting fire to the barn, the rebellion of the three outsiders, etc
- Dickens – Louisa’s rebellion against her upbringing and marriage, the workers’ rebellion against the mill owners, etc
- Atwood – Offred’s rebellion against the rules, Moira, Offred’s mother, etc
- Ibsen – Nora’s rebellion against her husband’s rules both in the early stages of the play and at the end, etc
- Shakespeare - the rebellion of Hotspur, Northumberland, Glendower against the king, Hal’s rebellion against his father’s rules, Falstaff’s rebellion against authority, etc

Students might address significance in terms of meanings and/or significance to the narratives or sequence of ideas and/or significance of the contextual factors connected to rebellion.

AO2: Arguments above should be linked to some of the following writers’ methods: dramatic method (eg exits and entrances, dialogue, soliloquy, use of crisis and climax, action, settings, etc), poetic method (eg structural issues: stanzas, patterns, rhythm, beginning and end, settings; language issues: the title, sentences, diction, imagery etc) , narrative method, (eg structure, sequencing, voices, titles, settings, language, characterisation and role, etc).

Text combinations

Clearly there are many combinations of texts which centres can choose, all of which can be justified and lead to interesting investigations by students. Schools and colleges have the responsibility though of satisfying the rubric so it must be realised that not all combinations are possible. Students have to study three texts. One must be a poetry text, one must be a post 2000 novel and there must be one further text. One of the texts chosen must have been written pre 1900. If Blake is chosen as the poetry text, therefore, both the poetry and pre 1900 considerations have been satisfied and so there is free choice of the third text, once a post 2000 novel has been selected. If Harrison is selected for the poetry text, the third text must be the Blake poetry, *Henry IV part 1*, *A Doll's House* or *Hard Times*, in order to satisfy the pre-1900 requirement. If Blake is chosen as the poetry text, then both post 2000 novels could be studied if students and teachers wish to do so.

It might be helpful here to look at two exemplar routes and what these combinations of texts can offer to students. It needs to be said though that these suggestions are in no way recommended models; others might be equally as good or better.

Example 1

Let us imagine that this student has been prepared for the following three texts for Paper 2B: *Harvest*, Harrison's poetry and *Henry IV part 1*. Let us also imagine that the student, having considered all the questions in Sections B and C has made the choice to write about *Harvest* in Section B. The student will now be using Harrison's poetry selection and *Henry IV part 1* to answer Question 10. With these two texts in mind, this question would be a good choice as both texts have rebellion at their heart and yet the types of rebellion are very different. The student would therefore be able to explore this political element in interesting ways. The student could show knowledge of the different ways drama and poetry work whilst focusing on civil war as a form of rebellion in Shakespeare's representation of fifteenth century England and class war as a form of rebellion in, for example, Harrison's 1980s 'v.', '*National Trust*' and '*Them and [uz]*'. (It should be noted that students do not need to write about all of Harrison's poems and might here only write about 'v.'). There might also be discussion of the fact that despite the differences in time between the texts, they both focus on male rebellion and anger and women are very much in the background.

In *Henry IV part 1*, the student could focus on the rebellion of the Percys and how this is played out in the structure of the play – in the council chamber, in the plotting that follows between Northumberland, Worcester and Hotspur, in the scenes with Glendower, Hotspur and Mortimer and in the climactic Battle of Shrewsbury where rebellion, championed and seen as honourable by Hotspur, is crushed by the Prince of Wales. Students might also focus on the rebellion of Hal against his father's authority, on the comic rebellions of Falstaff against the King's law and dignity, and also on Henry's own rebellion in the backstory which led to his taking the crown and to his feeling of guilt in the story dramatised on stage. In the discussion of Harrison, discussion might centre on 'v.' only which would be perfectly legitimate for this question. Comment there might be on the rebellion of the jobs who spray the grave stones with graffiti, on the rebellion of Harrison who uses language to challenge orthodoxy, the rebellion of the specific job who sets himself up against the ruling classes and the rebellion of the miners against the Thatcher government, Ian MacGregor and the National Coal Board. Students might also refer to any of the other Harrison poems and comment on Harrison's rebellion through poetry and language choices against the establishment

and privileged Standard English, for example in ‘*Them and [uz]*’ and ‘*Divisions*’. Students could also write about Harrison’s rebellion with himself in ‘v.’

Example 2

Let us imagine that this student has a different combination of texts. This student has studied *The Kite Runner*, Blake’s poetry and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The student has also thought carefully about the questions in Sections B and C and has decided to answer on Blake in Section B, leaving two modern novels for Section C. Given the task, this would also be a good combination for Question 10. Rebellion is clearly of central importance to Atwood’s text and although it is less foregrounded in *The Kite Runner* there is still much that can be said. The nature of rebellion in the two novels is very different. The texts are both novels but Hosseini’s is a bildungsroman and Atwood’s a dystopian fiction. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, written by a female novelist has a female protagonist and narrator and *The Kite Runner*, written by a male writer has a male protagonist and narrator. The similarities and differences between the two texts will provide the student with some interesting avenues to explore and although the question does not require comparison, it may be that the student will choose to do so.

Rebellion in *The Handmaid’s Tale* takes many forms. In the internal workings of the Gilead regime, Offred rebels by thinking about the time before, by fantasising about attacking the Commander, by having a forbidden sexual relationship with Nick and finally by recording her experiences. Moira rebels against male authority and male sexuality and Offred tells the story of her mother who was a feminist rebel in the time before; the telling of these stories is another form of rebellion.

In *The Kite Runner* the focus of the first part of the story is the friendship between Amir and Hassan, which could be seen as a rebellion of sorts given their different ethnic backgrounds. Later when Afghanistan suffers political upheaval with the occupation of the Soviets and then the Taliban, there are all kinds of rebellious acts – Baba’s against the Russian soldier, Amir’s attack on Assef and that of Rahim Khan who encourages Amir to return to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab. Interestingly, although women in this text are not central figures they commit significant acts of rebellion. Sanaubar rebels against her husband and the patriarchal authority of her society by running away from her family and joining some travellers five days after Hassan’s birth; Soraya, although virtuous in the novel’s present, tells Amir of her past when at eighteen she rebels against her domineering father and runs away with her boyfriend.

The significance of all acts of rebellion, in both examples given, can be teased out in a variety of ways in terms of how the rebellions can be interpreted and open up meanings and how those acts of rebellion are significant to the design of the stories.

Elements of crime writing: resource package for Section B

We have developed a range of resources to help you plan your teaching and to create practice exam questions for the Elements of crime writing component of A-level English Literature B. Below you will find links to a variety of resources:

- Creating your own questions - guidance document.
- Specimen assessment materials: question papers and mark schemes.
- Specimen question commentaries, which explain how a question taken from the specimen assessment materials addresses the assessment objectives, and which give some suggestions of how the task might be approached.
- Exemplar student responses with marking commentary: two responses of different mark bands are given to a specific question from the specimen assessment materials.
- Text overviews, which show you examples of how some of the set texts can be read through the lens of the genre of crime writing.

How to use these resources

These resources 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 text overviews and specimen mark schemes give you details about some of the aspects of the genre each text covers, 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.

Creating your own questions

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 Elements of crime writing: resource package A to set questions for Paper 2A, Section B.

Paper 2A, Section B

If you have used the relevant question from the specimen assessment materials or want to set a question on a different element of crime, 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:

'In *Oliver Twist* Dickens presents criminals as products of their society.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Dickens' authorial methods.

The question wording (To what extent...authorial methods.) can remain unchanged. You will need, however, to construct a different 'view' depending upon the aspect of crime you want the students to explore.

2. Read the relevant text overview to help you construct a different 'view' to debate. Look for elements of crime which occur in the text but don't forget that the absence of elements in a text is equally valid for debate. Other sources can be used to construct a view:
 - look at the list of elements of crime in the specification and make up a critical view around one of these
 - take a view from one of the writers in the Critical anthology around which to structure a debate
 - research critical views about crime writing, on this or other crime texts, 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 text they have studied.

Specimen question commentary

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment materials 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 2A, Section B

Paper 2, Section B questions are similar in construction to those in Paper 1, Section B. They will focus on a critical viewpoint about an element of crime or political and social protest writing in each of the texts. Students will be asked 'to what extent' they agree with the given view and they will be reminded to include detailed exploration of authorial methods. The student will of course have to be mindful of whether the text is poetry, drama or prose to show how these major genres operate in terms of the sub genre (crime or political and social protest writing) which they are discussing. In their chosen question, students can show how their text can be interpreted in different ways and they can also offer a strong personal view which is rooted in the text. Students have access to their texts in the examination and they should be using those texts to select relevant material to provide detail in their answers.

Sample question

'In *Oliver Twist* Dickens presents criminals as products of their society.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Dickens' authorial methods.

How the question meets the assessment objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. The key words and phrases in the question are: to what extent, relevant detailed exploration, authorial methods, and these are clearly connected to the assessment objectives. Students also need to engage with 'criminals as products of their society'.

AO1 will be tested through the way the students construct their arguments and express their ideas. **AO2** is set up in the requirement for students to include a detailed exploration of Dickens' authorial methods and in doing this they will show how these methods shape meanings. Here students will specifically need to address narrative methods. **AO3** will be addressed through the students' showing their understanding of the crime writing contexts of *Oliver Twist* as they focus on criminals and in addition, their debates will incorporate relevant contextual factors about 'society' and when the text was written and how it has been received. In writing about, and engaging with criminals as products of Dickens' constructed society, **AO4** will be addressed as students will be connecting implicitly with concepts of the wider crime writing genre. **AO5** will be addressed when students assess the viewpoint of whether or not Dickens' criminals are presented as products of their society. Students will need to engage with the idea that Dickens might exonerate his criminal characters by placing the blame at the hands of society. Here they will be able to use their texts in an explicit way to select apposite material to support their arguments and it would be sensible to use that same material to interrogate authorial method. Comment on structure, voices, settings and language can be woven into the argument. Students

need to think about how the methods selected help them to decide to what extent the given view is valid.

Possible content

There is ample room for students to debate the statement in this task, to discuss how far Dickens presents his characters as being ‘products’ of his constructed society. Some will see the novel directly as a social critique. The under privileged are seen as fighting for survival. Focus here is likely to be on Fagin, Sikes, Nancy and the boys, specifically the Artful Dodger. Comments could be made about the manner in which these individuals are forced into a life of crime by a society that has failed them and offers them no other opportunity. The ‘society’ is obviously a created world in *Oliver Twist* though students might well comment on how this society is drawn from Dickens’ London in the 1830s. There may even be a contrast between the treatment of boys by the parish and the boys under Fagin – the destitution of boys such as Oliver results in their seeing no other means of survival (Fagin does at least provide them with a home, clothing and food). This is an improvement on the treatment Oliver, for example, receives from Mr Bumble. Fagin could also be regarded as a paternalistic figure in contrast to the likes of Mrs Mann in the way he offers the boys some sense of safety and community. Students may comment on the lack of provision for children without families that thus forces them into the criminal world as their only means of survival particularly given their lack of education and the lack of state concern.

Students may also examine the manner in which society and the justice system is far from just thereby making ‘criminals’ into victims. Society, in Dickens’ novel, offers no sympathy for or understanding of law breakers. Many who transgress are desperate and many are children. Significantly all who transgress are punished by adult law. Comments could be made about the contrast between the manner in which those in socially privileged positions are treated and those of the lower classes. For example, whilst Mr Brownlow’s taking a book from the bookseller is quickly forgiven, Oliver’s supposed theft of a handkerchief is swiftly prosecuted in the harshest fashion despite lack of proof. Students could refer to the comments made by ‘criminals’ such as the Artful Dodger who are critical of the establishment and recognise that there is a very little justice to be found for individuals in the lowest rung of society.

Some students may argue that Dickens presents his criminal characters as products of their society in the way that they die: Nancy at the hands of her pimp and Fagin through hanging. Society thus either fails to protect them or punishes them, casting them as victims of a cruel and uncaring world rather than perpetrators of evil. Comments could likewise be made about the contrast between criminals and those in positions of power, such as Mr Bumble, who shape the behaviours of the underclass through their contempt of them. The powerful in *Oliver Twist* lack sympathy for and have no desire to understand those in the social classes below them thereby making the criminals products of their society.

Some students will challenge the given statement and argue that Dickens’ position is somewhat ambiguous regarding criminals being products of their society. Although it is clear that he has sympathy for Nancy and the children, he does not present explicit mitigating circumstances for Monks, Fagin or Sikes. Sikes is cast as a terrible villain particularly when he brutally murders Nancy who chooses to do good regarding Oliver despite her attachment to Sikes.

Sikes, and to some extent Fagin and Monks, appear not only criminal but malevolent in their brutality and treatment of others. In some ways they are classic examples of crime writing villainy motivated by greed and ill gotten gains. Students might well focus on the speech Dickens gives

these characters and his description of them thereby making implicit links with the wider crime writing genre. It could also be argued that Dickens' anti-Semitic presentation of Fagin and Fagin's manipulation and often threatening treatment of the boys whom he is happy to see punished for his criminal gain, make it difficult to see those who run criminal enterprises as products. Moreover, given that Oliver is the novel's hero and given that sympathy lies primarily with him, Fagin and the other boys' treatment of Oliver in taking him from the care of Mrs Bedwin, Mr Brownlow's kindly housekeeper, and denying him potential happiness for some time, casts them as villains and agents of society rather than products of it. Some may simply propose that Dickens suggests that criminals choose their lifestyle. The Artful Dodger, for example, seems to enjoy his work.

It could also be argued that the only real products of the society Dickens presents are the boys, such as Oliver and Dick, who are abused and ignored by a system which sees little value in them. Their morality contrasts with the immorality of Sikes, Fagin and Monks, which makes it difficult to see the adults themselves as products. Significantly Dickens does not provide biographies or psychological profiles for these adult criminals in any attempt to excuse or explain their behaviour. In fact, Dickens could be seen as censorious, presenting them and their criminal acts in an overwhelmingly negative light implicitly condemning their refusal to work in an honest and decent way. Students might also argue that Fagin and Sikes set up an alternative society over which they rule and that children become products of this world. Sikes is portrayed as a psychopathic; Fagin takes all the boys' gain for himself and is happy to see them punished for his crimes as long as they do not 'peach' on him; Monks appears bent on the destruction of Oliver; even the Artful Dodger is canny and worldly-wise and thus happy to manipulate the innocent Oliver for his own ends. Therefore it could be argued that it is difficult to perceive them as anything but inherently bad and not products of the wider society. As a result Dickens suggests that they therefore deserve their fate.

Exemplar student responses and examiner commentaries

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

Paper 2A, Section B

'In *Oliver Twist* Dickens presents criminals as products of their society'.

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Dickens' authorial methods.

Band 2 response

Criminals in *Oliver Twist* are characters who do things that are illegal like for example Sikes because he kills Nancy and Fagin because he gets boys to steal for him. However, these characters are not products of society in the way Nancy and the boys are. Nancy is a prostitute and a criminal, forced into crime because of her poverty and she is also a victim of Sikes' brutality.

Firstly, **Nancy** is definitely a product of her society. Nancy is one of the underclass and was a child of the streets. She then became a prostitute and part of a criminal gang. She is a product of the larger society and the smaller society of the criminal world as she is encouraged to make money for Sikes and for the gang she works for. Prostitution was immoral if not illegal when the book was written. Nancy is part of the criminal gang which lives by robbery. However, Nancy is a mainly a victim of society – or her criminal society - because Bill kills her in a terrible and bloody way because she tries to save Oliver and become a better person. She is the only developed female criminal and she is clearly a victim of the men in Fagin's gang and a product of two uncaring societies. There does not seem to be anyone who can help her which makes her a victim.

Oliver would be a good example to use to support the quotation. He is a criminal in a way because he is in Fagin's gang and he is with the gang when they break into a house. He is a product of society because society does not take proper care of orphans. Because he is abused by society he runs away and ends up in Fagin's gang. But he is really an innocent character. He is pushed through a window to help because he is small. Because he is forced to help he can be seen as a victim. He could also be a victim when he is at the workhouse and when he is an apprentice to the coffin makers because he is badly treated and because he does not get enough food. He is a victim especially as he hates the work he has to do. This is why he runs away and is lured into Fagin's den. It could be said that Oliver is really a victim of society rather than a product because of the way he is treated by authority. He commits the terrible offence by the workhouse standards of asking for more food in the workhouse and is punished for it. However at the end of the novel Dickens rewards him for his goodness by giving him a good home with Mr Brownlow.

Bill Sikes and Fagin are the worst criminals as they are cruel and horrible. Sikes is a murderer. He attacks Nancy when he is in a temper and in his rage he kills her. He is also violent to his dog. Dickens makes Sikes speak in an aggressive way to show how truly nasty he is. If a boy were to 'peach' on him he says 'I'd grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head'. It is hard to see that he is a product of his society as he just seems to be evil and chooses to live the life he does. He clearly does not want to work honestly in the way that society expects.

Fagin is a gang leader and he makes children work for him stealing – especially pick- pocketing and he takes all the profits. Today his crimes would also include child abuse. He is physically and mentally cruel to the boys. He doesn't care for them and his only worry is that if they are caught they might tell the police about him. He does not seem to be a product of society as he seems to be in control of his own society of the gang. At the end of the novel both Sikes and Fagin are punished for their crimes. Sikes is chased by a crowd as he tries to escape and he falls and hangs himself. Fagin is put in prison and then hanged. This is a typical ending when the bad people get punished. If they are products of society then society chooses in the end to destroy them.

Overall, there are lots of criminals in the novel and sometimes they are products of society, but Oliver is really a victim of an uncaring society but I feel most sorry for Nancy.

Examiner commentary

There are some points about criminals and their potentially being products of society here and the candidate focuses on the question in a fairly simple way. There is some attempt to argue that criminals are more victims or beneficiaries of society than products. However, most of the writing is of a generalised nature. There are few specific details and only one quotation. The student does not use the open book to support ideas.

AO1: There is some sense of ordering the ideas and separate paragraphs are used for the discussion of different characters. The writing is clear but there is only a generalised use of critical concepts.

AO2: There is a little awareness that Dickens has constructed the text to shape meanings and there is a simple understanding of authorial methods. The candidate makes some structural points about the ending of the novel in relation to the task and there is a comment on Sikes' language.

AO3: There is a simple understanding of criminal, moral and social contexts. There is also some sense of when the novel was written and how readers might respond from a modern contextual position.

AO4: In engaging with 'criminals' and the causes of criminality the student is connecting with elements of the wider genre; this is done implicitly.

AO5: The student is able to construct some argument and make some general points in the debate. A simple personal view is offered at the end.

This response seems to match the Band 2 descriptors.

Band 3 response

In some ways the criminals in the novel could be seen as products of society especially the likes of Nancy who is murdered and Fagin who is hanged. On the other hand, some people might argue that they are not products because they choose this life for themselves and many of them do really terrible things like Sikes who kills Nancy and Fagin who uses the boys. In this essay, I am going to look at both points of view.

Firstly, it could be argued that Nancy is a victim, and therefore a product of her society, as like a lot of individuals who live at the bottom rung of society, the only way in which she is able to survive is by turning to criminal or immoral activity - in her case prostitution and involvement with more hardened criminals such as Sikes and Fagin. However, even though she is a criminal, Dickens presents her in a sympathetic way. It seems that she genuinely loves Sikes and when he is ill, she nurses him showing a caring and motherly side to her character despite the way he treats her. Moreover, Dickens even calls one of the chapters 'The Time Arrives for Nancy to Redeem her Pledge to Rose Maylie' where the word 'redeem' suggests that she is a moral individual who wants to redeem herself for the wrong that she did Oliver. Nancy is the one who confesses that she took Oliver away from Mr Brownlow and the truth about Monks so that the truth about his parentage and real character can be revealed. Therefore it seems that Nancy is essentially a moral character whose social circumstances have forced her into the criminal world. She does not seem to be actively making a choice to be a criminal. Society does not offer her any alternative way to live. Also, her murder makes her seem like a victim. Dickens portrays this in a really violent way as we are told she 'staggered and fell, nearly blinded with the blood that rained on from a deep gash in her forehead'. Sikes' attack on Nancy, which is partly motivated by the way she has interfered with his plans, seems savage and terrible and therefore despite the fact she is a criminal, we see her as a product of the world she lives in and we sympathise with her.

Likewise, some people might see the boys who work for Fagin as victims of society even though they are criminals. The alternative life is one where they are starved and beaten as we see at the beginning of the novel through Dickens' presentation of Mrs Mann's baby farm and the suffering of Dick and also how society treats people in the workhouse. This is a life that even the moral Oliver cannot stand and tries to escape from. Society does not care for such impoverished and orphaned children. Their only way of surviving is therefore to steal in order to have enough food to live. Therefore the boys are products of their cruel 19th century world. Oliver is persuaded to go with Fagin at first because he offers him a bed and shelter something that society has failed to provide him with despite the fact today we would consider this a really basic thing. In fact, the life the boys have with Fagin, who is even described as a 'pleasant old gentleman' is seen as a great improvement on the conditions in the workhouse as he gives them clothes and food and does look after them in a way. He could almost be seen as an alternative mentor and father figure taking the place of a society that has failed them. He provides an alternative society though it could be said that the boys become products of that and they seem happier in that world. In films, for example, the Artful Dodger is often presented as a humorous and fun loving character who the reader really likes. Moreover, these boys are really harshly punished by society. In today's society, if you are a young boy under the age of 16 and commit some kind of crime you get sent to a detention centre or looked after in some way, but these boys are punished severely and even sent to the 'gallows' for simply stealing a handkerchief or pocket watch and no one seems to care. This makes them victims of society as well as products because they are forced into this life, punished too harshly and no one cares about them.

On the other hand, it is difficult to see characters like Bill Sikes as products or victims of society. He seems like a savage psychopath who is willing to stoop to any level for self gain. You could argue that he chooses the life of a criminal because he is greedy and even enjoys the violence of the criminal life. He has no moral conscience and even abandons Oliver, our innocent main character, after the attempted burglary leaving him to potentially face arrest and death despite the fact he is only a child. Moreover, when Sikes dies at his own hands we feel no sympathy for him. His treatment of others, the way he is a violent threat and his murder of Nancy all make it difficult to see this criminal as a product or victim at all.

Finally, it could be argued that Fagin is not a victim or product of society either. He has ample money that he keeps hidden and so he could choose another life. However, like a lot of the criminals in the book he chooses a life of crime rather than working hard like the Sowerberrys and Dickens is condemning people like him. Moreover, Dickens presents him as really unpleasant because of the way he treats the boys. For example, he doesn't care about the fact that Oliver has been arrested or the fact he might of found a better life with Mr Brownlow, he is only worried about the fact he might of 'peached'. He even says, 'He has not peached so far...If he means to blab us among his new friends, we may stop his mouth yet' which is really threatening and conveys the fact that he is happy to hurt the boys who work for him if it serves himself.

Overall, whilst some of the criminals are products of society and I do think that Dickens might be criticising justice and the fact it doesn't work and isn't very fair and blames society for lots of bad things happening, he doesn't present all criminals as products of society. A lot of the criminals are villains and so I don't agree with the statement.

Examiner commentary

This is a straightforward response and the student makes relevant points in a clear way.

AO1: The response is structured and ideas are sensibly ordered. The student uses terminology in an appropriate way. The writing is clearly expressed and mainly accurate although there are some awkward phrases and there is some imprecision.

AO2: The student has some sense of the author's shaping meanings but there is more on Dickens' intentions than the methods themselves. A little is said about how Dickens presents characters but the ideas are not detailed. There is a little discussion of how Dickens structures his novel in relation to whether or not his characters are products of their society but, given the fact this is open book, the use of evidence is rather thin.

AO3: There is some engagement with social and legal contexts and there is valid discussion of how society treats children. There is also an awareness of how a modern society would treat young criminals as opposed to the Victorian system. However, again there is a lack of specific detail from the text.

AO4: There is straight forward understanding of the crime writing genre with relevant comments about what makes individuals become criminal and there are some specific examples of criminal activity. The student also focuses on the nature of victims of crime although the ideas lack development and detailed textual reference.

AO5: There is a relevant debate here although the latter section is less developed than the first. The response remains focused on the task though and there are straight forward points made both for and against the statement although the final argument is not really clinched.

This response seems consistent with the Band 3 descriptors.

Text overview: *Oliver Twist*

Read our overview which shows how you can consider *Oliver Twist* in relation to the genre of crime writing. We haven't covered every element of this genre. Instead we hope this guide will provide a springboard to help you plan, and to get you and your students thinking about the text in more detail.

“The condemned criminal was seated on his bed, rocking himself from side to side, with a countenance more like that of a snared beast than the face of a man.”

Criminal acts

Given the heavy focus on crime and the London underworld, it is not difficult to see the novel as a clear example of a specific type of crime writing, one rooted in social realism. *Oliver Twist's* narrative is driven by a number of crimes. Bill Sikes' murder of Nancy is the most horrible and dramatic; Fagin's corruption of young boys, specifically his attempt to pervert Oliver, covers more of the story's action; Monks' vengeful spite as he tracks down Oliver and seeks his ruin provides a narrative structure; but perhaps surpassing all these are the terrible crimes committed by the state against its people, especially children, through the passing of the Poor Law Act of 1834. The creation of workhouses, the authorities' condoning child labour and the wide-held belief of those with power that poverty equalled criminality, are included by Dickens to show that the values held by the state are more devious and cynical than the criminal world itself. Since 1838 many of the laws that underpin the novel have been abolished, and public attitudes have likewise changed. Some practices which were once lawful are now crimes themselves, like making young children work and hanging them for acts of theft. As a result, pinning down crimes and judging them is problematic for modern readers.

The novel reflects the London of the 1830s as Dickens saw it and incorporates his reactions to it. His own views were complex. There is abhorrence for many laws and accepted practices but also contempt for law breakers. Sometimes there is criticism of the middle classes and of criminals, and sometimes there is sympathy. Fagin and Sikes are outlaws, but also social outcasts. They are developed with more psychological realism than Oliver and, at their ends, they are figures of terrifying loneliness.

Crimes and criminals

As Oliver progresses through childhood he encounters the criminal world first hand: theft, abduction, murder, prostitution, deception and fraud are at the heart of Dickens' novel.

Thieving is the profession of Fagin's gang and his empire depends on children of poverty being recruited as pickpockets. Stealing leads to some of the children being hanged.

Whereas modern readers are likely to be horrified at the practice of abducting children, Fagin and his adult gang think that this is their right, and the authorities seem to turn a blind eye to it. Some children are lured into Fagin's den and this is certainly the case when Oliver first goes, persuaded by the Artful Dodger that he will be given a home. When Oliver escapes from Fagin, he is forcibly kidnapped from Mr Brownlow's and returned to the den. Oliver is also an unwilling accomplice in Sikes' robbery and, when he is shot, his abductors show little compassion. The most violent and terrible crime is the brutal murder of Nancy by a raging Sikes who accuses her of betrayal. The

incident is charged with emotional intensity. Sikes beats his pistol on the upturned face of Nancy until she “staggered and fell; nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead” and then as she attempts to pray “he seized a heavy club and struck her down”.

Dickens mainly makes his criminals detestable. He is censorious of their behaviour, their lifestyle and seemingly their poverty. In some ways he validates prevailing 19th century attitudes regarding the lives of the poor, supporting the views that led to the Poor Law. At times the novel seems to support the belief that the population needed checking because, rather than working, people would prefer a dissolute life and claim parish relief. Dickens’ criminals are made to look horrible, as if God is displeased with them. He paints them as being deformed and wretched and their lives as squalid and miserable. They skulk “uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospect...” In creating his characters, Dickens establishes a link between their immorality and their physical repulsiveness. Fagin, for example, is reptilian and “villainous looking”.

Fagin is the chief criminal, a manipulative and intellectual kind of villain, feeding off others. He preys on children, whom he brutally trains to pick pockets. He does not care if they are caught and hanged so long as they do not “peach” on him. Although the children are given a home of sorts, they have to deliver the proceeds of their filching to him.

Sikes is a more terrible and terrifying villain, trumping Fagin’s evil; he is a violent, brutal robber, inspiring terror in most who come across him. His murder of Nancy is vicious, an act of vengeance and anger.

Monks is another villain who exhibits a festering kind of evil which works below the surface; he is manipulative and malignant. Unlike other criminals in Fagin’s camp, he is not poor. However, although he inspires some terror and mystery when he first enters the novel, he becomes little more than a plot mechanism, seeking to destroy his half- brother Oliver out of spite.

The Artful Dodger is a cunning worldly-wise thief, who sees himself as a professional man, wanting to rise in the world. The ‘dodger’, despite being drawn with some affection, is self-seeking and full of guile.

Victims

Oliver is the novel’s insipid victim and literary hero. He is a victim of the official world which first abuses him and, after his escape, he becomes a victim of Fagin’s villainy, Sikes’ cruelty and Monks’ vindictiveness. However Oliver also breaks laws: he assists Sikes, albeit unwillingly, in the house robbery because he is small and can get through windows. Even earlier, when he runs away from the workhouse, he breaks the law by being on the road with no money (the 1824 vagrancy act criminalised begging and sleeping outdoors without means of support). Yet he is no true criminal and Dickens makes his face attractive to signify his innocence.

Nancy is a law breaker in that she supports Fagin and Sikes in acts of robbery. She is also a prostitute, though her prostitution is only alluded to. However, she is also a victim, immersed into Fagin’s world from the age of five and ultimately beaten to death by her brutal lover, Sikes. Nancy’s representation in the novel as primarily being a victim is secured by her sacrificing her life to keep Oliver away from a world she cannot leave. She also breathes ‘one prayer of mercy to her Maker’ as she dies.

Settings

Dickens creates very clear place and time settings in *Oliver Twist*: the streets of 1830s London are specifically named, there is the workhouse, Fagin's den, the three Cripples and Newgate prison. These dark and dangerous settings are contrasted with the middle-class residences of Brownlow and Mrs Maylie and are an important element of the crime writing genre.

Police/law enforcers

There is a police force of sorts operating in the world of *Oliver Twist*, but Dickens does not place police constables in the foreground. The work of detection and arresting criminals is carried out by individual citizens like Brownlow (who tracks down Monks and interrogates him), and by mobs; though police assistance is in the background should it be needed. When it is thought Oliver has stolen Brownlow's handkerchief the crowd shout "Stop thief" and they hound him with "a passion for hunting". Later a dehumanised mob pursues Sikes, in a state of frenzy and fury.

Criminal trials and punishment

In *Oliver Twist*, punishment is meted out on criminals to serve Dickens' moral purpose. The apparatus of the law abounds: courts of law, magistrates and court officials, prisons and executions.

Formal trials are an important part of the framework of the novel. When Oliver is taken to the metropolitan police office for apparently stealing Brownlow's handkerchief, despite Brownlow's reluctance to press charges, Oliver is tried by the magistrate Mr Fang. He is sentenced to three months hard labour which is only retracted when a late witness arrives at the trial to say that Oliver is not the thief.

The Artful Dodger's trial for stealing a silver snuff box is a humorous farce. His punishment is transportation to Australia.

Fagin's trial contrasts with the two above in that it is utterly serious. The scene is recounted through Fagin's eyes and suspense is created when the jury return their verdict: "The jury returned, and passed him close. He could glean nothing from their faces; they might as well have been of stone. Perfect stillness ensued – not a rustle – not a breath – Guilty."

To Sikes, Dickens administers a different justice. After Sikes kills Nancy he is fearful of the consequences. He is terrified by shadows "but these fears were nothing compared to the sense of that morning's ghastly figure following him at his heels". It seems here that Sikes' conscience is at work. In no way can murderers escape, or justice be evaded; in *Oliver Twist* providence is not asleep. Sikes is terrified by his guilt and, like Macbeth, is transfigured by the act of murder. He tries to escape but cannot, and after being pursued by the crowd onto a house roof he accidentally hangs himself.

Monks' punishment is less severe. After his capture he is given a second chance by Oliver's generosity and allowed to leave England, though in America he reverts to crime and dies in prison.

For Fagin, Dickens reserves the harshest form of institutionalised punishment: Newgate prison and then hanging. When Fagin is condemned to the gallows he screams in terror as the crowd gather. He does not repent.

Moral purpose

In *Oliver Twist*, ultimately the good prosper and the evil are punished. In this example of crime writing there is a moral outcome. Oliver discovers he has noble origins and his being adopted by the kindly Mr Brownlow is his reward for his inner goodness.

Non-exam assessment (NEA): Theory and independence

Non-exam assessment advice sheet

Re-creative tasks

- The re-creative response allows students to explore aspects of their text and its potential meanings.
- It gives students enjoyment in the creative aspects of their task.
- It offers a critical reading of the base text that has been informed by working with the Critical anthology.
- It finds the 'narrative gaps' or 'absence' in the base text and by filling some of these gaps students offer a critical reading of the text.
- New light can be shed on the text and its potential ambiguities by re-creating part of it through a new voice and genre.
- A new light can be shed on a conventional reading of a text by offering a reading from a different critical and/ or contextual starting point.
- There is no requirement for students to replicate the form and language of the chosen base text but the selection of voice matters.
- It is often more interesting and enlightening to present the point of view of a character who is at times marginalised as a voice in the base text.
- Together with the commentary, it must allow for all the AOs to be addressed.
- It offers opportunities for energy and individuality.
- It is important to see that this is not a soft option and that there is a demand for intellectual rigour.
- The task is likely to foreground characters – and characters will need to be deconstructed in the commentary (ie shown to be constructed and not real).
- Poetry can be used as well as the prose text.
- It offers an opportunity to find and explore unheard voices of minor or absent characters.
- It offers a chance to 'echo' the original while creating something distinctively new.
- It offers a chance to create new scenes that are hinted at in the base text but not explored there.
- It should illustrate a reading of the base text that can be justified by reference to the original – it will show that a debate is going on – implicitly or explicitly.
- A range of genres can be chosen, for example: editorials, letters, journals, monologues, obituaries, etc.
- Some students might want to submit prequels or sequels.
- Importantly the re-creative piece should illustrate a reading of the text – it is not 'original creative writing'.
- The re-creative piece is not the same as parody or pastiche.
- Neither is it just a retelling of the story – (there are perils in taking a narrative approach).
- It may not suit all students, but it will offer a different experience of literature for all students across the ability range.
- It might be a good teaching strategy to let all students have a go at producing a piece of re-creative writing during their course even though some will not choose to develop it or submit re-creative work for their NEA.

The student's commentary

- The re-creative piece must be accompanied by a commentary.
- Most students will offer a commentary which is at least as long as the re-creative piece.
- The commentary needs to connect the re-creative piece with the base text.
- It must explain the significant choices made in the creation of the base text.
- It will illuminate the choices that have been made.
- It will offer textual support for the choices that have been made.
- It will refer explicitly to the Critical anthology.
- It will debate or refer to other readings.
- It will draw attention to contexts (AO3).
- It will consider the significance of the re-creative process in terms of AO5.
- It will explain and justify the perspective chosen.
- The commentary will ensure that the AOs are all addressed to support the re-creative piece.
- The commentary will establish a clear connection between the re-creative piece, the base text and the relevant section(s) of the Critical anthology.
- The commentary should illustrate the significant choices that have been made in the production of the re-creative piece and explain how those choices led to a critical reading.

An example

A re-creative task drawing from the sections on feminist theory and/or Marxist theory might be:

Write a series of journal entries by Miss Kenton written at different points in the narrative of *The Remains of the Day* in which she reflects on her treatment by Stevens and others at Darlington Hall.

Use ideas from the Critical anthology to inform your work and include a commentary explaining how you have explored ideas from feminist and/or Marxist theory in your re-creative piece.

Conventional tasks

- Tasks need to focus on an aspect or aspects of the Critical anthology.
- Conventional tasks will focus on debate and enable students to explore potential meanings in a prose or poetry text using critical theories and ideas.
- Tasks need to ensure that the AOs are addressed.
- They need to offer a genuine opportunity for debate.
- They need to facilitate an independent response.
- Relevant contexts will be those set up in the tasks or made part of the student's argument.
- The conventional task does not need a commentary.

Example

A conventional task drawing on the post colonial section of the Critical anthology might be:

Forster has written *A Passage to India* in such a way that it is impossible to sympathise with any of the English characters as there is so little to redeem them.

Using ideas from the Critical anthology to inform your argument, to what extent do you agree with this view?

Non-exam assessment re-creative task: exemplar student response B

A re-creative task drawing from the sections on feminist theory and/or Marxist theory and/or narrative theory and/or post-colonial theory might be:

Using Tennyson's '*Ulysses*', write a monologue by Ulysses' wife in which she reflects on the words he speaks.

Use ideas from the Critical anthology to inform your work and include a commentary explaining how you have explored ideas from feminist theory and/ or Marxist theory and/ or narrative theory and /or post-colonial theory in your re-creative piece.

The aged wife's story

I have been patient before and I must be patient again but my heart is breaking.

I hurt so much... to mean so little. I know I am old and long gone is my beauty but to mean so little, to be dismissed so easily. Am I no neamore than 'an aged wife'?

But I must be patient. I must not think of my own pain. In all the years, I have not dwelt on that. And now again, I have to think of him.

He is lost. His mind is adrift, floundering on the high seas he speaks of – or on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

He did not know I was here; did not know I could hear him speaking to himself. To him I am invisible, but I watched him and I heard. Perhaps it was just a rehearsal, a preparation for a ceremonious farewell – his final speech. Perhaps he has not lost his mind. Perhaps I am mistaken. But no... He believed he had an audience, he believed he was leaving today. He said his farewells and there was no one there.

It was pitiful. He stood alone – an old man, my husband, king of Ithaca and all those empty rhetorical flourishes – 'I am become a name; for always roaming with a hungry heart'. It pains me to remember what he said: 'Life piled on life were all too little' and 'this gray spirit yearning in desire'. He explained why he must leave, relived his past glories for what he felt were his captured listeners.

– But there was no-one there.

I am so unhappy. I know he is no longer in his right mind. He seemed to think that there were people listening to him, sympathising. But who were these people he had invented? Who would think it right to dismiss your wife and your countrymen. He hates his subjects, no more to him than a 'savage race', hates them because they do not 'know' him, do not understand what he was. I think he hates himself too. He knows he has failed as a king. He has no respect for his governance in the here and now... no place in the here and now.

Only when his memory took him away from 'this still hearth' did he come alive. He wants to be what he once was – a young man full of vigour, daring life with his comrades. He clearly loved those with whom he suffered greatly, enjoyed greatly. There was no mention of me. There he

stood, telling the empty house of his love of adventure, of his experiences across the globe, of the honour he received. My heart weeps for him. He spoke of his life now as dull, a life rusting unburnished. And what he wants is still to be drinking the delights of battle with his fellow men, reliving Troy.

It was all so painful to hear. He knows that despite his imaginings the eternal silence is so very near. It was desperate – the desire to experience more of the gleaming untravelled world, to seek knowledge beyond human thought. Oh I know the words sounded admirable, noble even, but there was no-one listening. There was only himself, an old man – and me behind the door.

And it didn't stop there. Next he imagined Telemachus our son had entered the scene. And then such an elaborate deposition; he bequeathed to our son the sceptre and the isle. Did he expect his audience to applaud? Did he think he sounded sincere when he claimed that his son is well loved, sensitive and capable? He did not fool me. He has always felt contempt for Telemachus's tenderness. How feeble his words of praise sounded: Telemachus, so 'discerning', so ready to 'subdue' the people 'to the useful and the good'. In the end I don't think he could pretend any further, not even to himself: 'He works his work, I mine'. His interest was again on himself and the dream moved on.

And now for the last scene of all. He saw himself standing near the port – and all the while still by our hearth. He seemed to be in a reverie, seeing the vessel puff her sails, energised by the sight of his mariners. It was pitiful to hear him address them – 'You and I are old; Old age hath yet his honour and his toil', urging them forward, 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world'.

But where has he gone to now? Why did I not speak to him? Why could he not have asked me to go with him to touch the Happy Isles?

I am no one. Just an aged wife. He wants to die and I cannot help him.

Just an aged wife.

Student commentary*

Having read a selection of Tennyson's poems in which narrative gaps occur – '*Mariana*' and the uncertainty of the narrative outcome, '*The Lady of Shalott*' and how she becomes encased in the tower, '*The Lotos Eaters and Choric Song*' and whether the mariners stay on the island intoxicated by the lotos plant or return home and '*Godiva*' and how the grim earl responds to her heroic naked ride through the streets of Coventry - I decided to look at the gaps in '*Ulysses*' and recentre the story from Ulysses' wife's point of view. I also applied the view of Machery quoted by Peck and Coyle in the AQA Critical anthology that the reader sees what the text is hiding from itself. The most common interpretation of the poem is that it is a celebration of those who want always to seek newer worlds and sail beyond the sunset, but this might just be Tennyson representing on a surface level the ideological code of his Victorian age – a code which promoted the adventuring pioneering spirit of men.

Ulysses' story is riddled with gaps and ambiguities. In '*Ulysses*' the key gaps are what does Penelope think, who is he addressing and what happens at the end. Abbot suggests that narratives gain in dynamism through the limitations of information given to us and this is certainly true of Ulysses' story. In my recreative response I sought to keep some of those ambiguities alive by suggesting that Ulysses could be mad, speaking to himself throughout his monologue or that his

wife is a mis-reader of her husband. Perhaps, as he says of the savage rage, she also does not know him.

In my reading I also wanted to create a voice that could draw attention to the unreliability of Ulysses' first person narration though in doing this I have also drawn attention to his wife's potential unreliability. Lodge says though, that first person narrators cannot be totally unreliable (If everything he... says is palpably false, that only tells us what we know already, namely that [the story] is a work of fiction'). In choosing Penelope as the voice which commentates on Ulysses judgements, I wanted to draw attention to the 'possibility of discriminating between truth and falsehood within the imagined world' of the text. Ulysses, as an unreliable narrator, reveals the gap between appearance and reality. How he wants to be seen is not how he is seen by his wife and perhaps how Tennyson wants him to be seen is not how he is seen by readers. I have created Penelope as an emotional figure, but she has a clear view of her husband. I have made her seem grounded.

In writing a monologue from Penelope's point of view, I also wanted to offer a specific reading of the poem, one which is from a feminist perspective and gives the silent woman a voice. Although there is no reference in the poem to Penelope's back story (her waiting for him for over twenty years in Homer's text) I have alluded to this in her monologue. What we hear in Tennyson's monologue is Ulysses' voice (the male gaze) and the words Ulysses speaks reflect the phallogocentric nature of civilisation. The aged wife is cursorily dismissed at the start of the poem and Ulysses then glorifies the actions of men. However, in my monologue, a revision takes place. Penelope rewrites the story, drawing attention to the fantasy world that her husband inhabits. Ulysses is not so much a hero but an old man who is losing his mind. He addresses not a large sympathetic male audience but the air. In reading the text in this way, I answer one of the ambiguities set up in the text about who Ulysses is actually addressing in his monologue. While some commentators suggest that there are three audiences, I suggest that there is only one: Ulysses himself. He rehearses the words he would like to speak to his son and to his mariners but the words are in his head.

Much critical debate has also centred on Ulysses' spirit, his being a role model for old people on how to conduct themselves in their twilight years. Sterne refers to Ulysses' Churchillian spirit – presumably thinking of his call to his mariners to brace themselves with 'One equal temper of heroic hearts ... strong in will/ To strive to seek, to find, and not to yield'. The fact that these words come at the end of the poem sharpen their impact.

The reading I am favouring here is of Ulysses as an old man, perhaps like Lear on the verge of dementia, who cannot cope with growing old and therefore resorts to fantasy, finding solace and meaning only in reliving his heroic past. However, I keep alive the ambiguity by suggesting that Penelope might be mistaken in her judgement and that Ulysses has in fact now left the island with his sailors.

Bibliography

AQA poetry anthology
AQA critical anthology
J B Sterne *Tennyson*

*See Appendix B for moderator commentary to this response.

Non-exam assessment conventional task: exemplar student response C

A conventional task drawing on the feminist/ Marxist sections might be:

'*A Clockwork Orange* is a protest novel about the powerlessness of human beings against ruthless autocratic governments.'

Using ideas from the Critical anthology to inform your argument, to what extent do you agree with this view?

Student response*

At first glance there seems little to debate about this view. It is certainly true that *A Clockwork Orange* directly attacks totalitarian governments. When Alex is subjected to the Ludovico Technique, which removes his freewill, Burgess makes it clear that such a treatment is wrong no matter how heinous Alex's crimes. But the focus in the given view is on 'human beings' and it is not easy to see how the novel protests against the powerlessness of *women* either at the hands of a ruthless state or at the hands of male characters –ruthless or otherwise. In fact it seems the novel endorses the powerlessness of women given that they are largely invisible, silent or just types.

Burgess wrote his dystopian novel in 1961 and although it is set in his future – or near future – it very much reflects political ideas, cultural changes and attitudes of his own time (the rise in youth violence, the growing interest in psychological experimentation and aversion therapy, and state control in the Soviet Union). His autobiography (*You've Had Your Time*) makes it clear that he was condemning totalitarian regimes, warning what can happen to any Western society and showing that trust should not be placed in the state. It is easy to read *A Clockwork Orange* as a Marxist text because it shows how the working classes are commodified by the system. Although the world of *A Clockwork Orange* is closer to a communist than a capitalist one, the treatment of workers here is the same as in Dickens's *Hard Times*. There is a law 'for everybody not a child nor with child nor ill to go out rabbiting'. Alex's mother and father are examples of the exploited class; she fills up shelves in a Statemart; he 'rabbits' in the dyeworks. Both parents illustrate Marxist ideas of alienation and victimisation. Importantly, Alex, the novel's protagonist, rebels against the prevailing system suggesting that Burgess welcomes the undermining of repressive regimes. However it could also be argued that although Alex thinks he is a rebel who plays the system, he is as much a pawn of the state as his parents. He only thinks he has choices. 'What's it going to be then, eh?' opens all three sections and seems to signal the different choices Alex as an agent of freewill can make. But if Bertens ideas are applied, then the choices that Alex thinks he has are still actually determined by the social economic structure of his world. At the start of the novel, as Alex delivers his own account, it seems that he has choices open to him. During one night he and his droogs choose to attack a schoolmaster, rob and beat up a shopkeeper and his wife, brawl with a rival gang, using knives, razors and chains, steal a car, break into a cottage owned by a writer, destroy his book and gang rape his wife. But in real terms Alex's choices are limited. In him, Burgess creates an unreliable narrator. Seduced by his own arrogance and the naive optimism of his youth, he thinks he can make endless choices. But, he cannot choose to be a government minister or a scientist or go to the opera nor do any of the things that the privileged classes can do. He sees himself as a rebel with some power over authority, but in a sense his crimes are sanctioned by the

state (it turns a blind eye to drug taking and seemingly tolerates the violence on the street). Although the police are irritated by Alex's behaviour and he is eventually imprisoned, Burgess does not show the government itself as feeling threatened by the delinquency of young people. Indeed part of the reason for the introduction of the Ludovico Technique is not so much to reclaim the streets for ordinary people but to clear the prisons of thugs like Alex to make room for political prisoners.

However, the use of aversion therapy as a form of control must not be overlooked as a terrible abuse of state power. Burgess was clearly appalled at the choice the state could make in using science to control behaviour. The prison chaplain becomes the author's mouthpiece when he asks 'Does God want woodness or the choice of goodness?' As a Catholic, Burgess comes down firmly on the side of choice. Although many readers, particularly those in the 1970s who saw the novel as an incitement to violence, will argue that such a punishment is more than just given Alex's crimes – he is a rapist, a child abuser and a murderer, Burgess is in no doubt that an intervention which kills the soul, is morally wrong. As the chaplain says: placing Alex 'beyond the reach of prayer', is a 'terrible, terrible thing to consider'. Significantly, though, Burgess does not suggest a viable alternative solution to the problems of street crime.

What he does propose is that behaving in an antisocial way is simply a rite of passage and that eventually young criminals grow up. Many commentators have lambasted Burgess for his conclusion suggesting that it is a cop out. Although some criminals might reform, many do not. Even in the novel there are older male criminals in the Staja. However, there is another point to consider here. Burgess offers the final chapter as a kind of victory for Alex. Alex is 'cured' and then chooses of his own freewill – and because of his biological calling – to 'grow up'. But Alex's growing up and conforming is problematic from a Marxist viewpoint. He chooses roles that are socially constructed for him and so the state continues happily unchallenged. Perhaps, in seeking solutions, Burgess is as much trapped by the economic world as his characters. Alex loses interest in criminality because he wants to keep all his earned pretty polly for himself, 'to like hoard it all up for some reason'. By becoming a capitalist of sorts, the state is more firmly in control. So while Burgess seems to be supporting the rights of the individual, in the end he affirms state control.

But there are more disturbing issues regarding women. The dominant voices in the story are males and the story is about males. There is also an assumption that the readers of the novel are male (Alex refers to the readers as his 'brothers') reflecting the male centred nature of civilisation. While it must be remembered that this is Alex's vision and not Burgess's, the author must carry responsibility for the world he creates. As an inspiration for the novel, Burgess says he used the growing dissent of British teddy-boys, mods and rockers but it is only *male* teenagers that he represents even though there were females in those cultural groups. All the major roles in the novel are masculine. Alex narrates, he and his droogs commit crimes, he is the victim of brainwashing, he is the battleground for conflicting political interests, Brodsky is the scientist, Brannon the doctor and all involved in politics are male. Perhaps, though, Burgess can be forgiven for the attitudes that are posited. Marxist criticism itself largely focuses on males. In Marx's 'Foreword' in his 1859 *Towards a Critique of Political Economy* (cited by Bertens in the AQA anthology) 'It is not the consciousness of *men* [my italics] that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'. Marx gives no sense that females might have a consciousness or an existence and indeed in *A Clockwork Orange*, there are no young women who are part of the gang culture, no women who challenge authority. Female struggles are not reflected in the novel. Perhaps Burgess's representations of women just repeat cultural stereotypes.

Referencing Millet, Bertens suggests that in much literature women are largely presented in terms of their sexuality and that the relationship between sex and power mirrors the larger society. Certainly in *A Clockwork Orange* women are predominantly seen for their sexual purposes. Even the nurse who is part of Alex's recovery has a sexualised role. At the start of the novel, the droogs decide not to rape Slouse's wife because they are not yet ready for that; the night is too young, though gang rape is what they do later and with impunity. F Alexander's wife is subjected to a terrible ordeal and although some readers overlook the incident because the account of it is comicalised by Alex and softened by nadsat, it is still rape and rape is not funny. When Alex and his gang come across Billy Boy and his droogs, Alex says the rival gang were 'just getting ready to perform something on a weepy young devotchka ... not more than ten'. Later Alex himself persuades two young ten year old ptitsas to go home with him where he rapes them to the joys of Beethoven's Ninth. Readers today, in the wake of high profile reports on the abuse of young children will surely find such moments unpalatable, but there is little disquiet expressed by anyone in the novel. Interestingly in Kubrick's film the girls are much older suggesting that he knew there was a boundary which he couldn't cross.

F Alexander's wife is clearly a victim of Alex's sexual brutality and depravity, yet her role as victim goes further. Although her death sends her husband 'bezoomny', and he claims he misses his 'dear dear girl', it is her role as wife that he misses most. When Alex revisits him after his treatment, he says that his house is untidy because his wife used to do all the 'domestic chores' – what Bertens termed as an 'angel of the house'.

The cat woman is another victim and different kind of cultural stereotype. She is a victim in that Alex breaks into her house and murders her, but she also fulfils the role of 'dissatisfied shrew'. In defending herself she is not presented sympathetically or heroically. She is presented as humorously aggressive: 'Keep your distance, you villainous young toad, or I shall be forced to strike you'. Alex calls her a 'stinking starry old sharp' and the fight between them is like a musical farce with her panicking cats providing a chorus.

At the end of the novel women are represented as wives and baby makers. In chapter twenty when Alex is afforded full redemption, he itches to get married, have dinners provided and reproduce. As he imagines his future, Alex thinks of the son (not daughter) he will have. The American publishers W. W. Norton were disinclined to publish the novel unless the final chapter was dropped. However this was not because of the slight on women. The American audience had at that time an appetite for negativity (so wanted Alex to continue in all his vicious glory). Burgess, however, wanted optimism and focused on Alex's 'moral progress' – a progress of course that saw the main function of women as more providers of sons. Some optimism!

For the most part, then, women have little significance in the novel. Even the language disenfranchises women. Burgess' creation of nadsat is interesting and makes Alex an engaging narrator, but significantly the words for young males (malchick, chelloveck) are more energised than the words for young females which smack of sexualisation (ptitsa, devochka).

This is a political novel in a wide sense, incorporating important philosophical ideas, but women's voices are not heard. Alex's mother says little more than the boohooing girls that he rapes. Given that Burgess's own wife was the subject of mindless violence when she was robbed and beaten by three GI deserters, it is hard to see why women do not have louder voices in this novel. Unless, of course, the novel's intention is simply to endorse the cultural domination of males.

Bibliography

A Clockwork Orange – Anthony Burgess (Penguin) with an introduction by Blake Morrison
You've Had Your Time – Anthony Burgess (Heinemann) (1990)
AQA Critical anthology

*See Appendix C for moderator commentary to this response.

Co-teaching opportunities

Co-teaching: a possible route through AS and A-level

AS and A-level English Literature B

This suggested programme of study assumes that **all** students will sit the AS examination at the end of Year One.

It is written in the knowledge that a range of different factors, for example timetabling structures, may affect a teacher's ability to follow this programme without some adaptation. For example, if two teachers are sharing one class, each teacher will take a half-term's text focus and spread that over a whole term (in the Autumn term, Teacher One would take introduction to genre and Shakespeare study and Teacher Two the other drama set text and mock exam practice).

Year One (Co-teaching AS and A-level)			
Timeline	Text focus	Skills Focus	Notes
Autumn Term 1	Single poem from poetry anthology	Introduction to tragedy or comedy	Use ' <i>The Death of Cuchulain</i> ' from the Tragedy anthology or ' <i>Not my Best Side</i> ' from the Comedy anthology as an introduction to the genre. The poems offer different aspects of the genre (see specification pages 18-19) but teaching absence of or subversion of aspects is equally interesting and valid.
	Shakespeare set text	Drama study Response to passage-based drama essay writing skills (AS Paper 1, Section A and A-level Paper 1, Section A)	The chosen Shakespeare text should be studied in its entirety as students are required to refer to the text as a whole in the examination. A range of passages should be studied as the passage set for examination is not predictable.
Autumn Term 2	Drama set text Mock exam practice (optional)	Drama study Response to single drama text essay writing skills (AS Paper 1, Section B)	To satisfy the A-level requirements, the drama text must be taken from the A-level set text list for connection at A-level with a poetry or prose text (Paper 1, Section C). Either the drama text or one of the poetry or prose texts must have been written pre-1900.

Optional Mock exam in Week 1, Spring Term 1: AS Paper 1			
Spring Term 1	Poetry set text	Poetry study Response to poetry essay writing skills (AS Paper 2, Section A)	All poems in the chosen poetry collection should be studied as the poem set for examination is not predictable. Either the poetry or the prose text must come from the A-level set text list (for connection at A- level with the drama text: Paper 1, Section C).
Spring Term 2	Prose set text	Prose study Response to single prose text essay writing skills (AS Paper 2, Section B)	If either the poetry or prose text is taken from the texts appearing on the AS text list only, this text may be used in the NEA at A-level. (<i>Hardy selected poems</i> OR <i>Remains of the Day</i> for Tragedy/ <i>Betjeman selected poems</i> OR <i>Wise Children</i> for comedy)
Summer Term 1	Revision of: Shakespeare text Drama set text Poetry set text Prose set text	Revision of exam writing skills: Response to passage-based Shakespeare Response to single drama text Response to poetry Response to single prose text	
AS exams			
Paper 1: Literary genres: aspects of tragedy OR aspects of comedy (drama)			
Paper 2: Literary genres: aspects of tragedy OR aspects of comedy (prose and poetry)			
Summer Term 2	A-level study begins – see Year Two below		

Year One (A-level)			
Timeline	Text focus	Skills Focus	Notes
Summer Term 2	Shakespeare	Drama study Response to whole play essay writing skills (A-level Paper 1, Section B)	Students will have already studied their chosen Shakespeare text and how to respond to a passage-based question at AS. At A-level, students also need to learn to offer a conventional essay response to a given view on the same play.
	NEA Text 1 Critical anthology	Study of chosen genre for NEA Study of critical theory	Preparation for NEA will differ dependent upon whether: one text is taught to the whole class and the second is independently chosen; both texts are independently chosen by the student; students have already studied an AS only text (<i>Hardy selected poems/Remains of the Day/Betjeman selected poems/Wise Children</i>) at AS and are using this for NEA. The Critical anthology offers students different ways of reading their texts; as such, it may be introduced earlier in the course even though explicit reference to the critical views therein is only required in NEA. To ensure independence, students should be exposed to different sections of the Critical anthology, from which they can choose critical views to apply.
Summer Holidays	NEA Text 2	Independent study	One of the two texts studied must be a poetry text and the other must be a prose text.

Year Two (A-level)			
Autumn Term 1	NEA Texts 1 and 2 and Critical anthology	Extended essay writing skills Application and evaluation of critical views	See pages 24-25 of the specification for guidance.
Autumn Term 2	Unseen text Set text 1	Response to unseen extract essay skills (A-level Paper 2, Section A)	Choose range of engaging extracts from the chosen genre of study, which cover different elements of the genre as an introduction to it. Extracts from any of the relevant set texts offer a good starting point as the examination extract can come from any of poetry, prose or drama. (See specification pages 21-23 for possible elements and set texts).
Spring Term 1	Set text 2	Connective essay writing skills (A-level Paper 2, Section C and Paper 1, Section C)	
Optional Mock exam end Spring Term 1/beginning Spring Term 2: Paper 2, Sections A and C			
Spring Term 2	Set text 3	Response to single text essay writing skills (A-level Paper 2, Section B)	Across Sections B and C of Paper 2, students need to study one post-2000 prose text, one poetry and one other text, at least one of which MUST have been written pre-1900.
Summer Term 1	Revision Paper 1: Shakespeare	Revision of exam writing skills Paper 1: Response to passage-based drama Conventional essay response to given view	Shakespeare preparation for passage-based will need to reflect the increased demand in assessment between AS and A-level.

	Set texts	Connective response to drama and poetry/prose texts	Preparation for Paper 1, Section C should reflect that the drama and poetry/prose texts were used for different assessments at AS. If both poetry and prose texts studied at AS come from the A-level list, both could be revised for connection with the drama text to give students choice in the A-level examination.
	Paper 2: Unseen extract	Response to unseen extract	Students should be prepared for making choices in the examination. Their combination of texts will inform which pair would best answer the chosen connective question in Section C and therefore which single text will be used in Section B.
	Set texts	Response to single text and connective response	
A-level exams Paper 1: Literary genres: aspects of tragedy OR aspects of comedy Paper 2: Texts and genres: elements of crime writing OR elements of political and social protest writing			

Appendices

Appendix A

Aspects of tragedy: exemplar student response A

Examiner commentary

This is a very confident and accomplished response, and although the ideas are a bit over packed at times and the argument a little overdone, the student writes in an assured way.

AO1: The response is well structured and the task is always in the student's mind. The student argues perceptively with a strong and assured personal voice. There is a confident use of literary critical concepts and terminology and the written expression is very secure. Quotation is neatly woven into the argument.

AO2: There is perceptive understanding that Shakespeare has constructed this drama to shape meanings. Comment here is often implicit, but there is valid discussion of the structure of the play in relation to the task and on language choices.

AO3: Contextual understanding is clear with a sharp focus on military and gender contexts. These are well linked to the tragic genre.

AO4: As the student fully engages with the task and valour and virtue, there is perceptive exploration of the tragic genre thereby implicitly establishing connections across literary texts.

AO5: There is perceptive and confident engagement with the debate here and the student clearly knows the text well and selects appropriate material for the argument. The student is really thinking about the task and offers some complexity in the answer, well aware of the ambiguities that the play and task set up.

This response seems consistent with the Band 5 descriptors.

Appendix B

Non-exam assessment re-creative task: exemplar student response B

Moderator commentary

This is an interesting re-creative piece and there are a number of skills shown in this response. The voice is convincing and the piece is clearly anchored in the text. The commentary establishes effective connections with both the Critical anthology and the base text which is not an easy task. The student makes it clear that other Tennyson poems have been read and that a clear choice has been made for this piece. The comments on the other poems show that there is clear understanding of how Tennyson uses narrative gaps in the telling of his stories. Perhaps at times points could have been a little more sharply made, but this is still an impressive piece.

AO1: This is a perceptive response and in both the re-creative piece and the commentary there is some sophisticated writing. There is an assured use of critical concepts in the commentary.

AO2: There is very good understanding of how monologues work – demonstrated in both the re-creative piece and the commentary. There is also an assured understanding of voice and structure. Comments on Tennyson’s language are well integrated.

AO3: The sense of literary and cultural contexts is admirable. There is valid commenting on gender issues and on Tennyson’s own time period. These contexts are integrated into the overarching argument put forward in the commentary.

AO4: Connections across texts are well made here with close links between Tennyson’s poem and ideas from the Critical anthology on feminist and narrative theory.

AO5: There is perception and confidence in the argument here and the re-creative piece is clearly a part of the debate. Different interpretations are evident and the student has taken an unusual but plausible angle on how to assess Ulysses.

This seems to be comfortably operating in Band 5.

Appendix C

Non-exam assessment conventional task: exemplar student response C

Moderator commentary

This is an interesting and engaged essay with a confident personal voice. The student is insightful and takes an individual approach. The task is central to the argument and there is very secure engagement with sections of Marxist and feminist ideas from the Critical anthology. A slight weakness in the response is that its structure is a little insecure. Perhaps if the student had restricted focus to Marxist or feminist ideas, more cohesion could have been achieved. The essay could also have benefited from closer textual detail and more precise references, but perhaps the student was mindful of the need to keep the word count down. There is no doubt that the student knows the text well and ranges around it with confidence. This is a very good response.

AO1: The essay is perceptive and assured. The argument is ambitious in its attempt to marry Marxist and feminist readings, and even though it is a little uneven, there is much to credit. The student's expression is mature and there is a confident use of literary critical concepts.

AO2: The student weaves relevant comment about Burgess's methods into the argument. There is very good focus on voice and structure and some relevant language comment. At all times the student shows how the methods help to shape meanings.

AO3: There is excellent integration of comments on a range of contexts. All comments are made relevant to the argument. The student has a clear handle on cultural, gender and political contexts and there are some judicious comments on biographical and historical contexts. Marxist and feminist theories are centrally connected to the discussion of contexts.

AO4: There is perceptive exploration of critical texts here and ideas are clearly connected to the student's reading of *A Clockwork Orange*. Critical ideas are applied with some confidence.

AO5: This is a real strength of the answer. The argument is assured and it incorporates a number of different readings, including readings over time.

This response seems to sit comfortably in Band 5.

Notes

Notes

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