

Aspects of comedy: specimen question commentary for AS Paper 1, Section B

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, and there are some suggestions of how the task might be approached. Section B questions in Paper 1 are similar in construction to the prose questions on Paper 2. Here though the examination is closed book so students will be dependent on their memories for selecting relevant material.

Paper 1B, Section B

The questions in Section B will focus on a critical viewpoint or the significance of an aspect of comedy in the non-Shakespeare play studied. Students should spend about 45 minutes on this question. There will be one question on each of the three plays offered in Section B for AS. Students will be asked to explore either a given view or the significance of an aspect of the play. They will be reminded to include relevant comment on the playwright's dramatic methods. In their response, 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 and question.

Sample Question

Explore the view that, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, barmaids are not simply figures of fun, they are positively celebrated.

Remember to include in your answer relevant comment on Goldsmith's dramatic methods.

How the question addresses 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 Paper 2, Section B questions, though here students are asked to make relevant comment for A02 as opposed to relevant analysis of the prose writer's authorial methods which is the requirement for Paper 2; this is to reflect the differences in demand for closed and open book exams. It is important that students engage with 'dramatic methods' here showing that they know they are writing about a play. A03 will be addressed through the students writing about the dramatic context, given that the disguised Kate pretends to be a barmaid, a point which heightens the play's comedy, and through students writing about

gender and social contexts since barmaids are clearly female with all kinds of cultural associations around them (in this play they are also representatives of the lower social classes). It would also be relevant for students to refer to the eighteenth century context in which Goldsmith wrote the play (in relation to the question of barmaids being celebrated or simply figures of fun) and to write about how the play has been received. AO4 will be targeted when students engage with the wider generic aspect of fun and celebration and AO5 will be hit when the students engage with the argument about whether barmaids are not simply figures of fun but are positively celebrated in Goldsmith's play. AO1 will be tested through the way students construct their arguments and the way they express their ideas.

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 *She Stoops to Conquer* through the lens of dramatic comedy, they will be able to identify many ideas themselves. It is likely that students who agree with the proposition will focus on the joy audiences receive at watching Kate performing the role of barmaid to trick Marlow and to bring out his confidence. They might focus on the way that Kate has fun herself at the expense of the sophisticated Marlow, how they engage in sexual banter and how their word play and obvious flirtations set the pathway for a romantic ending. There might also be comment on Tony's adoration of Bet Bouncer (if she is a barmaid at The Three Jolly Pigeons) and how she is preferred above the wealthy and cultured Miss Neville. Students might show how Tony elevates her in his speeches and in the play's epilogue. If students disagree with the given view, then the focus might be on Kate's not being a barmaid in fact but just pretending to be one to release the personality of Marlow. Some students might also argue that if Bet Bouncer is a barmaid then she is hardly celebrated given that she does not have a speaking role in the play. It might also be argued that no particular social group or any gender are figures of fun and neither are any of them celebrated because this is a 'laughing comedy' in which men and women, the sophisticated and the ignorant, the towns folk and the country people are all ridiculed.

Students might focus on the settings of the drama in which barmaids appear. Kate serves ale in what Marlow and Hastings believe is an inn (the 'old Buck's Head' on the hill) and the placing of the various barmaid scenes in the drama have structural significance often changing the mood or heightening the comedy. There might also be comment on the exits and entrances of Kate (and perhaps Bet Bouncer) as a barmaid. In focusing on barmaids, students will be able to comment on the use Goldsmith makes of language techniques to represent the lower social classes and the drinking fraternity. In terms of relevant contexts, students might well focus on gender issues and the way that barmaids are seen as the playthings of gentlemen – perhaps reflecting 18th century attitudes. There might also be comment on the way that barmaids represent honesty and freedom and do not fill Marlow with terror in the way that sophisticated women

do. In writing about barmaids, much could be said about the nature of dramatic comedy and how it draws attention to its own artifice – here specifically through the way that Kate, a character in a play, takes on the role of a barmaid for comedic purposes. As the students write about comedy itself and whether barmaids are figures of fun or are celebrated, students will connect with other comedic texts in which drinking scenes play a part and also those in which humour is generated through the depiction of the lower social classes. There might also be discussion of the marriages at the end and the possible sense of harmony – all of which are set up in some way through Goldsmith's use of barmaids to resolve issues (Tony's interest in Bet Bouncer leaves the way clear for Miss Neville to further her romance with Hastings and Kate's disguise as a barmaid enables Marlow to reveal his confidence and to be open to her charms).

Students will also have to understand how to effectively respond in the closed book exam. To do this they will need to have been specifically taught how to do so. They need to know their texts very well so that they can closely refer to different parts of the play and to have learned quotations which they can relevantly use here. When students refer closely to the play or use quotations they will have ample opportunity to comment on Goldsmith's dramatic methods. Students need to embed comments on method into their arguments. Relevant discussion might be on the play's structure, its title, the use of patterning, the voices which deliver the prologue and epilogue, the contrasts of speech patterns and language, and the use of dramatic irony.