



GCSE

ENGLISH LITERATURE

8702/1M Modern prose/drama

Report on the Examination

8702

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Introduction

Given that this was the first full examination series after the lengthy break because of the pandemic, it has been both remarkable and extremely pleasing to see the standard of work produced by students, which was clear evidence of their teachers' efforts in preparing them and of the students' own hard work. Many examiners have also commented on the clear sense of engagement that students had with their texts.

The aim of this report is to provide feedback on the 2022 exam for teachers, and will:

- offer an overview of some reflections that arose from the experience of marking the paper this year
- discuss some key points from some of the more popular texts
- aim to clarify how the assessment objectives relate to approaches to the examination
- offer some suggestions that might be useful for students to consider.

General Overview

Students overwhelmingly managed their time well, and very few indeed seemed to have been unable to finish their response in the allotted time. It was notable that there seemed to be more evidence of planning this year, and effective planning at that. There were far fewer of the generic PEE / PETAL-types of plan, and many more which were determined not by any preconceived stratagem but by an organic response to the questions. Such planning is a clear sign from the start of a student's engagement with the task and a willingness to think and write independently.

Conversely, some students who potentially might have worked at a higher level were rather limited and constrained by overly formulaic scaffolding approaches. While there may be some virtue in such methods for students looking to move into level 3, for those aiming higher, such rigid structures can almost prevent their fulfilling their potential, as these approaches tend to militate against the extended development of ideas which is necessary for access to the higher reaches of the mark scheme.

There was also a marked improvement in students' ability to sustain their focus on the question which led to very effective use of references for AO1. Moreover there was a clear development towards treating AO1 references as a broad category, not just quotations (either exactly or otherwise recalled), but also allusions to specific moments or passages from the text. Weaker responses tended to have long passages of simple narrative, whereas stronger answers looked at the significance of selected references and explained why they had been chosen in the light of the demands of the question. Given the closed book nature of this paper, students' grasp of their texts was hugely impressive. We do not require exactly recalled, rote-learned quotations for success on this paper; we are looking to see and reward students' knowledge and responses to the texts.

The Texts

In general, there seemed to be less variety in the selection of texts this year. The vast majority of responses were on *An Inspector Calls*, and the 'inequality leading to tragedy' question was by far the more popular. Many students chose to approach this question through Priestley's characterisation of Mr and Mrs Birling, with Sheila and Eric seen as their (to some extent) foils who carried the burden of the author's ideas for societal improvement. The Inspector also featured heavily, with many identifying him as Priestley's 'mouthpiece' with better responses looking in

some detail and with great maturity at how the Inspector's actions and words reflect the author's views on society. There was a pleasingly wide range of reference to the play, with some aspects which have been only rarely discussed in previous series coming to the fore. Even very familiar references such as the Titanic were recast in thoughtful and precise discussion in many cases. There was the complete range of levels of response to this question which was pleasing to see. This was also true of the question on Eric, and what was striking were the different ways in which students responded to his character, and the ways in which similar pieces of evidence about him from the play were utilised to make different points about his behaviour. The 'half-shy, half-assertive' stage direction was particularly interestingly used to many different ends.

In both questions, there was much less evidence of 'bolted-on' AO3 context. Students largely looked to the question for the basis of their contextual ideas rather than simply importing sometimes irrelevant historical detail. Where students did talk about the play's dramatization of the clash between socialism and capitalism, for example, it was generally grounded in character and ideas as they occur in the play and thus received credit. Many students writing about Eric dealt thoughtfully with still-relevant ideas about what personal moral responsibility might mean for a young man in society and his relationships with women.

Another striking thing about many student responses was the degree to which the assessment objectives were so integrated in the writing that it was sometimes difficult to know which to credit at a given point. This synoptic awareness of the needs of the mark scheme was extremely pleasing to see and can only have been the product of both informed and committed teaching, and hard work and thought on the part of the students.

There were as usual many high-level *Lord of the Flies* responses, particularly to the more popular Question 14 about the human capacity for evil. Lots of students tracked the boys' passage through the novel and judiciously noted the key staging posts on the way to moral and physical disaster, while remaining keenly aware of Golding's symbolic intentions. Again there was some fascinating discussion of a very wide range of references to events and moments in the novel. What is always noteworthy with responses to this text is the maturity and sophistication of students' awareness of the profoundly serious issues with which Golding forces the reader to engage. Though fewer in number, the responses to the Simon question were equally illuminating and varied, with many writing impressively about the nature of sacrifice.

Examiners saw many excellent *Blood Brothers* responses this year, with the majority on the question which asked about the influence of childhood on Micky and Edward's lives in the play. There was a pleasing sense of students treating the play as a piece of drama in a broader sense than has hitherto been the case, with the Narrator's role and the significance of some of the songs featuring more than previously. Sharp contrasts between the boys' lives were often noted with effective reference and these were often very skilfully linked to context. Again there was much less irrelevant and unrelated contextual writing, and there was a great deal of thoughtful consideration given to the influences of early poverty and education on people's adult lives, again still relevant in today's society.

It was very pleasing to see many responses to *DNA* this year, with many of an excellent, thoughtful standard. Again, the maturity of some of the students' writing about the nature of good and bad leadership was striking and full of insight, while there was a good grasp of the contrasting characters in the play and how they are used dynamically by Kelly. The 'change' question prompted a wide range of different ideas about who had and had not changed the most throughout the play. Again, there was excellent textual knowledge on display in many cases.

Responses to *Animal Farm* followed the pattern of showing a real development in terms of context. This text is uniquely problematic in this regard, in that there is considerable academic controversy

and disagreement about the extent to which Orwell intended it as a satire on Soviet Russia, but there was relatively little of the simplistic history writing which has been seen previously, and instead a far more nuanced consideration of the characters and what they say and do in the text and how this might relate to some relevant contextual issues.

Assessment Objectives

AO1: response to task and use of supporting references

Many students began their response with what amounted to a thesis statement which outlined their understanding of what the question was asking and how they intended to approach it, thus displaying from the start the potential for a 'clear, explained response'. Though not necessarily gaining marks in itself, this approach has the benefit of making the students get clear in their head at least a framework (thus a kind of plan) before they get into the body of their response. There were also definite signs that messages about the allowable breadth of what constitutes a reference have been heeded and acted upon. Furthermore, whatever form these references took, students who looked to explain and develop their significance in relation to the rest of the text tended to do better than those who simply provided the reference and did not do a great deal with it.

AO2: the use of methods to create meanings

Many examiners commented on the benefits that seem to have accrued from the amendment of the mark scheme of the rather restricting 'language, structure and form' for the more general 'methods'. Even at lower levels there was clear evidence of an awareness of the writer making decisions for specific purposes and it was rare to see a response with no AO2 to credit. Teachers seem to feel freer to explore wider ideas of characterisation, setting, structure and so on, and there are clear advantages for students to judge from this year's offerings. There was for example a marked decrease in simple technique-spotting of the kind which scarcely informs a student's discussion and actively detracts from their ability to write thoughtfully about a writer's choices. Particularly pleasing was the much greater prevalence of really useful and interesting writing about the way structure is used across texts to support meanings, with developed examples from, for example, Priestley's cyclical structure to *An Inspector Calls* and its impact on the audience, and Russell's parallel presentation of Micky and Edward's lives in *Blood Brothers*.

There was also a sense among examiners that students seemed to have been given more opportunities to discuss a writer's methods and their possible effects in class rather than simply being told what they were. As a result there was a confidence and freshness in their writing about AO2 that has perhaps not been the case previously.

AO3: ideas, perspectives, contextual factors

As has already been stated, there was far less evidence of the kind of context which is detached from a consideration of the text rather than forming a part of it. Indeed such writing is almost the definition of Level 1 'explicit' AO3 and no more. Teachers have clearly encouraged students to think widely about the whole notion of context and the fact that for every question ideas about context are implicit within the wording of the question itself. As a result we saw lots of lively discussion about the roles and attitudes of men and women in Edwardian England, the nature of human behaviour and why people sometimes behave badly towards each other, and how poverty and affluence condition us in different ways, amongst many others.

Advice for Students

Always take a few minutes to think carefully about what the question is asking you to write about. The wording of the questions is very carefully considered to make it as clear as it can be, and there will always be a 'steer' in the question about what you might consider for AO3.

An introduction can be very useful if it demonstrates your understanding of what the question is asking and how (briefly) you will go about answering it. It always gives you a reference point to go back to in order to check you have not drifted off-topic.

Any references you include should relate directly to your response to the task. Just because you can remember something about the text doesn't necessarily mean it will be useful to your answer.

Don't fret about slightly misquoting something; the exam is not a detailed memory test. Examiners want to hear what you think, supported by reference to the text.

We are not looking simply for the names of techniques; we want to hear why you think the writer organised her or his material in a particular way, and what effects you think that has on the reader or audience. Why is the text organised as it is? How do the characters respond to each other and how are they presented to cast light on others? What ideas is the writer trying to bring out for discussion and consideration?

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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