
AS LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE A

7711/2 Love through the Ages: Prose
Report on the Examination

7711/2
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Part One: General Remarks

This report should be read in conjunction with the report on 7711/1. It might also be relevant to consult to the report for the equivalent A level components, 7712/2A and 7712/2B.

It was evident from the marking of Papers 1 and 2 that the historicist philosophy of the Specification is positively embraced for providing clarity and coherence. Historicism sees texts not in isolation but as products of their time. As such, it encourages the exploration of the relationship between texts and the contexts in which they are written and then in which they read and interpreted, along with how they have been interpreted over the intervening time period. Key to the engagement with a historicist approach is the focus on a shared context. In both Paper 1 and Paper 2 this is the diachronic context of Love through the ages.

Importantly, this specification aims to encourage confident, independent readers who are able to 'make meaning' through both close textual analysis and a wider understanding of the contexts that might inform their literary study. Students are encouraged to pursue clear, authentic arguments with conviction.

Such responses are best rewarded by the holistic marking of five Assessment Objectives using a 25-mark scale divided into five bands. The holistic use of assessment objectives allows for a flexible mark scheme which aims to encourage independent work not limited by formulaic constraints. Holistic marking enables responses to be assessed as organic whole texts in themselves. Assessment objectives are not tracked in the marking or reported on separately in summative comments. This enables the genuine inter-relatedness of assessment objectives to be respected. The best advice to students is to concentrate on answering the question set and let the assessment objectives look after themselves. Because the quality of written expression is crucial in enabling literary skills, students should be particularly mindful of how they answer the question too.

Part Two: Priorities

In the first few series of this examination, the emphasis of reports and subsequent training was on historicism as the underpinning philosophy of the Specification. The following areas of priority build on that foundation:

Unseen extract

It is important to remember that the unseen extract in Section A is selected and printed on the examination paper for the express purpose of relevant analysis and to give a full and detailed answer to the question. The extract will have been chosen with a clear beginning and end, to enable analysis of structure. The key words of the given view are intended as a lens through which to view the extract. Therefore, there is every reason to spend a substantial amount of this time slot analysing the details, methods and contexts embedded in the extract.

There is a clause in the preamble to the Mark Scheme which reads: 'In the case of a significant omission to an answer then the examiner should not give a mark higher than Band 3' ('Arriving at marks', paragraph 12, page 5). So, an answer that does not fully engage with the extract is capped at Band 3.

As the unseen extract is from a prose text, it is particularly important to accessing authorial methods that the text is seen as such.

AQA's **Teaching Guide to AO2** offers a productive way into thinking about the different ways in which meaning is shaped across the three different genres.

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-a/teach/teaching-guide-ao2>

Comparison

This is essential to accessing the higher bands. It is also important to consider both similarities and differences between the two texts. Over focusing on either similarities or differences often leads to an unsubtle response. Students also need to ensure that they look in each case at specific aspects of the novels in the context of the whole text with the interpretation and question focus in mind. More successful students support relevant readings with specific textual details, as appropriate in an 'open' book examination and carefully analyse the writers' narrative prose methods by linking them to meaning. They also analyse the role of point of view and structure in both prose texts, apply context in a considered way and demonstrate an awareness of the typicality of the literature of love. More successful students avoid: narrative/descriptive approaches that lose focus on the question and its key words; describing or labelling narrative prose methods, sometimes inaccurately, with no reference to meaning or simply asserted a link to meaning; making sweeping, simplistic and inaccurate statements about context.

Question key words

Questions in Section A will always begin: Examine the view that... 'Examine' here encourages thorough attention to the given view and to the unseen extract. Both 'how' and 'examine' are prompts to analyse within a clear, coherent argument. This is a higher-order skill that allows access to the upper reaches of the mark scheme. Likewise, Section B questions will always begin with a statement followed by 'By comparing two prose texts, explore the extent to which you agree with this statement'. The key word of 'comparing' clearly requires students to make comparisons between two of the selected prose texts. Discussion of one text would be a rubric infringement, whereas an unbalanced response that heavily considers one text would struggle to move out of Band 2. The key words of 'explore' and 'extent' allow for students to analyse the two texts in relation to the given view and to develop their argument.

Part Three: Feedback on specific questions

Section A

Question 1: Unseen Prose

Most students found the extract from *Call Me by Your Name* by André Aciman to be accessible and yet there were complexities to stretch and challenge the more able too. Attention to the structure of the extract was instructive. The extract is narrated from Elio's perspective and focuses on Elio's father's one-sided conversation with his son, where he attempts to offer Elio advice on his summer romance with Oliver.

Most students readily engaged with the debate on the idea that Elio's father is dominating and intrusive when giving his son advice. All students were able to consider the dynamics of the father-son relationship, although only higher-level students could consider the presentation of the relationship through considering the narrative perspective of Elio. Only a minority considered Elio's sexuality in a developed manner; those that did were able to use the context of social attitudes as a tool for considering the father's thoughts and actions.

The given view seemed to provoke some very unsubtle reading of the father's actions and language – some suggesting an abusive/coercive approach that was supported by simple textual reference such as 'touched my hand'. Better work balanced the debate; but sometimes this approach became a little mechanical making the student 'hedge their bets' on interpretation. The best responses addressed the view by simply having the confidence to offer their own interpretations reacting to the key words of the given view.

More successful students: had read the extract carefully and could fully engage with the task because they understood the whole extract rather than fragmented detail; always grasped and commented on the narrative perspective of the extract; were fully aware that the reader's view of the father is through the lens of the son Elio; used context as a subtle literary tool; could consider the typicality/atypicality of the father's presentation; could reflect on gender and sexuality; explored the debate in a genuine rather than mechanical way.

Less successful students: failed to read or understand the question fully; used word level analysis and so offered some unconvincing interpretations; were confused over names and locations suggesting that they did not carefully read the preamble; over valued the effect of punctuation; made digressive references to other texts; made little or no reference to Aciman or his prose narrative methods; made inaccurate or sweeping assertions about context.

Section B: Comparing prose texts

These questions follow the typical frame of giving a critical view and a generic question focus which students adapt to the two prose texts the centre has chosen to teach. Across the two questions *The Great Gatsby* was the most popular text.

Question 2

This question focused on exploring the given view that 'In prose fiction, love always challenges those who experience it'. Many of the text combinations lent themselves to discussing a range of reasons for love presenting challenges for characters: gender, class, social conventions, repression, forces beyond the lovers' control (such as war in *Atonement*). Text choices and interpretations differed widely in response. Where a debating approach was chosen, students had to be careful not to contradict themselves when it came to interpretation. Perhaps the answer is to avoid sweeping generalisations in response to the given view and to accept that the complexities of the novels mean that it depends on the stage of the narrative.

More successful students engaged with both key words 'always' and 'challenges'; widened the debate through considering challenge in positive and negative ways; confidently discussed the typicality of love narratives through considering the typical trope of a lover being tested; compared in a fluent way by frequently moving between the texts; focused on contrast not just similarity; were able to build comparative links around AO2 literary methods.

Less successful students only considered similarities between texts; adopted unsubtle context-driven responses that squeezed out any literary engagement; wrote too much to little effect.

Question 3

This was by far the more popular question of the two and focused on exploring the given view that 'In prose fiction, lovers experience more suffering than joy.' The question allowed for students to compare a wide range of experiences of lovers in their chosen texts. Students identified interesting dichotomies which they were able to argue were at the heart of the love stories concerned. For

example, there were particularly interesting discussions about suffering and joy, particularly in relation to *The Great Gatsby*, *The Awakening* and *Atonement*.

More successful students were able to weigh up suffering and joy in a subtle way and often used this as a comparative framework for the response; made perceptive choices through choosing to focus on a linking aspect of the paired texts; purposefully considered the painful consequences of unrealistic, idealised views on love; focused comparative links on literary methods rather than theme.

Less successful students were driven by narrative paraphrase that used the keywords ‘suffering’ and ‘joy’ as simple headings for their thinking; became too generalised and considered suffering and joy in broader social terms; wrote too much and did not **select** material and ideas which would build a more coherent comparison. There is potentially a lot to write about; the trick is to select ideas that are not just built around paraphrase and similarities.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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