
A-LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE A

7712/2A Texts in shared contexts: WW1 and its aftermath
Report on the Examination

7712/2A
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Part One: General Remarks

This report should be read in conjunction with the reports on 7712/1, 7712/2B and 7712/C (NEA), along with the mark schemes for those components. Reports on the components for the closely related AS Specification might also prove useful.

It was evident from the marking of all three components 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, received, and understood. Key to the engagement with a historicist approach is the focus on a shared context. In Component 1 this is the diachronic context of Love through the ages. In Component 2, it is the synchronic context of either WW1 and its Aftermath or Modern Times. In Component 3, it is the idea of 'texts across time' which allows for a diachronic or a synchronic approach with a chosen focus.

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 advice to students is to concentrate on answering the question set and let the assessment objectives look after themselves. However, because the quality of written expression is crucial in enabling literary skills, students should continue to be mindful of how they answer the question.

This summer's 7712/2A paper proved accessible to students, and it was clear that many were well prepared for its demands. The following problems, however, should be noted.

- students should only attempt questions within their chosen option and ensure that the question numbers are clearly labelled on their work
- overlong work that often required extra paper beyond the 12 page answer booklet was often rushed and lacking in coherence. Such work is often self-penalising, and students should be reminded that to move into Band 4 and above, works should be planned, focused and well-shaped
- My Boy Jack is no longer classed as a post 2000 and is an unacceptable text choice for option 3. This requirement is clearly highlighted in question 18.

Section A: Core set text questions

To prepare well for this paper students should be familiar with how questions are typically constructed and fully aware of how they should be addressed. Students should focus on the key command words as well as engaging with a debate that might be highlighted through a given view with the use of the keyword 'significance'. 'Significance' in this specification has the sense of the ways in which an idea or theme can be encoded with meanings. Students who think that significance is a synonym for importance will struggle; those who recognise that they should

explore the varying ways in which a topic can be given meaning through a writer's methods or a reader's reception will succeed.

In this single set text section, secure textual knowledge and recall is vital. Students who demonstrate secure textual knowledge and understanding can quickly engage with the demands of a question. In successful responses, secure textual knowledge allows for secure independent responses where detail is carefully chosen rather than arbitrarily unloaded or paraphrased. In less successful responses, students often just tended to 'go through' poems or resorted to broad narrative approaches to novels and plays in an attempt to demonstrate subject knowledge rather than to answer the questions. Students who purposefully engaged with all the key words of the question were able to produce more focused work which drew together contextual awareness and literary analysis. Such work did not unload unassimilated ideas or reworked rehearsed material.

Section A Option 1: Poetry Set Texts

Up the Line to Death – ed. Brian Gardner

Question 1

More effective answers:

- engaged purposefully with all keywords in the task
- considered 'comradeship' critically through considering varying presentations from different points in the anthology
- purposefully used contextual understanding as a critical tool through exploring the presentation of 'comradeship' from differing phases within the war
- were able to produce more nuanced arguments through carefully considering the given view and considering the extent to which comradeship can make the 'horrors of war' more bearable.
- showed a clear understanding of Gardner's text selections and construction of the anthology.

Less effective answers:

- did not select appropriate poems and often developed distorted interpretations to suit the focus of the question
- resorted to rehearsed contextual approaches that largely just compared the difference between early and later war poems
- adopted simple word level analysis that led to restricted interpretations.

Question 2

More effective answers:

- were able to consider 'To Unknown Lands' in a range of ways through exploring the title both literally and metaphorically
- had a secure contextual focus on the significance of differing war settings such as Gallipoli and other forms of war through the presentation of pilots
- purposefully considered the varying viewpoints and perspectives offered in the poems
- always used the analysis of poetic methods as a tool for exploring meaning rather than as an end in itself

- clearly considered the significance of Gardner’s selection of poems for this section and were able to relevantly discuss the section’s significance in the collection as a whole.

Less effective answers:

- over-relied on the well-known ‘An Irish Airman foresees his Death’ and could only offer an inconsistent grasp of the section as a whole
- avoided ambiguous and complex meanings and made more generalised assertions about individual poems and their relation to the title
- Showed little grasp of the different contexts of warfare evident in the section.

Scars Upon My Heart – ed. Catherine Reilly

Question 3

More effective answers:

- made good use of the quotation from Iris Tree to explore the presentation of bravery
- made varied, interesting poetry selections that allowed for discussion of the presentation of male and female bravery
- were able to integrate the contextual presentations of gender and bravery into thoughtful analysis
- could approach some poems critically through discussing the limitations of adopting the viewpoint and language of male soldiers
- could purposefully debate the given view through considering the ways in which emotional suffering is shown as a part of the presentation of bravery in the anthology.

Less effective answers:

- largely ignored the given view
- did not consider the varying forms of bravery in the collection and largely considered the presentation of male bravery in combat
- ‘went through’ poetic features in a sequential way which could only offer a simple checklist of poetic methods largely unrelated to an interpretation of meaning.

Question 4

More effective answers:

- demonstrated confident knowledge of the collection as a whole and could make wide-ranging selections
- were able to fully consider and debate the use of religious imagery within individual poems
- were clearly aware of the ways in which the pain and suffering of soldiers were often presented within the context of a religious sense of sacrifice
- were aware of the ways in which religion is presented as offering solace and comfort within the anthology
- could confidently debate and challenge the religious views offered in the anthology.

Less effective answers:

- over relied on obvious choices such as Bedford's 'The Parson's Job' and struggled to make other appropriate selections
- asserted meanings based on minimal textual evidence
- often made generalised assertions about the importance of religion at the time of the war without integrating this into more literary discussion focused on 'presentation'.

Section A Option 2: Drama Set Texts

Oh! What a Lovely War – Joan Littlewood

The entry was very small for this text, making it difficult to provide a meaningful report.

Journey's End – R C Sherriff

Question 9

More effective answers:

- were supported by a clear understanding of dramatic methods through considering sound and lighting effects and the ways in which the dugout setting is part of the presentation of characters and ideas within the play
- were able to carefully consider the layout of the dugout and the extent to which this presents the differing relationships between the men
- explored the strange domesticity of the setting and how it is part of Sherriff's aim of creating a realistic representation of the frontline experience.
- explored the extent to which the setting deliberately focused the play on the psychological experience of war
- saw the dugout as a representation of the officer class and considered the significance of Raleigh's decision to be with the men in the trenches after Osborne's death
- made effective use of the contextual understanding of trench warfare and frontline conditions.

Less effective answers:

- made little explicit reference to dramatic methods
- largely ignored setting and chose to describe the character interactions in the dugout
- used the question as an excuse to discuss trench warfare in a generalised way without much literary discussion of the use of setting to create meaning
- made generalised assertions about how the dugout setting presents the futility of war without exploring how this might be achieved through dramatic methods.

Question 10

More effective answers:

- made good use of the given view to structure and develop a detailed consideration of Hibbert's presentation
- showed confident awareness of context through focusing on differing audience responses

- fully understood the varying responses to Hibbert from other characters such as Osborne and Trotter as well as Stanhope
- explored the function of Hibbert's role within the play both as part of Stanhope's characterisation and Sherriff's presentation of the experience of war
- analysed the dramatic impact of Hibbert's confrontation with Stanhope through considering stage directions and the creation of tension and release
- grasped the relevance of the biographical context of Sherriff's frontline experience, his suffering from neuralgia and the extent to which this informs the presentation of Hibbert.

Less effective answers:

- made generalised assertions about audiences from differing times
- did not consider Hibbert's presentation in the play as a whole and only concentrated on his confrontation with Stanhope in Act 2
- tended to offer narrative paraphrase rather than consider how Hibbert is presented through dramatic methods.

Option 3 Section A: Prose Set Text

Regeneration – Pat Barker

Question 13

More effective answers:

- explored the given view as a way of offering a more complex view of Sarah Lumb
- Integrated contextual knowledge of women's war work and changing gender roles into a literary examination of Sarah Lumb's presentation within the novel
- focused on 'war is liberating' through exploring Sarah Lumb's actions, attitudes, and speech through focused analysis of well selected textual detail
- made explicit reference to the writer's intentions and Sarah Lumb's function within the novel as a whole
- considered Billy Prior's perspective on Sarah Lumb and the part it plays in her presentation.

Less effective answers:

- adopted an imposed contextual framework which could only consider Sarah Lumb as an illustration of changing gender attitudes and of the increased employment opportunities offered to women in the war
- often used narrative paraphrase to support ideas
- only referred to a narrow range of text that largely focused on her relationship with Billy Prior and did not consider, for example, the significance of her visit to the hospital in chapter 14.

Question 14

More effective answers:

- showed an overarching understanding of trauma and the significance of memory
- used contextual knowledge of developing psychiatric practices as way of exploring the interactions between doctors and patients

- were able to offer a balanced debate on the presentation of memory through comparing the experiences of Prior and Burns
- purposefully considered River's memories and the extent to which they highlight his changing attitudes towards the war
- fully explored the given view particularly when considering the presentation of Billy Prior's memories.

Less effective answers:

- offered generalised assertions and narrative paraphrase about the treatment of mental trauma without any literary analysis
- ignored the given view and listed examples of memory loss and recall without a broader understanding of the importance of memory within the novel as a whole
- used digressive contextual description of mental trauma and shell shock without integrating this into a literary approach to the question.

Birdsong – Sebastian Faulks

Question 15

More effective answers:

- integrated contextual understanding of the importance of tunnelling war into a literary discussion of Faulks' aims as a writer to present the lesser known aspects of the war to the modern reader
- were able to consider how the setting of the tunnels serves to heighten and highlight aspects of character and character relationships through considering Stephen Wraysford and Jack Firebrace
- the extent to which tunnelling, and tunnels are echoed in the modern-day episodes in the novel
- considered the use of the tunnelling episodes in the structure of the novel as a whole
- explored tunnelling as a metaphor for broader themes within the novel, for example Stephen Wraysford's rescue from the collapsed tunnel by German soldiers as a presentation of post war rebirth and reconciliation.

Less effective answers:

- adopted a list like structure that could only paraphrase the horrific aspects of tunnel warfare
- over relied on contextual knowledge without integrating this into a literary discussion of tunnelling
- ignored the modern-day sections of the novel
- misunderstood 'significance' as importance

Question 16

More effective answers:

- approached the given view in a more nuanced way through considering varying aspects of 'innocent in war'

- considered Michael Weir's function within the novel, through exploring his relationship with Stephen Wraysford
- explored Michael Weir's experience of war and the significance of his response to the battle of the Somme
- considered how Michael Weir is used to show the alienation of soldiers returning home on leave
- explored the significance of the impact of Michael Weir's death.

Less effective answers:

- only approached Michael Weir through offering narrative paraphrase
- ignored the given view
- did not address or fully understand the key word 'significance'

Section B: Unseen Prose: questions 5, 11, 17

The unseen prose extract was accessible to most students and allowed for some engaged discussion of the effects of the experience of war. A clear grasp of the keywords of the task and the preamble is essential here. Less successful responses took little notice of the preamble and largely considered the text in isolation with little contextual framework. Students who were alert to the date of publication and the gender of the writer could more readily consider the post war perspective of the extract as well as exploring the possible reasons for the more detached, dispassionate viewpoint.

Careful close reading of the extract through the lens of the given view is a clear key to success in this question. The key word 'significance' invites the student to focus on the varying ways in which the passage can be interpreted in the light of the chosen topic. Confident students were able to select textual detail relevantly rather than 'going through' the text using narrative paraphrase and simple feature spotting. These less successful responses did not show how prose methods created meaning; largely they paraphrased the text in a generalised way with simple reference to sometimes inconsistent word level analysis. Students who carefully chose how particular literary methods illuminated the transformative nature of war experience were able to build stronger more focused responses. Such work often explored the alienated dispassionate perspective of the extract and considered how this was shaped by the syntax of balanced clauses, repetition, and simple sentences. More confident students explored this perspective through considering the post war recognition of the brutality of modern warfare. Some discussed the significance of the writer's gender and saw the extract as a women's view on how traditional masculine stereotypes are dismantled by the experience of war. Focus on imagery and metaphors proved particularly successful. The biblical associations of the snake were considered; some very sophisticated work fully explored this language through seeing the extract as a fall from grace where the returning soldiers now had 'profound knowledge' because of their experience of war. Many students focused on the dehumanising effect of the experience of war on the men and could discuss how their feelings were uniformly degraded so that 'suffering was a part of their rations'.

Students should avoid digressive references to other texts when they are specifically asked to focus on just the extract. Too often contextualising the extract through considering other texts proved unwieldy and often undermined the focus on the single extract. More successful approaches used context as a literary tool; for example, the dehumanised, degraded presentation of soldiers in the extract was seen as a post war rebuttal of propaganda stereotypes of masculinity.

More successful prose unseen responses:

- had a clear understanding of the task and considered the preamble
- demonstrated clear, careful reading and a strong overview of the extract as a whole
- used context as a way of exploring meaning
- selected appropriate textual as a way of answering the question
- considered prose methods in relation to the given focus of the effects of the experience of war.

Less successful prose unseen responses:

- showed rushed reading and poor planning
- picked out details in a chronological way and had no sense of the extract as a whole
- unloaded pre-planned discussion of context
- often considered other texts in a digressive way and failed to focus on the extract.

Contextual Linking: questions 6, 12, 18

Comparison is a distinctive feature of this Specification. In Paper 1, two out of three tasks involve explicit comparison. In Papers 2A and 2B, one out of three tasks is explicitly comparative. The NEA task is also explicitly comparative. There are other kinds of comparison involved in Specification A tasks too, of course, such as explicit or implicit comparison within the shared contexts to establish typicality or atypicality.

To be successful students must answer the question through a focused comparison of the two chosen texts from different genres. Less successful work only focused on some generalised similarities and did not consider the differences reflected in texts from differing times and genres. Such work lacked fluent movement between the texts and almost treated the texts in isolation. More successful work, however, often focused on comparing differing literary methods and quickly moved between the texts comparing and contrasting as a way of building a more sustained response to the task.

Change to post-2000 drama text

In this examination a new post-2000 drama text *The Wipers Times* has now been introduced and *My Boy Jack* is no longer classified as a post-2000 text. *My Boy Jack* can still be studied in Option 1 as long as it is paired with one of the post-2000 prose text options: *A Long, Long Way*, *The First Casualty* or *Life Class*

In Option 1 a number of texts were compared successfully. Many centres still took the opportunity to use *My Boy Jack* comparing it with the post 2000 novels *A Long Long Way* or *Life Class*. Interesting work focused on the contrasting viewpoints offered by drama and prose texts and considered the presentation of the changing attitudes of Kipling, Kirwan and Tarrant because of their differing experiences of the war.

In Option 2 there was evidence of focused thinking that contrasted the varied prose and poetic presentation of the experience of war and its effect on individuals. Students studying *Regeneration* explored the presentation of trauma and its treatment making strong links with the poetry of Wilfred Owen. Although ‘*Dulce et Decorum est*’ can often be overused by students and considered in a generalised way, here it was often explored through focusing on ‘the smothering dreams’ of the traumatised speaker who cannot save his comrade. The shared context of *Craiglockhart* also offered another way of linking these texts.

In Option 3 *The Wipers Times* is now the only post 2000 drama text. Some students focused on the changes presented in Roberts and Dodd and compared this with contrasting early and late war poetry. Sophisticated responses took a broader approach by focusing on the aftermath and considering the treatment of veterans who are isolated by their experience of war. Successful answers considered the varied dramatic devices employed by the play comparing this with the differing method employed in individual poems as well as the order and construction of the poetry anthologies.

More successful comparative responses:

- did not just focus on the similarities between texts, but also considered differences
- wrote purposeful introductions that presented a clear thesis on the significance of the effects of the experience of war
- clearly considered the differences between genres
- wrote succinctly

Less successful comparative responses

- only considered similarities
- resorted to narrative paraphrase rather than considering literary methods
- unloaded learnt poetic analysis that was often irrelevant to the focus of the question
- wrote at length in an imprecise way without planning

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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