



Commentaries

A Level English Literature:
Coursework Marking Training

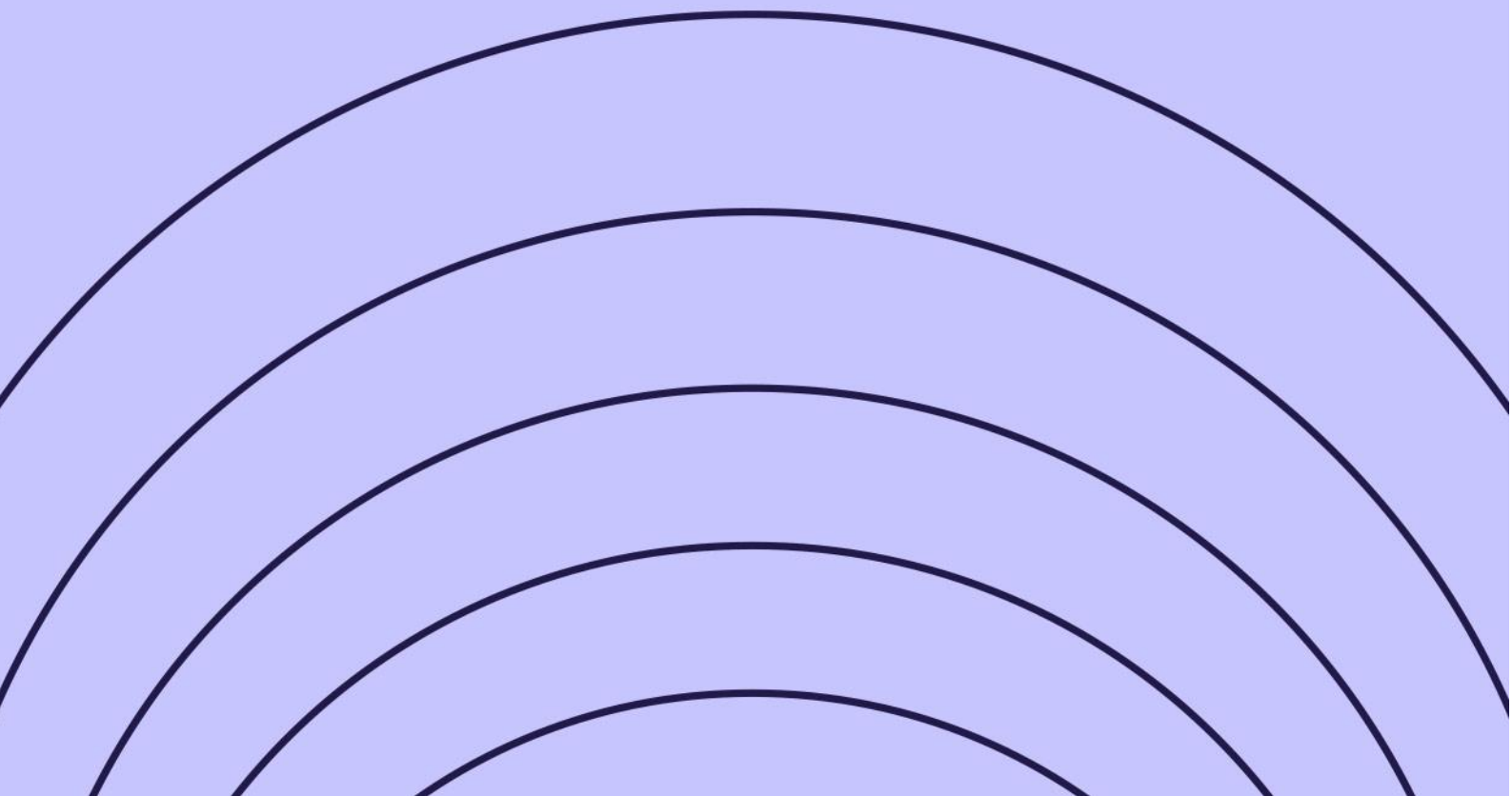


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Commentaries

Folder 1

The Poisonwood Bible and Heart of Darkness

An initial scan of the folder shows this candidate has worked precisely within the word guidance, carefully presenting the essay with double spacing, referencing and bibliography. It is worth reminding candidates, however, that there is no need to reference every quotation from their primary texts. The centre has shown their internal process for marking and moderation, with two different sets of annotation.

The two texts are well chosen and offer good literary potential in addressing the full breadth of the assessment objectives. The title flags all assessment objectives though 'compare' is not explicit. The wording 'imprints' is arguably a little oblique as an anchor to the piece, but the candidate manages to clarify this as the folder progresses; a less able candidate may have needed more clarity in both these areas for a successful outcome. The introduction sets up the link between the two texts and establishes potential for an evaluative argument, rooted in a range of contextual factors and referencing writer's intentions. It addresses the complexity of power dynamics and already begins to draw the finer distinctions between the way both texts present the Congo and its impact on the novels' characters.

The folder begins with a thought-provoking introduction, which addresses the complexity of power dynamics and already begins to draw the finer distinctions between the way both texts address societal power and race. The candidate considers context and how power manifests in relationships defined by gender, race and religion.

As with the rest of the folder, the first two pages establish just how tightly all the AOs are seamlessly woven into a critical and evaluative argument which is a typical of essays in Level 5. The piece is precisely written and secures the clarity and control for AO1 to move up to this level – this writer is fully in control of their prose, rather than struggling to use 'sophisticated' vocabulary simply to impress.

The argument continues with sustained textual examples, accompanied by critical evaluation of how meaning is shaped. The second paragraph reflects wide consideration of AO2, offering analysis of setting, motif, structure ('the novella opens...'), imagery and word level analysis; subject terminology is deftly combined with evidence and evaluation, linked back to the position outlined in the introduction. By page 2 paragraph 1 this is developed via AO3 with reference to Conrad's biography (Najder) taken through to personal argument. (Note that biography of a writer is most likely to provide AO3 rather than AO5 and the quotation used here by Najder aligns with biographical context rather than critical view on the literary text.)

Connections between the texts and the finer points of difference in writer's intentions, run throughout the folder, with well chosen evidence linking the writer's methods in both texts, positioning this in Level 5. The candidate tackles complexities around Conrad's context of production, in relation to colonialism, versus Kingsolver's more recent writing, head on. This establishes a critical and evaluative approach which is consistently taken back to analysis of the literary text. The bibliography reflects a range of texts of secure provenance linking to AO3 and 5. While it is clear that the candidate is in command of textual, critical and contextual knowledge, some use of critical views is not fully sustained and sophisticated (see section on Kurtz, where the use of Achebe is used neatly to consolidate the argument rather than develop it further). However, there is enough across the folder to justify the top Level 5 mark (e.g. p. 5-6 using Austenfield and Ognibene alongside AO3, personal argument and extensive textual reference).

The centre mark of 60 was agreed.

AO1-3 = 36 (Level 5+); AO4-5 = 24 (Level 5+)

Total = 60

Folder 2

Wide Sargasso Sea and Foe

This is an appropriate selection of texts. 'Wide Sargasso Sea' is a fairly popular choice. 'Foe' is less commonly encountered by moderators, but offers appropriate challenge and some interesting points of comparison.

The title links the texts appropriately, with a focus on writers' methods to encourage the candidate towards AO2, though there is no flagging of AO3 and 5 which can be helpful, particularly for those candidates who may fail to give them due attention. The piece opens with clarity; by the final sentence of the introduction, the overarching comparative argument is posed, linking both texts in their presentation of marginalised voices and the impact of internal hierarchies within marginalised groups. AO3 helps anchor the first couple of pages with clear acknowledgement of literary context and sources.

As set up in the question wording, the candidate's focus on AO2 is a strength throughout, without hindering the momentum of the argument. The texts are consistently used in a perceptive and discriminating way. Integration of critical theory is impressive, and the candidate's confident use of concepts such as authorial control and marginalisation is characteristic of responses in the top mark band. Context is less of a focus but is still nuanced and precise.

This is a folder that achieves into Level 5 on both mark grids. However, it is not a high Level 5 folder; notice the way the AOs interweave so tightly throughout Folder 1, which is not always the case here. AO3 is somewhat sparse and not always interwoven effectively; though it is tied to the evaluative argument, it would benefit from more detailed close analysis of relevant section of the literary text to support. High Level 5 candidates also typically support contextual references with a citation. Though the candidate's strong engagement with the texts is a pleasure to see, there is occasionally a sense that they have lost sight of the characters as constructs, and we would expect candidates working at the top of Level 5 for AO1 and AO2 to keep this in mind consistently. There is also a tendency towards general theory rather than literary criticism in AO5 which prevents this moving to the top of Level 5.

While the candidate clearly understands Said's theories and applies them ably, the lack of direct quotation or reference in the bibliography gives the sense of a more general understanding than would otherwise be expected. Although the quality of referencing does not affect the mark given, this is clearly a very able candidate whom we assume is looking to enter higher education, and they have missed the opportunity to learn the referencing skills that would be non-negotiable as an undergraduate. Citations exist, but do not always include page numbers; the bibliography does not list all sources, notably the editions of the texts themselves.

The wide margins mean that centre comments are clear to read. The breakdown of the centre's marking by AO on the Coursework Comments sheet is useful to support the moderator in understanding how teachers came to a final mark. There is evidence of a main marker and moderator within the centre marking process, reflected by two sets of comments. The mark grid provided by the centre provides excellent evidence of marking according to the AOs, and is helpful to the moderator, as are the detailed annotations.

AO1–3 = 32 (Level 5); AO4–5 = 21 (Level 5)

Total = 53

Folder 3

The Great Gatsby and The Guide

This is a very interesting task, and the Narayan text elicits some really interesting comparisons with *The Great Gatsby*. This is a good example of how a very 'established' A Level text can work well when paired with something less commonly studied.

The introduction is quite laconically expressed, but the argument is controlled and well-constructed as a whole. Each section of the essay is structured cohesively, and there is a secure overarching structure too. Textual support is consistent. There are, however, areas with some lapses in expression, and whilst there is a discriminating argument, sophistication is rare. The candidate seems aware of the assessment objectives and – with one exception – attempts to incorporate them consistently.

The first section on *Gatsby* is well-expressed, and there are some pleasing contextual references that are integrated effectively. Even though this is a *Gatsby* paragraph, the brief references to Narayan are useful and remind us that this is a comparative study. The Pearson quotation occurs halfway through the paragraph, rather than at the end, enabling the candidate to use it to develop their own argument in an analytical way. What's missing, however, is AO2: textual support has not been chosen with this objective in mind, and whilst perhaps there are hints of awareness at crafting here, the centre, sensibly, has not credited them. This continues on the next page, with really interesting and specific discussion of Hindu spiritual concepts, useful AO4 links, and continued engagement with AO5.

Towards the bottom of page 5, the integrated comparative approach has become fully established, and we are clearly looking at a high Level 4, or Level 5 borderline, for AO5. On page 6, there is at last a secure focus on AO2, as narrative voice is discussed in both texts. On page 7, we arrive at a fairly lengthy discussion of the endings of both novels, and the range of AO3 material, precisely deployed and often analytical, is impressive. The candidate confidently goes back and forth between the texts, and critics are deftly integrated, though perhaps not with sufficient use of the texts to justify a mark in Level 5.

The candidate has referenced their work consistently. Footnotes are used, and the bibliography is detailed and formatted appropriately.

Overall, a sensible 'best fit' judgment was made by the centre when arriving at the mark, which precludes a Level 5 for the AO1 – 3 mark grid. Some may disagree with the final mark for AO1 – 3 because of the disparity between AO2 and the other AOs; this would not, however, be more than 2 or 3 marks. AO4 and AO5 are indeed a strength, with an integrated comparative approach and discriminating and often perceptive use of critics for AO5; a mark into Level 5 is deserved here. The centre demonstrated sound professional judgment in their application of the mark scheme.

All annotations from the centre are helpful and detailed. The summative comment clearly shows us how the final mark was decided; whilst more precise reference to the AOs and the levels would have been helpful, the use of vocabulary from the mark scheme makes this clear. The second marker has not duplicated labour unnecessarily, but has been helpful in showing us where the AO2 is to be found. The second comment is brief, but fine: we have evidence that a second pair of eyes has seen this piece, and we do not expect every piece to be double-marked or internally moderated in detail.

AO1–3 = 27 (Level 4); AO4–5 = 20 (Level 4/5)

Total = 47

Folder 4

Lonely Londoners and The Color Purple

This is an interesting and appropriate choice of texts. While the theme of gender is appropriate (although the wording of ‘the effect of gender’ is less helpful), it appears that this candidate might have benefitted from a more precise and nuanced focus. This is evident from the introduction, which lacks focus and seems to attempt to engage with multiple possible subtopics simultaneously.

After this, however, the candidate begins to form an argument that is clear, logical, and relevant. Expression here is consistently clear, using relevant quotations from the texts, but without any real sense of discrimination or really thoughtful selection of material. Indeed, not all quotations are entirely accurate. The candidate tends to start each paragraph with a simple but focused “topic sentence” – often comparative – which is typical of a candidate writing at Level 3 in its clarity of structure. Paragraphs are then developed with textual support and consistent discussion of AO2. This can be straightforward (“the simile ‘like a king’ (p.9 of PDF)) but with some more nuanced appreciation of tone (eg p.11, though this never approaches Level 4). Context, most often social, is also clear and relevant. This is a typical high Level 3, scoring 20.

For AO4 and AO5, attainment is at the same level. There is a comparative approach overall, and the candidate goes back and forth between the texts frequently. However, frequency of comparison does not necessarily imply it is always successful. On closer reading, connections are “clear” with obvious discourse markers such as “similarly” or comparative topic sentences, but the candidate sometimes changes focus without comment or preparation, and links are not analysed.

For AO5, whilst one marker felt it could go into Level 4, ultimately the attainment here is similar. The candidate engages with other interpretations and explores them, in a fairly straightforward way; there is not evidence of developed exploration or analysis – for example “Like Cheung suggests”, which effectively ‘matches’ evidence from the text to what a critic has argued, but going no further. The discussion at the top of the final page – “As Abbandonato cleverly states” – is also a strategy very common in candidates working at this level. Finally, at one point the candidate attempts an analysis of a historian; the centre, correctly, credits this as AO3. However, whilst this does not affect the final mark given, the candidate has not adequately referenced their sources. There appear to be formatting errors in the bibliography, and there are no inline citations.

Although this appears to be a candidate who has found the task challenging, they have made a real effort to keep the assessment objectives and the mark scheme in mind. Whilst they have not been able to achieve into Level 4, the clarity with which they have signalled the structure of the essay, moments of comparison, engagement with wider reading and context, and direct focus on AO2 has helped them to organise their thoughts into an essay that hits Level 3 fairly securely.

The centre has performed all their duties professionally. Inline annotation is useful and detailed. There are detailed summative comments by both markers. A third colleague has moderated to resolve what is really quite a minor disagreement. There is further evidence of best practice as the moderator/Head of Department has justified the decision as “after ranking of sample”, which shows that careful internal standardisation has taken place.

AO1–3 = 20 (Level 3); AO4–5 = 14 (Level 3)

Total = 34

Folder 5

1984 and *The Parable of the Sower*

This pairing offers a refreshing combination of a well-established novel with a less commonly used text. The dystopian setting of both texts works well to provide links and connections. This folder is helpfully double spaced, with a word count that indicates the guidance has been adhered to. Page numbers would be most helpful. Centre marking does not indicate that there is a second marker and that internal moderation has been undertaken. This is necessary for all centres, apart from those with a single subject teacher. There is a short bibliography listing appropriate critical sources, as well as both primary texts.

The opening paragraph begins with a simple point on character and general explanation of his activity as linked to the question focus. As the paragraph develops, the movement to Butler then offers general discussion about the writer's intentions, attempting to draw in a critical view. The development of the initial point is not sustained and this lack of control and clarity is indicative of the remaining essay. The candidate rarely maintains focus on single points of analysis but instead veers across general statements. There is acknowledgement of the context of Butler's futuristic American setting as linked to modern American society.

Throughout the folder, the candidate makes general references to characters and events in each text, which are interspersed with quotations, many of which are relevant though not fully supported by exploration of how meanings are shaped. Despite the lack of detailed analysis, there is regular awareness that the texts are crafted by the writers (P4: 'Butler's decision', 'Orwell does this to show') though the range of AO2 is limited (narrative perspectives, character, relationships, setting, action, theme) (AO1 L2). Explanations remain general though do demonstrate knowledge of the events of the text and inferences about character and action. AO3 is slightly stronger, with awareness of the texts' literary genre and attempts to consider the context of production and reception, explaining these in relation to the events of the texts. This places the folder in the middle of Level 2 for the first grid.

AO4 is general and runs consistently through this folder with some attempts to link relevant events in each text, though development and related literary analysis is rarely apparent. There are several attempts at AO5, occasionally trying to link critical argument with textual evidence– see page 1-2 Phillips. AO4-5 L2+.

Overall, the qualities of Level 2 are largely met across AO1-3, placing this in the middle of the band. The folder fully meets the Level 2 criteria on the second grid. Annotation by the centre conveys very brief commentary, partnered with a pertinent summative comment.

AO1-3 =12 (Level 2=); AO4-5 = 9 (Level 2+)

Total = 21