

Examiners' Report

June 2025

GCE English Literature 9ET0 01

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Introduction

In Summer 2025, examiners for this paper commented on the great deal of thoughtful and challenging work they read by candidates who had clearly been very well prepared for the examination and demonstrated, in many cases, a wealth of understanding in relation to the texts they had studied. There were very few examples of rubric infringement, demonstrating that teachers and candidates alike have developed a good understanding of how this well-established paper works.

The paper addresses four Assessment Objectives over its two sections, and most candidates were able to cover these effectively. This paper takes an integrated approach to the assessment of AOs 1-3 (which are assessed in both Section A and Section B of the paper). Therefore, the most successful responses were those that managed to integrate their coverage of these objectives. They did not, for example, treat contexts separately from the discussion of the plays' contents or the methods they employ in shaping meanings. Successful candidates wove these elements together in carefully constructed arguments and illustrated these with regular and well-selected textual references.

For Section A, a separate mark is awarded for AO5 – the use of critical ideas. This is a weighted objective, carrying a potential 14 marks out of the 35 available in this section of the examination. Again, much good evidence was seen that candidates are being introduced to a range of high-quality critical material and that they are able to deploy this within their writing about the Shakespeare texts they have studied. Again, the best work in this regard does not treat the critical material as separate from the rest of the material, but weaves this into personal arguments, demonstrating the ways in which it has framed and shaped candidates' personal readings of the plays.

The following report offers detailed commentary on individual questions, but there are some general points to make at the outset, for both teachers and candidates to consider:

- Candidates who took the time to plan their responses tended to develop clearer and more organised lines of thought, especially where they had considered how and where to make use of critical and contextual material.
- Candidates who used the introductions to their answers to establish clear lines of argument tended to be better able to structure their responses successfully and engage with all of the AOs.
- By contrast to this, there was evidence of candidates using stock learnt introductions – often including unhelpful factual information such as the dates of the plays' composition and/or the application of assertive adjectives (e.g. 'Shakespeare's masterly tragedy'). Candidates are advised that it is more effective to use introductions to engage in more focused and explicit ways with the task set.
- AO2 tended to be the least well-covered of the Assessment Objectives, especially in lower and middle range responses. In weaker responses – and even some stronger ones – this was largely at word or sentence level, and opportunities were missed to discuss the many dramatic methods the writers employ and to consider how these shape meanings within the plays studied.

- Some responses with great potential and novel ideas were limited by their lack of supporting evidence from the text. It is important that candidates root their answers in the texts they have studied, otherwise there is the risk that they drift, however good it might be, into more generalised commentary.
- Candidates are encouraged to use more circumspection when discussing contexts and to avoid blanket assertions, such as the idea that all inhabitants of Jacobean England were religious, or that they were inherently racist. It is also important to ensure that context is not simply identified, but that it is applied to the issues under consideration.
- Many lively and thoughtful responses linked discussion of the texts to theatre and film productions. This is to be encouraged. However, it is important that when referring to stage or televised versions of their plays, candidates treat these as contexts and ensure that they connect them closely to their personal readings of the plays.
- Weaker responses tended to offer sequences of examples of issues from texts, or textual features, or quotations from critics and then to try to extract an argument from that. Stronger answers tended to do the reverse: they had a strong argument and sought to exemplify it with material.
- Many examiners commented on the continued trend of deterioration in handwriting. Equally, some candidates persist in writing in tiny script. Candidates should be aware that no matter how good the content of their answers might be, examiners cannot reward work that cannot be read.
- The best answers demonstrated that candidates knew the texts well and were able to be creative and express ideas about them in critically informed ways. Highly formulaic structures (such as 'PEE') are still occasionally in evidence. These are not always suitable or effective at this level of study.

Question 1

Antony and Cleopatra

The question asked about the presentation of power.

Power proved an approachable theme within the play for candidates of all levels. Many candidates identified and explored a range of different manifestations of power in the play. Less effective responses tended to present a sequence of different kinds of power, providing surface readings of the ways in which Shakespeare shapes this within the text. Stronger candidates were able to analyse the effects of power, such as Antony's inability to prioritise his political position over the emotional power Cleopatra wields over him, Cleopatra's sexuality as a form of power over Antony, and how other characters see Antony's reduction from great soldier to fool because of his infatuation. Some candidates opted to discuss Caesar, but in many cases, this appeared to be an afterthought. Antony's botched suicide was seen to demonstrate his loss of power, even over his own death. Cleopatra's choice to commit suicide rather than be paraded as a trophy of war was explored as evidence of her taking power back over her own life.

Here we see two different introductions to Question 1.

In Shakespeare's ^{play} *Antony and Cleopatra* power is explored through different characters ~~such as Antony, Cleopatra~~ with the main ones being Antony, Cleopatra and Octavius ~~Caesar~~. All of these characters represent different aspects of power as Antony and Octavius represent the masculine version, whereas Cleopatra embodies feminine power highlighting how there are gender differences when it comes to power. Antony is ultimately presented as a tragic hero as his hamartia (fatal flaw) is his love for Cleopatra which brings his downfall. Therefore, power is presented as something that can be weak in itself as it is ~~is~~ not guaranteed to last so it is temporary.



Note here the way the candidate uses the introductory paragraph to set out a set of clear and relevant ideas in relation to the topic of power. This is related to both the group of central characters and to different manifestations of power in the play. There is also a nod to the play as a Tragedy and how this might be significant.



It is a very good idea to make introductions explicitly relevant to the topic under discussion.

The theme of power in Shakespeare's 16th/17th century tragedy 'Antony and Cleopatra' is a prominent, vital theme throughout the play. Shakespeare explores power through a variety of different characters, most notably Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra.



In this second introductory paragraph, the candidate offers a much more general introduction. Notice the extraneous reference to '17th century tragedy' and the absence of a clear argument.



The listing of factual information about the play ('17th century tragedy') in and of itself adds

nothing of real substance to the answer.

Question 2

Antony and Cleopatra

The question asked about the presentation of messengers.

Very few responses were seen to this question. Candidates identified the way Shakespeare makes use of different kinds of messenger within the play, including both conventional messengers and characters who provide messages of different kinds for both the other characters in the play and for the audience, such as The Soothsayer and Enobarbus. Some candidates commented interestingly on the dramatic functions of messengers in creating connections between the geographically disparate settings Shakespeare employs. There was also some discussion of the ways in which characters in the play respond (or fail to respond) to the messages they receive. This was, when done well, very effective. Others commented on the narrative purposes both the messengers and their messages fulfil.

Here is a good example of a clear and relevant introduction. This is an extract from a solid Level 3 response.

Throughout the play, there are a number of scenes where the more high-class ~~as~~ character are visited by a messenger, they are usually typically informing Antony or Cleopatra about the actions of the other, but are also used to inform both the audience and Antony simultaneously of Caesar's ^{detainment} ~~actions against~~ the threat of the Roman triumvirate, Lepidus. ~~As critic~~ ^{As critic} David Dan Bevington remarks "Antony and Cleopatra are remarkably similar", this is shown no more clearly than when comparing their behaviours towards the messengers to their messengers that are caught between

Here. Firstly, in ~~Scene 5~~ Act 2, Scene 5, a messenger brings news to Cleopatra that Antony ~~is~~ has taken Octavia, Caesar's sister as his new wife, as he speaks plainly: "Madam, he's married to Octavia" and moments later "He's married, Madam." This news infuriates ~~and~~ Cleopatra & the jealous Cleopatra, who lashes out at the poor messenger, ~~telling~~ ^{challenging} him to cease his words, threatening him to "savour thine eyes like balls before me" and "thou shalt be whipped with wire, and stewed in brine" ~~the~~ the vivid and ~~deep~~ disturbing images that Shakespeare creates in the minds of the audience through Cleopatra's words ~~emphasize~~ ^{emphasize} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~extreme~~ ^{reminding the audience of} creepiness, and lack of control, as well as ~~the~~ ^{the} disregard for the common person she shows at other parts of the play.



This candidate identifies clear and relevant connections between how both Antony and Cleopatra respond to messengers in the play. There is some clear awareness of the structural function of these messengers, as well as some clear integration of contextual material.

Question 3

Hamlet

The question asked about the presentation of masculinity in the play.

Candidates responding to this question offered a variety of interesting approaches to the presentation of masculinity in the play. Most focused primarily on the character of Hamlet and his crisis of masculinity. Typical topics included the conflict between contemplation and action and the trouble he faces in fulfilling the expectations placed on him by his father. Most also wrote about other representations of masculinity in the play, comparing Hamlet to Claudius, Old Hamlet, Laertes and (in fewer cases) Fortinbras. Some interesting observations and definitions of masculinity were offered. Many responses also included interesting explorations of masculinity via the use of Gertrude and Ophelia and how they are treated by the men in their lives. Higher level responses handled this effectively, maintaining the focus on masculinity, but weaker responses tended to drift into Shakespeare's portrayal of femininity.

An interesting range of contextual material was covered, including consideration of a typical Elizabethan/Jacobean 'modes' of masculinity, ideas of chivalry and humanism and the notion of the Renaissance Man. Higher level responses looked further afield, exploring, for example, the contrast between Claudius and Old Hamlet as models of the ruler, with some very detailed and perceptive analysis of contemporary beliefs about the monarch as the centre of society.

Candidates were generally very well prepared in terms of AO5 and had evidently undertaken a range of wider reading. Higher scoring candidates thoroughly engaged with the critical ideas, often evaluating differing critical perspectives. Good responses related these to supporting evidence from the text, rather than simply quoting relevant ideas from critics.

Here we see an extract from a Level 5 response, awarded marks of 19 + 12.

The hubris of toxic masculinity has a means of occurring both directly and indirectly in the lives of Shakespeare's female characters. Dr Johnson explained the "useless and wanton cruelty" that Hamlet shows Ophelia. The argument suggests that there is nothing to be gained in the plot of the play, or in the life of Hamlet, by the extreme nature of his callousness and abuse towards her. This has encouraged many to argue that Hamlet chooses to exert his negative masculine dominance over her and their relationship as means of regaining control in his own life and thus

treats her as an emotional and physical outlet for the feelings he is not equipped to process. He displays clear traits of misplaced anger, he tells her "wise men know well enough, what menses you make of them" suggesting that her femininity and 'womanly wiles' are a competitive force - yet in the context of the play, Hamlet is emotionally exhausted with the burden of revenge. Gertrude suggests that Hamlet "has all the knowledge of what he must do but is constantly averse to action" and as such, embodies attributes of Nietzsche's Dionysian man. The result of this inaction and his actual revenge mission becomes the direction of cruelty to the easier targets - the women. Hamlet's attitude towards Gertrude offers a similar analysis. His own grief and loss becomes projected onto his mother and his desire, as J. Adelman wrote, to "purify her". However the argument that Gertrude needs to be purified suggests that she is guilty. Emily Graf wrote that "Gertrude is only guilty by the words of the ghost and Hamlet, who condemn her". This critical approach furthers the theory that women experience masculinity brutally, and largely suffer for it. During the



In this extract, the candidate establishes sophisticated arguments, drawing on a rich variety of contextual and critical ideas, weaving these seamlessly into their work and allowing them to frame key ideas. Textual references are short and to the point.



It is important candidates make sure that their answers make regular reference to the text they have studied. This keeps arguments well rooted in the play.

This extract is from a Level 2 response.

In Act one scene two, Hamlet tries to express his emotions to his new stepfather Claudius and his ~~the~~ Mother Gertrude. His feelings of grief and despair are normal to us as an audience because death is a very difficult and tragic thing and we know the emotions that can come with it. However, at this time the males in society are meant to be strong and the ~~em~~ feeling of grief and loss are traditionally more feminine & due to the idea that women are weak and emotional. This causes us to feel pathos towards Hamlet as his feelings are being dismissed, especially during Claudius reply ~~in~~ where he says '... his unmanly grief' which ^{implies} ~~says~~ that what Hamlet is feeling is not very manly.

This feeling of grief continues in Hamlet's soliloquy 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt'. This reflects Hamlet's disillusionment with the world around him but also his feelings of pain due to his father's death. However this can still be seen as a problem like before because his masculinity seems to have ~~been~~ been broken down which is ~~that~~ ^{what's causing} he is feeling him to be so emotional



Note the much more general tone of this response. Arguments and textual references are not developed with clarity.



Successful candidates engage in discussion of Shakespeare's dramatic methods. His use, for example, of soliloquies by Hamlet and Claudius, rhetoric, verse, dramatic irony and foil characters as means of conveying or undermining traditional views of masculinity.

Question 4

Hamlet

The question asked about the presentation of pretence.

There was a wide range of approaches to this question, exploring different interpretations of the word 'pretence'. Most candidates chose to focus (some uniquely) on Hamlet's 'antic disposition'. Many, however, widened the discussion effectively to consider other manifestations of pretence at Elsinore. Some, for example, explored the importance of acting and actors in the play, or compared Hamlet's feigned madness to Ophelia's genuine loss of sanity. Others compared Claudius' pretence to be grieving Old Hamlet to Hamlet's genuine emotions, some usefully engaging in discussion of the playwright's use of soliloquy. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's pretended loyalty to Hamlet also made an interesting appearance. Some commented on dramatic methods, such as Hamlet's use of pretence in 'The Mousetrap' to capture the 'conscience of the king'.

A wide array of contextual ideas was seen, such as the tropes of Renaissance tragedy, the relationship between *Hamlet* and its various source texts, religious conceptualisations of truth and deceit, contemporary attitudes towards truth and pretence, and a variety of performance versions of the play.

Coverage of AO5 was wide and varied, and demonstrated that centres continue to be imaginative in developing candidates' critical responses to the play. Material from the critical anthologies was often effective. There was some controlled and purposeful engagement, for example, with Mack's critical argument on the freedom of speech which madness brings. Less effective responses tended to rely on critical quotations that stand separate from the candidates' arguments or generic statements related to critical approaches such as psychoanalysis, feminism or Marxism.

This is a complete Level 3 response, awarded marks of 13 + 9.

Indicate which question you are answering by marking a cross in the box ☒. If you change your mind, put a line through the box ☒ and then indicate your new question with a cross ☒.

Chosen question number:

Question 1 ☒

Question 2 ☒

Question 3 ☒

Question 4 ☒

Question 5 ☒

Question 6 ☒

Question 7 ☒

Question 8 ☒

Question 9 ☒

Question 10 ☒

Question 11 ☒

Question 12 ☒

Question 13 ☒

Question 14 ☒

Question 15 ☒

Question 16 ☒

Myron Taylor claims that the fact that 'no one in Denmark is genuine' is precisely why Denmark is 'rotten'. In productions of 'Hamlet', such as Gregory Doran's 2009 version, David Tennant's madmen seems overly pretend. He spends much of his time laughing, elevating Hamlet's power of wit. The concept of 'seeming' is one Hamlet consistently explores, questioning how one with less 'motivation' and 'due proportion' can 'seem' to. Arguably, all characters in Hamlet participate in pretence, and this is Denmark's hamartia, that leads to its destruction.

The question of pretence is most evident in the focus of the eponymous play - Hamlet. Madmen was thought of as an 'excess of any passion', as stated by Hayward Mack. Polonium is persistent with the idea that Hamlet's behaviour is 'the very ecstasy of love'. However, Ophelia's description of Hamlet reveals a dramatised madman, with Hamlet appearing to 'find his way without eyes'. Hamlet's behaviour is intensely dramatic and hyperbolic, implying it's fake. Hamlet himself aids this interpretation, with his wit, which is 'pregnant' with meaning. Claiming that 'Denmark's a prison', he outwits Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. P. Spaeth argues that Hamlet's 'words and acts are calculated mystifications,

intended not to reveal, but to conceal his true self.' He abuses the guise of madness to insult, ordering Ophelia 'to a nunnery,' unfairly condemning Gertrude's 'o'erhasty marriage,' and telling Claudius to 'seek him i'th' other place yourself.' His ability to manipulate language, evident in his ability to switch between verse and prose, allows him to take control of conversation, undermining those he wishes to. Madness was seen as a female malady, known as hysteria. Shakespeare utilizes genuine madness in Ophelia to highlight Hamlet's feigned abuse of it. In Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film, Kate Winslet appears flushed with messy hair, aiding the depiction of her as 'divided from herself and her fair judgement.' As she 'sings' of ~~virtues~~ 'true-love shown,' and a 'shroud as the mountain snow,' it is clear she is consumed with grief and pain surrounding her father and Hamlet, to the extent she cannot compartmentalise the emotion. Shakespeare includes this to emphasise the genuine foundation of Hamlet's behaviour. Hamlet's abuse of a female malady shows his privilege and his actions under the pretence of madness are destructive.

It is evident that no character in the tragedy is innocent, and their tendency to pretend is a benefactor to the tragic downfall of them all. John Dover claims that Claudius' ~~machiavellian~~ villainous actions are 'for Gertrude's sake.' However, Claudius clarifies that 'my crown, mine own ambition, and my Queen,' are the order of importance in his life. Their relationship is founded on deception, Gertrude speaking of Hamlet's 'lawless fit,' and how he 'weeps for what is done.' She disobeys her duty as a wife and a member of court to tell the truth to the king, for the sake of Hamlet. Her deception is matched by Claudius' machiavellian pretence, insisting that

ability to blur the line between pretence and genuine interiority show the extent to which characters have no trust with each other. The lack of trust and inability to distinguish between 'acting and authenticity' is a benefactor to the deterioration of Denmark.

The fact that all members of the court display a degree of pretence portrays the deep-rooted corruption in the court. As outlined in Axtell's 'poetics', a tragedy often centres around a royal family, hence making the impact of the corruption widespread. This is evident through the intense deception involved in each character's actions, and Shakespeare implies that the lack of trust contributes to the tragic downfall of the country.



Notice the consistently clear and relevant ideas about pretence that the candidate sets out. These are clearly illustrated from the play and there is consistent coverage of all of the Assessment Objectives.

Question 5

King Lear

The question asked about the presentation of the storm scene in Act III Scene ii.

The specific focus of this question on the storm scene prompted some effective engagement with stagecraft, imagery and symbolism, and also some very thoughtful discussion of how the scene is staged in varying stage and screen productions.

Less successful responses tended to outline the events of the storm scene, whereas stronger candidates demonstrated their understanding of the broader metaphorical, symbolic and narrative significance of this scene in the context of the play as a whole. As one examiner observed: 'the best responses were confident enough to decide to go beyond the scene in the scope of their response.' Many considered the physical storm as metonym for Lear's mental turmoil. Some strong responses connected Lear's tirade at the storm to his earlier outbreaks to his daughters. This was an effective way to connect scenes together and show an understanding of how Shakespeare structures the play, seeing the scene as part of a dramatic arc tracing Lear's gradual decline in power. Others chose to compare the storm to other settings Shakespeare employs, providing useful AO2 focus.

A variety of relevant and interesting contexts was seen, including contemporary notions of kingship, and how Lear's actions and the storm might reflect contemporary political turmoil. Some commented on the pre-Christian context of the play, exploring the tensions this establishes with Shakespeare's own times.

It is important to think about how successful candidates incorporate critical ideas into their work. Here we see an example of discriminating use of such material.

The critic A.C. Bradley & Lear is describing Lear as a "suffering soul" in a moral universe. Tragedy focuses on the fall of a noble individual due to a fatal flaw (hamartia) in a moral ordered universe. Bradley uses Lear as a high born figure whose error (abdication and misjudgment) triggers his downfall, but also his moral redemption. Bradley sees Lear tragedy as the journey of a man "more sinned against than sinning" suggesting a tragic dignity in Lear's suffering. However, modern critic may challenge this redemptive fantasy, viewing Lear's demise as more nihilistic than cathartic.



In this first example, the candidate offers some discriminatingly developed discussion of A.C. Bradley's ideas, applying these to the character of Lear and to concepts Shakespeare deals within the play.

Here we see the same candidate making use of critical material in a different way.

Barber ~~uses~~ ^{uses} ~~King Lear~~ interprets King Lear through psychoanalytical lens, focusing on the role of identity breakdown and the symbolic "unaccommodated man". She emphasises how Lear stripping of power becomes a metaphor for the deconstruction of identity and social role. When Lear cries "Is man no more than this?" Barber sees this as a moment of ontological crisis: the King confronting the emptiness beneath royal masks. This aligns with her broader thesis that Shakespeare uses clothing and nakedness symbolically to expose the performativity of power.



In this example, the candidate uses a psychoanalytical reading of the play by Barber to feed into their argument about the breakdown of Lear's personality and as a springboard into discussion of examples from the play.



It is a very good idea to think about how critical ideas can be incorporated within candidates' own arguments. This makes the critical ideas key generators of thinking about meanings in the play.

Question 6

King Lear

The question asked about the presentation of social order.

This proved an effective and accessible question. Most candidates were able to comment on the presentation of social order in terms of society's failings and its breakdown. Weaker responses tended to describe changes in the social order of the play and how it changed, while stronger responses identified ways in which this challenged or related to Jacobean hegemonic structures. Some responses interestingly explored key contexts such as 'the great chain of being'. Stronger candidates incorporated such ideas into detailed discussion of how, by giving up the crown, Lear breaks a key element of the social contract, leading both to his own 'punishment' and to the outbreak of civil unrest. Lower level candidates sometimes allowed such contexts to 'run away' with responses rather than focusing on their contribution to readings of the play.

There was a tendency, in less effective responses, to include (sometimes lengthy) narrative passages, loosely related to assertions about social systems, power and unrest. Stronger responses incorporated targeted textual reference seamlessly within argument. One examiner was impressed by scripts that suggested Lear 'brought about his own downfall by going against patriarchal ideals when he encouraged his daughters to speak', thus setting off a chain of events that further destabilise the world of the play.

Key contextual factors explored included the difference between the newly emergent middle class of Shakespeare's time and old-blood aristocracy, social constructions of monarchy, social rights and responsibilities and legal status. Some candidates also considered ideas of gender and social status, as well as genre contexts related to the role of social outsiders, such as Edmund and The Fool.

Integrating coverage of the Assessment Objectives is a skill and a key feature of responses awarded marks in the higher levels.

One critic says that 'King Lear is a play of passion and suffering, which we come to recognise as our own - regardless of social or religious conventions - it is universal'. This interpretation can be mirrored in the pathetic fallacy of the storm in Act 3, Scene 2 - whose "sulphurous and thund'ring fires" not only reflect Lear's inner turmoil and psychological distress, but also the social disintegration in the rest of the country as it "cracks Nature's moulds". The "Rage" of the storm symbolises the unpredictability of life, how that natural social order has been upheaved. In the 2023 adaptation of King Lear, directed by Braganha, the use of lighting and strobe effects in this scene characterise the disorientation of the stereotypical hierarchy - building the tension amongst the modern audience. Similarly, contemporary audiences would see this chaos as a legitimate threat to the feudal system that governed society. This enhances the critic's interpretation and understanding of the play, as despite not living in feudal system, modern society is still confined by social norms, structuring our lives as familiar and predictable. Therefore, the fear of a breakdown of social order is universal. Shakespeare therefore presents social order

as a crucial aspect of both personal and external interactions, vital for a peaceful society.



In this example, we see a candidate discriminatingly weaving contextual and critical ideas into their discussion of the text and the ways in which it deals with concepts related to social order.



Use of settings and symbolism can be a useful way of addressing AO2. For this question, the storm as a symbol of the breakdown of social order and the use of the map in the opening scene as a symbol for the division of Lear's kingdom are both significant in relation to social and familial breakdown in the play.

Question 7

Othello

The question asked about the extent to which Othello is a flawed hero.

This was the less popular option for *Othello*, but many thoughtful responses were seen. It encouraged approaches via genre context, and many candidates rose to this challenge. As well as the Aristotelian model of tragedy, many candidates considered how inherent misogyny, racism and social constructions of honour and reputation could define Othello as a flawed hero. A number of stronger candidates engaged thoughtfully with Leavis' views on Othello's propensity for 'self-dramatisation'.

Lower-level responses tended to catalogue features of tragic heroes or to see Othello as unproblematically flawed from the outset on the basis of his race and/or his masculinity.

Some responses considered Othello in relation to other characters – primarily Iago, Desdemona and Cassio – exploring their roles in his downfall. There was some interesting AO2 focus on the play's shift in locus from Venice to Cyprus and their roles as liminal spaces in shaping Othello's fate. There was some very effective use of stage and screen performances of the play and the interpretations they offer of Shakespeare's text.

The task naturally focused on literary context, and examiners commented on some impressive analyses of Shakespeare's conformity to, and subversion of, Aristotelian and Senecan tragic conventions. Some candidates enriched their argument by considering Nietzschean perspectives on classical tragedy. Others explored literary parallels and divergences between Cinthio's original and Shakespeare's version and the effects might have on audiences views of Othello.

In terms of AO2, many candidates noted Shakespeare's use of dramatic verse and its role in shaping our views of Othello. Others observed Shakespeare's significant pairing of characters and his use of set pieces such as the handkerchief scene and Iago and Othello's observation of Cassio.

In this extract we see a candidate offering a clear and relevant response to the task.

While Shakespeare's play 'Othello' follows Aristotle's 4 key elements for a tragic play, were Othello the tragic hero is undone by his hamartia, of which is his insecurity of his race and the obsession of his reputation, ~~leads to him~~^{it} allows him to succumb to Iago's manipulation. This shows that he was once a well respected hero but his insecurity and obsession leads to him becoming a flawed hero.

Othello can be seen as the cause of his tragedy, precisely because he is a flawed hero. His misogynistic views and hamartia, cloud his judgement and impairs him from seeking the truth. Bradley describes him as "a tragic hero, merely a victim". While he is a victim from Iago's manipulation, ~~he~~ Othello shares some responsibility of his downfall with Iago. ~~His insecurity and~~ ~~insecurity cause him~~ He believes Iago over his own wife ~~that~~ their marriage is one built on honesty but is betrayed because of his preexisting

racial self-consciousness. Leavis says "Iago represents something in Othello", this is presented through their language, ~~Othello~~ In Act 1 Scene 2, Othello speaks in blank verse written in iambic pentameter, ~~showing his and refers to Desdemona as a soft and fair~~ but once Othello gives in to Iago's provocation his language becomes fragmented and confused which mirrors his mental state and Iago's language. Their views begin to align in Act 4 Scene 2, Othello mirrors Iago's derogatory language towards women by calling her 'whore'. However, towards the end of the play he realises his mistake, 'O fool, fool, fool' his exclamation shows his anagnorisis, ~~but it is too~~ later he realises what he has done and is mistakes but it is too late.



The response includes critical ideas, and these are applied in a relevant way to the proposition of the question and to the candidate's arguments, but these ideas are not developed. Expression is clear throughout. There is some textual reference, though this is localised and not analysed in detail.



Regular close reference to the text is important in making sure that responses are closely related to the play.

The strongest candidates use their critical reading in integrated and evaluative ways in their analysis of the plays. This is well exemplified in the following extract from a Level 5 response.

The character of Othello is an incredibly flawed hero, as all human beings are. However, the nature of 'Othello's' writing leaves it up to interpretation what his flaw truly is. Critics such as Lewis and TS Eliot hold little sympathy, whilst others such as Bradley vehemently defend one of Shakespeare's most controversial protagonists. However, it is Leach who regards Othello with the most nuance - who sees the multifaceted nature of a man loved by some, hated by many, and yet with 'no geographical or cultural anchor to his being' (Honigsmann). We can therefore understand Othello as both the hero and the villain, the victim and the perpetrator, the one at blame and the one absolved of blame. Othello is contradictory, he is polarising, and he is one of Shakespeare's greatest creations.

The more empathetic to Othello's plight regard him as the flawed hero due to his nobility^{and} his language. Within the play, even his puppeteer Iago describes Othello's

= "constant, loving, noble nature"
~~"noble and loving nature"~~ and how "he'll prove to Desdemona
a most dear husband". This belief is echoed by AC
Bradley who deems Othello "the most romantic of
Shakespeare's heroes". Before Iago begins to "pour
pestilence" into Othello's ear, evidence suggests this
to be true. Some critics consider his speech to be
so romantic and lyrical it is regarded as 'Othello-music',
proclaiming "if after every tempest come such calms,
may the winds blow till they have awakened death" during
his reunion with Desdemona, often staged with
an extremely passionate embrace. His rich, lyrical
speech allows the audience to understand the depths of
his devotion to his wife, the hyperbole aiding this. While
his devotion is evident, however, we come to understand
that Othello is easily trusting, which arguably becomes
his downfall. Coleridge argues that it is not jealousy
that causes Othello to murder Desdemona, but the 'superhuman
art of Iago'. Similar to Bradley, Coleridge does not
believe Othello is to fault for the murder of Desdemona
as it was Iago's poisoning that caused such thoughts
to fester. His proclamation that he is "one that loved
not wisely but too well" solidifies him as the "greatest
poet of them all" to Bradley, and one would assume
therefore that such an interpretation is sound. However,
it is arguable that rather than a tragic declaration
of love, Othello is attempting to self-soothe and
absolve himself of guilt in his final moments.



This candidate draws on a range of readings of Othello and demonstrates a very clear understanding of how the characters and events of the play might be interpreted in different ways. They draw freely on these critical interpretations in developing their own informed personal response to the play.

Question 8

Othello

The question asked about the presentation of manipulation.

This proved to be the more popular question on *Othello*. On the whole, candidates engaged well with the task. Almost all candidates dealt, at least in part, with the theme of manipulation by considering the character of Iago, and many candidates dealt with him exclusively. This was a perfectly valid approach to the task, and was handled very well by many.

Many commented on issues such as the basis of his skilful manipulation of others in both his psychological insight into those he despises and in his linguistic felicity. The latter was examined in detail through consideration of Shakespeare's use of deliberately audible asides, imagery, insinuation, echoing, rhetorical questions, false but credible and eloquent assertions of love and loyalty. There were, however, less effective examples, in which responses drifted into being a less focused character analysis of Iago. Some candidates also considered other examples of manipulation in the play. Examples include Othello's manipulation of the Senate, Desdemona's efforts to manipulate her husband in lobbying for Cassio, and Othello's final speech in an attempt to manipulate posterity.

Lower-level responses tended to rely heavily on Coleridge's assertion of Iago's 'motiveless malignity' with little consideration of what this might mean and how it shapes understanding of the play. Stronger answers engaged in a range of ways with whether Coleridge is correct in his views, thinking about a variety of potential motivations for Iago's manipulative behaviour, including racial prejudice, and sexual and/or professional jealousy. There was also much discussion of the ways in which manipulation is tempered by the play's repeated assertion that Iago is 'honest'. Some responses took this further by exploring how male characters manipulate the identities of women, or how Iago also manipulates the audience, suggesting that he weaponises the racial prejudices of a Jacobean audience to create a first impression of Othello, before he enters the stage.

A wealth of contextual and critical material was seen. Answers made good use of writings by Leo Africanus, Elizabeth I's expulsion of black people from England, and a number of candidates used the character of Aaron from *Titus Andronicus* as a comparative literary context. Some included reference to various staged or adapted versions of the play. AO5 was often addressed effectively, many candidates demonstrating the ability to apply purposefully critical concepts derived from – amongst others – Loomba and Honigman.

The following extract is from a borderline Level 4/Level 5 response.

It is plausible to suggest Iago as an embodiment of moral and existential nihilism; unlike Coleridge's popularly coined label, " motiveless malignancy", it is his pining thirst to exhibit his perceived sense of self which propels him into action. Iago parallels the tortured artist archetype, who, feeling misunderstood by their contemporaries, resort to ~~a state~~ expressing their existential anguish through their craft - Specifically the art of manipulation. In this sense, he adeptly exploits the tragedy of ~~Desdemona~~ Othello and Desdemona, to validate and externalise the notion that, " outward action doth demonstrate the native act and figure of the heart." Living within the realms of Venetian society, a setting famed for its rich social order, he strives to liberate his inherent and true self, which he is forced to negate, in order to someday "wear (his) heart upon (his) sleeve." He seeks to obliterate the existing world which so starkly contradicts the man he wishes to be acknowledged and admired as, thereby infusing it with chaos and thus significance through the exercise of his free will. He posits that if one's will is "trained with industry", it flourishes - reflecting the renaissance humanist ideas of the early modern period. He contends that one can become the architect of their fate, "the

gardeners" of "our wills", a firm belief which compels him to embark upon an active plot of manipulative schemes, one that will serve and allow his ego to flourish, rather than fall victim to the capriciousness of fate. Moreover, he relays, "he hath a daily beauty in his life, that makes me ugly", the oxymoronic statement eliciting that moral virtues and soulful aesthetics fail to resonate with him; a deficiency that he is acutely aware of within himself. Yet, in executing his plot, he systematically dismantles those who raise him of his persuasive inadequacies. His aim is to debate them to his own level or lower, acknowledging that even in moral decay, they lack the intellect and willpower he relishes. Rather than reform his own moral character to align with theirs, he seeks to obliterate the existing world through his deceptive schemes, endeavouring instead to induce the "monstrous birth" - the destruction of those he deems "fools" - thereby depriving them of their virtue and beauty, desiring for all to perceive the starkly nihilistic reality that is so superficially ~~obscured~~ obscured beneath the pretence of social order. Thus, this perverse motif of impregnation reflects Iago's aspirations to forge a new breed of humanity - nihilistic and cruel - a race that would accept ^{his character} ~~him~~ ~~at birth~~, rather than compel him to exist within the shadows of tedious schemes and petty manipulation. He welcomes chaos as the ultimate objective of this ephemeral social order.



Consideration of AO2 is here embedded within the candidate's discussion of Iago and the ways in which he manipulates the events of the play. The candidate's discussion of methods integrates seamlessly with their approach to the topic under discussion.

Consideration of the playwright's methods is key in successful responses. Here we see an example of a candidate on the Level 2/Level 3 borderline.

Shakespeare presentation of Iago as a master
manipulator illustration manipulation to the brim.
He uses Iago unique diction toward the

characters as a way to get into their heads. He
 Shakespeare manipulates the structure of verse &
 in Othello through enjambment & seiza to convey
 emotional shift & mental unravelling like in Act 4 Scene 1
 when Othello Jago tells Othello about Cassio's disloyalty
 by ~~showing~~ ^{he} telling him hear the conversation between
 Jago & Cassio about Bianca. He has when telling
 him he used plot of seiza as to show how precedent
 this information will therefore ~~surprising~~ ^{surprising} mental
 unravelling in Othello "Stand you ~~apart~~ ^{apart}...
 "Whilst you were here overwhelmed with your grief--
 ... ^{insulting} such a man-- ^{Cassio} come hither,"
 his use of the word grief ^{surfaces} sorrow
 into Othello & the continuous pauses causes Othello
 to feel unravelled ^{even} being he is about to
 receive imminent information on his wife's infidelity.



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In this extract, the candidate clearly understands that Shakespeare's use of verse is a key issue. However, this is not clearly exemplified by careful reference to the text and through analysis of the effects Shakespeare achieves.

Question 9

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The question asked about the play's use of contrast.

This question elicited a wealth of interesting ideas from candidates at a variety of levels. Many responses drew on the play's many straightforward contrasts and divides: between, for instance, Athens and the forest, male and female characters, human and fairy realms, waking and dreaming, higher- and lower-class characters, or between different generations. More discriminating and sophisticated responses also considered a range of the play's many conceptual contrasts, discussing issues such as the contrasts between liberty and imprisonment, between illusion and reality, between individual and society, between free will and constraint, between love and hatred. Such discussions generated some very thoughtful ideas. Many candidates were able to place their arguments within a broader consideration of Shakespearean comedy and its tropes, including the ways in which the play often comes perilously close to tragedy.

There was some very good consideration of AO2 – though this was not always addressed – considering a variety of Shakespeare's methods, including his use of rhymed and unrhymed verse, the dramatic function of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the pairing and contrasting of characters, use of contrasting settings.

Contextual and critical ideas were often relevantly and clearly used, many candidates drawing on social-, political- and gender-based contexts and concepts. Many also made use of literary contexts, drawing on other examples of Shakespearean comedy, as well as *Romeo and Juliet*. In some responses these references appeared mainly as information, but in other cases they were developed in informative and fruitful ways. References to the almost ubiquitous 'green world' were often less effective, as candidates tended to leave this phrase to speak for itself without either referencing its provenance in the work of Northrop Frye or explaining how and why this is a valuable concept.

Here we see a response falling in the Level 3 range, awarded marks of 9 + 6.

Shakespeare makes use of contrast through many different mediums in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Often creating opposing views for ambiguity.

Contrast can be seen in the meters that the characters speak in. The Athenian nobles mainly speak in Iambic Pentameter or Blank verse to create a sense of structure and order whereas the Fairies often speak in Catalectic Trochaic Tetrameter which is a more lyrical and confusing dialect. This contrast in speech creates a divide in social order and separates the two worlds of Athens and the woods. Shakespeare also uses language and meter to showcase a contrast and divide of social class.

The Mechanicals are shown speaking in prose for the majority of the play. In Act 3, Scene 1, Bottom begins the scene with, 'Are we all met?' Not only is this in prose which showcases hierarchy and class divide but it also expresses the contrasting power dynamics within the mechanicals. Peter Quince is the unofficial leader of the Mechanicals and yet Nick Bottom is always ~~an~~ attempting to usurp this role. This expresses the contrasting power dynamics even within the lower class.

Shakespeare continues his use of contrasting elements in the setting of the play. He depicts the city of Athens as grand and structured whereas the woods are shown to be lawless and disordered, in complete contrast to Athens. In his essay, Frye states that each world looks unreal when seen from the light of the other. This critic agrees with the idea of contrast being a key tool used in the play. Especially when looking from the perspective of the Athenians, the woods must seem magical and dangerous in their irrationality.

Not only does Shakespeare incorporate contrast into his play through the opinions of his characters but also by altering his depiction of certain characters to be unexpected in Elizabethan society.

Shakespeare's choice to display the Fairies as neutral/good characters would have contrasted with the views of audiences at the time. Fairies and sprites were seen as evil and mischievous spirits. Whilst Puck could be considered mischievous and perhaps irrational, he is certainly not evil. Oberon states, "How now, mad spirit?" when speaking to Puck which again suggests, that he is playful and mischievous but not evil as Elizabethan society believed. Shakespeare therefore creates a contrast between the expected in society and the reality in his play.

Shakespeare further creates contrast in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' through his portrayal of gender roles. Act 1, Scene 1 begins with Theseus, Duke of Athens, speaking to his wife, Hippolyta. The power imbalance between them is immediately noticeable as his

First line, 'Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour draws on apace' asserts dominance over her. In his essay, McGuire details how Hippolyta's silence affects the play and the gender roles within. Shakespeare however, then uses parallelism to contrast this dynamic in Act 2, Scene 1 when we are first introduced to Titania and Oberon. Titania appears to assert dominance over Oberon through her language and poetic meter, speaking in Iambic Pentameter whilst Oberon speaks in Cathectic Trochaic Tetrameter, as well as her unwillingness to comply with Oberon's demands. When he demands, she states, 'Not for thy fairy kingdom, Fairies, away!' which shows not only her defiant strength but also the power she holds over others as Queen of the Fairies. This contrasts largely with Hippolyta's weak demeanour despite being ~~there~~ a fierce Amazon warrior of Greek myth.

Contrast is shown in the play through the portrayal of reality and imagination. For example, the 'love-in-idleness' flower causes imaginary love between people. In the case of the Athenians, Lysander falls deeply in love with Helena.

Previously, Lysander had been besotted with Hermia. Through this creative development we can see the contrast between true emotion and fake. The true love between Lysander and Hermia is shown as they choose a path with the least violence, escaping Athens. Lysander and Hermia discuss their plan with Helena, 'A time that lovers' slights doth still conceal - though Athens' gates have we devised to steal'. This shows the ~~true~~ real love they both express, however, to contrast this, when Lysander is under the spell and in "love" with Helena, it causes emotions such as rage to appear, causing violence within the play as both men draw their swords.

Shakespeare further plays into the themes of real and imagined through the mechanicals. The mechanicals' play, 'Pyramus and Thisbe' showcases the contrast between real and imagined through the mechanicals inability to differentiate between the two. They show this clearly when in their ~~opening~~ prologue, they reassure the Athenian audience that the lion is not real and will not harm them. This shows the contrast between real and imagined, as Barber states in his

essay, 'Like children, they do not differentiate between real and imaginary events. This is a contrast to an Elizabethan audience who were very aware of a play as a work of fiction and often spoke to the characters, sometimes even climbing on stage.

Shakespeare presents contrast in his play through the introduction of tragic themes despite the comedic nature of the play. The continued depiction of violence in the play showcases its contrasting nature.

Buchanan states that the play includes violent undertones. She continues to say that most violence or threats of violence are committed by men. This criticism is solidified through Demetrius' threat to leave Helena to 'the mercy of wild beasts' whilst they are in the woods. This violent nature and description of 'wild beasts' further the idea of tragic undertones in the play. Shakespeare however, later counters this by fulfilling the expected denouement of a comedy, marriage. ~~The~~ Shakespeare seems to exaggerate the comedic ending to outweigh the earlier tragic contrast by having three

marriages rather than just one. Hopkins develops this idea of multiple marriages as the denouement in her criticism, 'marriage is comic closure', expressing the exaggerated nature of it. Shakespeare likely did this to remain ambiguous.

Shakespeare utilises ~~ambiguity~~ contrast to remain ambiguous in his writing. This was a necessity of the era as if any work was too controversial it was censored by the 'Master of Revels' whose job it was to keep controversy about the monarchy and religion out of plays. This is why contrast is so ingrained in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Shakespeare had to remain ambiguous to avoid punishment. This includes ambivalence in gender roles, social status, hierarchy and many more.

Contrast is presented through gender as Hermia ~~is~~ juxtaposes what a woman was supposed to act like. A young girl of the time was to marry ~~someone~~ whoever her father chose and be completely compliant to their whims, Hermia however, defies Egeus and

demetrius in Act 1, Scene 2 with the simple line, 'So is Lysander'. With three words Hermia manages to contrast everything that was expected of her. This social inversion is continued throughout the play.

Overall, Shakespeare's continued use of contrast in his play not only disorients the audience but also maintains a sub level of ambiguity for the playwright. Playing into many ~~major~~ major themes of the play such as setting, structure and power dynamics, contrast is ever present and vital to 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.



This is a clear and relevant response. The tendency to recount events without specific reference to the text and the more general nature of analysis in sections leads to the mark falling at the lower end of the range.

Question 10

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The question asked about the presentation of the four young lovers.

This was the less popular of the two questions on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Many candidates explored in detail the 'ins and outs' of the shifting relationships between the characters. In the case of less effective responses, this tended to be rather narrative and descriptive, while more able candidates were able to explore how the twists and turns of the plot illustrate the fragility and vulnerability of the characters concerned. There was also some useful discussion of the ways in which these events are experienced differently by the male and female characters. Surprisingly few responses commented on the ways in which Shakespeare's presentation of the young lovers leads to confusion – for the characters in the play and for audiences alike. Several candidates considered especially carefully the character of Hermia and her presentation in the opening scene of the play, where we see her placed in relief against an array of significant male characters. Other common issues for exploration included a comparison of the young lovers to the older lovers in the play – Theseus and Hippolyta, Oberon and Titania – and to the Mechanicals.

As with Question 9, not all candidates were effective in addressing AO2. However, useful comments were made on methods such as the use of verse, the final scene with its play-within-the-play, the shifting pairings and alliances of characters, and Shakespeare's employment of different settings.

Here we see an extract from a Level 4 response.

Finally, Shakespeare utilises the mechanicals to display the possible ending that the lovers could have faced. As argued by Fender, "the mechanicals are a parody of the lovers" which can be applied to their performance of ~~Pyramus~~ Pyramus and Thisbe. Ryan argues that the final scene of the play is unnecessary, however without it, parallels would not be able to be drawn between the fate of the lovers and the mechanicals performance. The meta mechanical nature of the play within a play highlights to audiences that the deans of Pyramus and Thisbe could have been the lovers. C.L Barber argues highlights the mechanicals literal thinking and the "naivety of folk dramatics" as they are literal with their "moonshine" and "chink at the wall" during their performance. In the end of the play, the lovers return back to Athens to "take their allotted places in society" (Hopkins). This cyclical

Structure utilised by Shakespeare displays the dream like nature of the play as the audiences are unsure if the events occurred as Smith highlights Shakespeares "Frendian view ~~aspect~~ of illusion are strikingly contemporary".
Moreover, Shakespeare utilises Puck's character to close the play, ~~also~~ finally asking for forgiveness to the audience (and potentially the lovers) with "give me your hands, ~~for~~ if we be friends, And Robin shall restore amends".



Integrated coverage of the Assessment Objectives is a feature of stronger responses. Notice the way the candidate focuses on Shakespeare's use of Pyramus and Thisbe as a dramatic device to highlight the position of the four young lovers, also effectively incorporating critical materials.



It is important to be specific in identifying the dramatic methods that Shakespeare uses and the ways in which these shape audiences' responses. This is key in meeting the requirements of AO2.

Question 11

Measure for Measure

The question asked about the presentation of the play's ending.

Candidates across the range were able to identify the troubling ambiguity of the play's ending and the extent to which it can be considered a comedy. Many engaged with this difficulty by considering the play's ambiguous use of marriage and exploring whether these marriages represent some kind of restoration and resolution at the end of the drama or whether, instead, they carry their own disturbing overtones that constitute *Measure for Measure* a 'problem play'. The significance of the title of the play and its rooting in biblical notions of justice, punishment and judgement was considered by many candidates, along with some interesting exploration of how this might have been seen differently by Shakespeare's contemporary audience as compared to audiences today. Another popular focus for discussion was related to the relative outcomes for the male and female characters and the extent to which the play's ending provides an imbalanced 'justice'.

Discussion of Shakespeare's method in employing a trial-like setting for the final scene provided some interesting debate. Some commented on this as a liminal setting 'near the city gate', reflecting the final scene's attempt to bring together the oppositions the play has revealed. Others considered the significance of the Duke's use of disguise. Some candidates made use of stage and screen performances of the play, and stronger candidates gave thoughtful consideration to how these interpretations affected their personal responses to the troubling ending of the play.

Strong conclusions are a feature of higher-level responses. Here we see two examples.

.....
Finally, the play's ending is presented as far too artificially constructed. The duke's role of being a playwright, and extension of

Shakespeare appears to take precedent over his actual presence as a character within the play. This sense of artificiality is constructed in the Duke's desire to present the ending as a performance: 'you must walk by us on our other hand'. The duke physically stages the characters within the line and prepares for the many reveals within the final act. There is also a complete disregard for Isabella's exposure of her feelings towards Angelo. Condemnatory, at the very least, she describes him as 'in all his dressings... titles, forms... an archvillain', 'a 'cattiff' whom she implores the duke to punish. There is an overwhelming hatred towards Angelo in Isabella's criticism, presented in the dramatic language she used to describe him. The idea of Angelo as a 'cattiff' and 'archvillain' presents him as such a cruel, ~~unpleasant~~ villain beyond comprehension. Isabella boldly and bravely exposed the crimes of Angelo, a man with an 'unsullied' reputation for moral righteousness, and risked her own reputation in doing so. Despite this, she concludes her presence in the play by pleading for his life, albeit on behalf of Mariana, as if her hatred for Angelo was conveniently resolved. This act, and subsequent disregard for her hatred, contributes to the artificial conclusion of measure for measure, as it seems to be motivated by the structural need to find resolution in comic closure.



A strong focus on the ways in which meanings are shaped is maintained until the end of the response here.

Here is a different kind of conclusion.

In conclusion, the ending of 'Measure for Measure' exemplifies Shakespeare criticising authoritarian and Machiavellian ruling, through the display of ultimate power and control from the Duke. It ~~is~~ also ~~poses~~ the questions of whether justice is truly restored and whether 'Measure for Measure' should be classified a comedy due to the forced and unsettling marriages. Through the revelation of true events manipulated by the Duke, it can be seen that all other characters are left powerless in a society where the ruler must be trusted due to the divine right of kings, suggesting that the role in power is God-given and therefore shall not be questioned. Regardless of this, a Jacobean and modern audience would question ~~base in~~ authority and their differing methods of control exemplified by the Duke and Angelo.



The candidate draws together the arguments made during the response, pointing to ways of interpreting the play's treatment of troublesome endings in the play.

Question 12

Measure for Measure

The question asked about the presentation of death.

Fewer candidates writing on *Measure for Measure* opted for this question. Those who did explored the play's use of death in both literal and figurative terms. It was somewhat surprising that so many, in a play so steeped in death, restricted themselves to using the sentence on Claudio as a springboard for discussion of Angelo's hypocrisy. Few mentioned the Duke's 'Be absolute for death...' or Claudio's 'Ay, but to die...', which are key markers in the play's consideration of death and mortality. There was also little reference made to Barnardine and his stolid refusal to die. Candidates offered insight into a range of interesting ways in which the idea of death can be figuratively applied to the events of the play. There was, amongst others, consideration of the death of justice and honesty in the Viennese court, the death of honour and the death of social cohesion.

Many responses engaged in discussion of the play's genre. They observed its designation as a comedy in the First Folio, going on to question the extent to which the play flirts with tragedy (and death) and is to be seen as a 'problem play'. Several considered the play in relation to the political world of Shakespeare's day, exploring notions of statesmanship and social order. Others discussed Shakespeare's use of Cinthio's story of Epitia from *Hecatommithi*, a similar tale that ends in tragedy and Whetstone's drama *Promos and Cassandra*, which includes more comic elements.

Here is a complete script that falls low in Level 3.

Shakespeare uses dream in 'Measure for Measure' to criticise the authorities of the play. We can see this through the character of Angelo who is shown to be hypocritical in his dream sentence of Claudio, and that of the Duke who ~~uses his~~ ^{uses} ~~the~~ dream scene to uncover secret wrong-doings in the play.

It could be argued that Shakespeare uses dream in 'Measure for Measure' to criticise strict religious authority through the use of Angelo. Cammeron argues that "in an era of Puritanism and its associated excesses and hypocrisies, a portrait of a man outwardly upstanding but inwardly seeming with lust must have ring particularly true." This can certainly be seen in Angelo who, described as a "seemer" and "prelate", would have been recognised as hypocritical in his strict religion by the audience of the time. This criticism is amplified by the plot of Claudio's arrest ~~in~~ ^{by} Angelo due to "too much liberty" in which Angelo insists that they "must not make a scarecrow of the law," and that "he must die". Through his sentence of dream,

Shakespeare presents an image of a man who is true to the law in which he refers to "pattern out my death" if he "do so offend". However, ~~the~~ when he asks Isabella to ~~"give up"~~ "Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness" the audience are presented with a man who has thought of denying the law in a way which could be considered ~~by many to be~~ worse than that he is sentencing a man to death for ^{and} therefore Angelo's authority over Claudio's death becomes much more shocking. We can certainly see Hampton-Reeve's view that "the play is tightly bound up with the cultural pulse of 1604" as Angelo, a follower of strict Puritan faith, would have echoed the ~~rule~~ rule of Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans; therefore we could suggest Shakespeare uses Angelo's ~~position~~ and his use of Claudio's death to ~~express~~ ~~imagine~~ ~~suggest~~ ~~to his audience~~ ^{flatter} what could happen under if the positive possibility of King James' idea of via media (a middle way) in religion, rather than the strict religious ideal which England had previously seen in its authority.

*to an audience who would not have seen the harsh punishment as fair.

Furthermore, using the death sentence of Claudio, we could argue that ~~Shakespeare~~ Shakespeare not only enhances that religious authority, but ~~also~~ in the Machiavellian authority ~~too~~ through the character of the Duke. Although Brookbank argues that "the Duke lies as white lies", we could argue that the Duke uses ~~the~~ disguise of Claudio's death ~~intentionally~~ ~~intentionally~~ for immoral purposes. This can be seen as the Duke uses Angelo's ^{Larar} ~~conviction~~ sentencing ^{to death} to test Isabella's faith, ~~as~~ ^{where} ~~Marion~~ Marianna tells her "lend me your weeds" and to "weel". This cruel manipulation it has been emphasised in some versions, one of which Isabella takes one minute to weel ~~so that~~ ^{for Angelo's life.} ~~Angelo is not put to death.~~ Perhaps we could suggest ^{The displayed} ~~and~~ power that the Duke has over death ^{would have as} ~~Shakespeare's attempt~~ ^{a modern} ~~modern~~ audience ~~would~~ feel unnerved, therefore we could suggest Shakespeare uses this ^{suggestion.} ~~to~~ enhance the Machiavellian intentions of the Duke, as perhaps cruel rather than to a "saving purpose" (Brookbank) Furthermore, we could suggest that the Duke's manipulation of death through Claudio is immoral, as he states "Claudio lost his head", even though Claudio is on stage and "muffled".

Shakespeare perhaps uses this dramatic way to emphasise the Duke's ultimate power over life and death, ~~as an audience would visually see the authority of the play reverse someone from death and will authority within the will of his subjects, his absolute appearing perhaps unalien to a modern audience but somewhat~~ normal at a time where sexual ~~crime~~ sin would be knowledge of "the community" (Maus).

Therefore, we could ~~alternatively~~ suggest that Shakespeare uses the ~~overarching~~ ^{over death} authority of the Duke to criticise the society's authority over private lives and ~~the ability to put~~ or individuality.

Therefore we could suggest that Shakespeare uses death in the play to criticise strict religious authority as hypocritical and overarching authority as too unalien into the private will of civilians.



The coverage across the Assessment Objectives is clear (though there is little attention paid to AO5), but the ideas are not always developed in detail.

Question 13

The Taming of the Shrew

The question asked about the extent to which the play is a dark comedy.

Most candidates saw 'darkness' in the treatment of Kate and responses tended to explore how different audiences might respond to the comedy in the light of Petruchio's apparent misogyny. Less effective answers were characterised by the recounting of a sequence of episodes from the play that are darkly comedic. More developed responses considered such moments in the play in the light of debates surrounding gender politics and the position of women in Jacobean England. There was some purposeful, and at times nuanced, discussion (drawing on George Bernard Shaw's comments in the critical anthology) on the contrasting responses likely between audiences of Shakespeare's day and modern audiences. This led to some intelligent debate of the extent to which the play could be viewed as a 'dark' comedy or, indeed, comedy at all. Such genre-based discussion proved potentially fertile ground.

There was some consideration of the dramatic methods Shakespeare employs, but this tended to be a less effective element of responses. One examiner, however, commented on a candidate who 'had looked in detail at the Induction and saw Sly's treatment at the hands of The Lord as Shakespeare's way of preparing the audience for the darkness later in the comedy'.

Introductions in strong responses often set out a strong stall, making evident the candidate's line of argument.

At first ~~glance~~ glance, it is tempting to assume that the taming process in 'The Taming of the Shrew' can be viewed as dark, as Petruchio asserts his complete dominance over his wife. However, this interpretation can be challenged by the inherent, rebellious nature of Katherine, as she deviates from ideal social norms about Elizabethan women. Moreover, the innocent and naive nature of Lucentio causes audiences to examine the lighthearted nature of Shakespeare's comedy, ~~through~~ through is Petrarchan love. As such, Shakespeare ~~not~~ ultimately combats the idea that ^{the} 'Taming of the Shrew' (Taming) is a dark comedy through the humorous, rebellious nature of Katherine, and the ^{innocence} deception ~~created~~ Lucentio expresses.



Here we see a candidate making a very clear case statement of their argument in relation to the comedy of The Taming of the Shrew.

This is an introduction from a Level 3 response.

The taming of the shrew would be viewed as a dark comedy to much of the plays ^{current spectators and readers} ~~audience and spectators~~, most likely due to the offensive nature and the 'tamed' female protagonist, ~~especially~~ particularly to a modern audience in a ~~social~~ society where gender roles are constantly being discussed, rearranged and evolving. Shakespear incorporates multiple conventions of a ~~an~~ typical Shakespearian comedy, starting of the plays ^{induction} ~~with~~ ^{with} an elaborate practical joke, writing this as a play within a play and seeking a comic resolution.



Here we see that clear ideas are established, drawing in some relevant contextual factors related to modern-day reception of the play.

Question 14

The Taming of the Shrew

The question asked about the play's use of irony.

Several candidates worked with the suggestion that Shakespeare is using the content of the play ironically to challenge societal norms and the gendered nature of Elizabethan society. For example, they considered the transformation of Bianca at the end of the play and the extent to which she and other female characters indulge in subversive behaviours. Others suggested that although ostensibly 'tamed', there is in fact little change in Kate's behaviour in the course of the play.

Examiners saw effective engagement with the question of how comedy functions as a genre and the extent to which *The Taming of the Shrew* and its troubling content can be (or should be) considered comic. There was some interesting discussion of the idea of performance in the play and the influence of commedia dell'arte. Both production and reception contexts were considered in relation to the content of the play, with a recognition that modern day audiences are likely to respond quite differently than Shakespeare's original audience. Several candidates also commented on the relationship between the play's Induction and the main drama, considering the ways in which it is important in establishing the ironies of the play.

Here is an extract from a Level 4 response.

Shakespeare introduces his ironic presentation of social class as a performance, through the deception of Christopher Sly in the induction scenes. During the second induction scene, due to being dressed as and treated as a Lord, Sly questions: "Am I a Lord? ... Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?". The noun 'Lord' ^{connotes} power, nobility and divinity, which means Sly's character associates this power with materialistic items and possessions rather than inner merit, as the only evidence he has of his ~~divinity~~ supposed divinity is clothing and possessions. Shakespeare ~~highlights~~ ~~the materialistic view of social class,~~

~~and uses~~ ^{uses} dramatic irony to satirize the materialistic view of social class because the audience is aware of Sly's true identity and social standing, but he himself is not. The critic Margie Burns suggests that "the play's unity is established through the frame created in the induction" which implies that Shakespeare's use of irony and thematic focus will be mirrored in the main play. Shakespeare's use of the verb "dream" repeatedly, ~~connotes~~ ^{signifies} illusion and fantasy, which introduces the idea of social ~~false reality~~ class being a performance, not based in logic or ~~truth~~ ^{reality}. Burns's view of the play is evident.



Discussion of the dramatist's methods is key in this section of the paper. Here we see a candidate thinking in detail about the implications of the Induction to the play.



Think about the playwright's use of specific dramatic methods. What is their effect on the meaning of the play, and how might audiences respond? Might these responses have changed over time? If so, why? Contexts can then be brought in to enrich arguments.

Question 15

Twelfth Night

The question asked about the presentation of deception.

The theme of deception proved accessible to a wide range of candidates. Most were able to connect this effectively to various dimensions of the play's plot and many also connected it to Shakespeare's dramatic methods. Less effective responses tended simply to identify moments of deception without deeper analysis of the significance or presentation of such moments in the play. Others, however, offered more fully-fledged responses. Typical, in this respect, was the widespread discussion of Shakespeare's use of disguise and costume in the play, with some candidates offering discriminating analysis of Viola's cross-dressing as Cesario. This was often connected to gender roles within Jacobean England, the idea of the Carnavalesque, and theatrical practices of male players in the age of Shakespeare. Another popular focus for discussion was the gulling of Malvolio, a topic on which candidates proved able to make purposeful connections to the mocking of Puritanism and Malvolio's desire for social advancement. This also led to some debate surrounding the morality of deception and deceit. Some candidates also considered the extent to which characters engage in self-deception, such as the Duke's self-deceptive and self-indulgent views of love or Malvolio's belief in his own importance.

There was a trend amongst some candidates to use the Viola/Cesario deception plot to suggest that Shakespeare was making statements about gender fluidity. The discussion of reception contexts is, of course, important, but candidates should be aware of the potential difficulties of such attempts to ascribe more modern intentions and perspectives retrospectively. Careful thought and phrasing is required when adopting and pursuing such arguments.

There was some useful discussion of Shakespeare's use of comedy, observing the prevalence of deception and disguise within the genre, but also observing how near these devices come to making the play a very dark comedy.

Detailed consideration of Shakespeare's methods was often a weaker element of candidate responses. Here, by contrast, we see a strong example.

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare presents deception as fundamental to comedy as much of the hilarity he constructs is derived from the deception of his characters, predominantly due to disguise. Shakespeare establishes deception through disguise as key to the play in Act 1, 2 when Viola asks the captain 'conceal me what I am, and be my aid / for such disguise as haply shall become / the form of my intent.' In this way, Shakespeare establishes the dramatic irony, which propels the humour throughout the play as the audience can enjoy the confusion and misunderstanding ~~that~~ that follow because they know Cesario's true identity. Additionally, by including the audience in Viola's secret, Shakespeare creates a connection between her and the audience, thus allowing them to become truly invested in her storyline, so that they ^{further} sympathise with her when she accidentally deceives Olivia. Critic Walter Kerr argues that 'comedy will speak of nothing

but limitation' and this is evident in Shakespeare's disguise of Viola, which causes humour, but was derived from her limited options for security ~~as~~ ~~was~~ when she washed up in Illyria. Furthermore, Shakespeare highlights the importance of deception, through disguise, in comedy following the aftermath of 'Caesar's' introduction to Clivia. In her soliloquy, Viola states 'Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,' Through this apostrophe, the way Shakespeare directly addresses 'Disguise' places the blame on disguise (and therefore deception) itself, rather than on the individual directly doing the deceiving, which clearly emphasises the importance he places on deception as a catalyst for comedy. Additionally, Kerr also asserts that 'Comedy occurs when there is no way out' and this appears to align with Shakespeare's own view as he explores the extent to which Viola's disguise amplifies the comedic confusion in the play. Shakespeare ends Viola's



The candidate offers an extended consideration of the role of Viola's adoption of disguise and how this feeds into notions of deception in the play, and the ways in which this relates to the responses of the audience.

Question 16

Twelfth Night

The question asked about the use of different types of comedy in the play.

The genre-based focus of this question led candidates to explore a variety of issues related to the tropes and conventions of comedy. Less effective answers, one examiner observed, 'struggled to comment on different 'types' of comedy – too descriptive in approach.' More effective responses, however, provided controlled and well-informed discussion of the tropes of festive comedy, connecting this out effectively to varied critical perspectives. Some candidates considered how dark some of Shakespeare's use of comedy is in this play, offering, for example, some confident and purposeful analysis of the baiting of Malvolio as a satirical response to Puritanism

Other areas of coverage included Shakespeare's use of physical, verbal and visual comedy, the comic effects of deception and gender reversal. Some wrote about how comedy was created through the suffering of others, particularly Malvolio (which was compared to the cruel sports of Shakespeare's time, such as bear baiting). Others discussed the ending of the play and the ways in which it moves to typical comic resolution. Some candidates did a good job of developing meaningful comparison between contemporary and modern audiences and how their views of the events of the play might differ, but in some cases such discussions tended to result in gross generalisations that were not so helpful. The role of Feste in the play was considered by many candidates, including analysis of his (and other characters') humorous wordplay and outrageous behaviour.

The best essays dealt with a range of types of comedy, including farce, slapstick, and the thematic and structural value of comedy, including the cultural significance and traditions of *Twelfth Night* and comedy as an antidote to hypocrisy and pomposity.

It is important to ensure that contextual material is not treated as separate from the rest of the response.

Shakespeare further uses comedy to create a comedy of festivity. Twelfth Night alludes to the festive celebration of where roles can be seen turnt upside down. Thus it can be argued Shakespeare uses different types of comedies to perhaps allude to the m- topsy turvy "celebration of the Twelfth Night. Shakespeare's presentation of the comic pairing of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew highlights the Shakespearean use of a festive comedy. As Sir Andrew claims he knows "three or four languages" yet when asked the most simple French "pourquoi" he is exposed for his foolish lies. A hilarious scene can be expressed through the comic pairing as Sir Andrew's confidence is exposed for the sense of comedic effect. The comic pair is further scene to embody Shakespeare's festive comedy as ~~the comic~~ through music. Shakespeare dispices the pair as in constant jolly 'O the Twelfth day of December' singing at the most absurd time of day. Yet even when ~~it~~ demanded to stop by Malvolio "she is very willing to bid you farewell", the comic pair continues to 'sing'.



Here we see a candidate clearly and relevantly embedding ideas of festive comedy into their discussion of Twelfth Night.



It is good if candidates can weave context into their own arguments, rather than treating it as information that is somehow separate from the text.

Question 17

Les Blancs

The question asked about the presentation of Eric.

This was the more popular of the questions offered on *Les Blancs*. Candidates at all levels were able to approach Hansberry's presentation of Eric. Less able candidates tended to offer a series of simple observations about his character and his role in the play. More developed responses, however, were able to consider how he is representative of broader complexities and issues at play in the drama. Useful discussion was seen in relation to the legacies of colonialism and the complexities of Eric's position as a man of mixed race. Many candidates were effectively prepared to discuss Eric's violent conception as the son of Major Rice and Aquah and how he therefore represents in many ways the figurative 'rape' of Ztembe.

There was much well-informed discussion of Hansberry's dramatic methods, and especially the stage direction in which Eric is first introduced and the ways in which it delineates his liminal role. Others explored the ways in which he might be fruitfully compared to his brothers, Tshembe and Abioseh. There was some especially effective comparison with Tshembe – who is an equally but differently conflicted character. Other fruitful discussion was directed at Eric's role in the play's final showdown.

Contextual issues were effectively dealt with by many candidates, who were well aware of – and able in many cases effectively to apply – the significance of the play in relation to the American Civil Rights movement, the politics of African independence, and literary contexts (primarily Genet's *Les Nègres*), but also including other significant postcolonial works by Hansberry and others.

Here is an extract from a Level 3 response.

Eric is initially characterised through the dialogue and perception of other characters. The first description of him is through Madame Neilson who refers to him as 'Caliban'. This alludes to the Shakespearean play 'The Tempest' where Caliban is imprisoned for attempting to rape Miranda. This is ironic as Eric hasn't committed that crime, but is a product of rape as his mother was raped by Major Rice, leading

to the life of Eric. Madame Nelson, at the end of the play, states that 'Eric was the living denial of everything he stood for: the testament to three centuries of rape and self-acquittal. He [the Reverend] wanted the child dead; wanted your mother to die.' ~~That~~ She also victimises the Reverend, referring to him as 'helpless' due to the aforementioned. ~~Harry~~ This admittance of the threat that Eric's life was to the reputation of the mission conceivably acts as the reasoning for Madame Nelson's hostility towards Eric. It's also interesting that she talks to Eric 'without turning her head' to acknowledge her presence.



We see here a candidate responding clearly to some different ways in which the character of Eric is presented, including how he is seen by other characters. The discussion also builds in some clear and interesting reflection on contexts.

Question 18

Les Blancs

The question asked about the use of stagecraft.

Fewer candidates opted for this task. However, its focus on Hansberry's stagecraft in the play meant that many candidates developed a much more concentrated and effective focus on AO2. It was pleasing to see that many of the responses to this question demonstrated candidates' abilities to connect the dramatic methods the playwright employs to the thematic concerns of the play, its contexts and its plot.

Candidates appeared well-prepared to answer this question and could write in detail about Hansberry's use of staging, sound and costume in the play. Detailed consideration was given, for example, to stage directions indicating how characters are attired and why this might be significant and to the different ways in which Hansberry employs sounds for dramatic effect.

Examiner comment: 'One interesting response I saw explored Hansberry's use of silent or absent characters and considered the dramatic function of *The Woman and Reverend Neilson*.'

Many candidates, as for Question 17, made confident links between the text and its contexts, in particular Hansberry's experience as an emerging black writer in 1960s USA and her complex relationship with the Civil Rights movement.

The following extract comes from a Level 5 response.

The use of sound in Hunsberry's 'Les Blancs' ^{helps} both ~~establishes~~ the setting in an African country and create a sense of impending danger - foreshadowing the later violence. The prologue instructs 'five minutes' of 'African bush' ~~the~~ sounds before the start ~~of the play~~ highlighting the setting that is so different from ~~the~~ ~~American~~ the US. She also instructs a conversation through 'drums' that grow in intensity and then 'reach a crescendo' - this creates a feeling of suspense but also ~~also~~ implies a Western lack of understanding ^{for characters, audience} - as the drums act as a form of language. * Even Madame Nielsen who was taught the drums by Agyiah is separated from it as she says 'today someone has died and no one has come to tell me' - understanding the language but now lacking a connection with the people. The sounds in the prologue also could be seen to foreshadow the play as the 'laughter of a hyena' which is heard in the opening could link to the Peter's fable of Modingo a hyena whose ambivalence directly echoes Tshembe's own wavering and refusal to engage with either the mission or

the resistance. Sound is also used by Hansberry to establish a sense of danger and violence that persists throughout. In Act 1, Scene 1, 'several loud rifle shots' happen offstage and Delovan notes how it was 'no more than a hundred yards away' this creates an unnerving and unstable atmosphere ~~and~~ as the sounds are so close it foreshadows how they later move to the forefront, it also establishes the presence of violence which links to Hansberry's belief that 'both violence and non-violence' was necessary - aligning more with Malcolm X's views - as the Civil Rights Movement was a backdrop for Hansberry writing in the 1960s. Sound is used by Hansberry to highlight the difference of this mission to US audiences who may view it in the way Morris does and to foreshadow later violence.



The candidate offers a detailed consideration of Hansberry's use of sound, drawing on a variety of examples and thinking deeply about potential ways in which these sounds connect to an audience's responses, as well as those of the characters in the drama.



Notice how contextual ideas are woven into the discussion of methods. This demonstrates higher level thinking about the text and the work that writers do.

Question 19

Doctor Faustus

The question asked about the presentation of learning.

Some good answers were seen to this question, especially when candidates connected the presentation of learning to relevant ideas about knowledge in the Renaissance world. Some strong responses used the idea of learning to provide detailed insights into Marlowe's presentation of Faustus' character and his naivety. There were responses at all levels which tended to miss opportunities to discuss the text as drama, many candidates limiting AO2 analysis to Marlowe's use of language and verse. This is, of course, a significant element of the play, but it is important also to engage with a variety of Marlowe's other methods. A useful example here is the Chorus' opening invocation of the Icarus myth. Weaker responses identified the literary allusion but did not go on to analyse its significance in relation to concepts of ambition and learning in the drama. More discriminating responses focused on Icarus as an idealised figure and how he relates both to the character of Faustus and to broader contexts of Renaissance Humanism.

Where candidates were discriminating and, indeed, evaluative and critical with AO3, they explored how Marlowe uses elements of both of the Renaissance stage and the Morality play form to dramatise the tensions between the Medieval notion of 'The Great Chain of Being' and Renaissance Humanism, linking learning and knowledge to social elevation and the fragility of the Feudal system at the close of the 16th Century. There was a tendency, however, for some responses to lose themselves in contextual material that, while undeniably interesting and relevant, needs to be carefully applied to the text and the topic under consideration.

Here is a clear and straightforward example of a Level 3 response.

Marlowe explores the importance of learning through the character of Faustus. During the Renaissance there was high emphasis on the need to learn more about the world. Marlowe could be using Faustus as a warning to the Renaissance of the consequences of wanting to learn more than what is permitted as despite the fact that Faustus had mastered the four key areas of study in the Renaissance he ~~g~~ craved more knowledge. Ultimately, leading to his downfall.

Marlowe presents Faustus as a man of high intellect who has ^{mastered} learned the four key Renaissance areas of study. Faustus "profits in divinity" and was "graced with doctor's name" ~~pro~~ revealing him to be the ideal Renaissance man. Yet despite his learning Marlowe explores Faustus' greed to learn and gain more knowledge, as "his waxen wings did mount above his reach" the comparison to Faustus to Icarus ~~could~~ could be used by Marlowe to reveal the ~~high~~ ignorance of Faustus. Faustus as he fails to heed the Christian warnings like Icarus Marlowe explores Faustus as a man who becomes greedy to learn more than the four areas of study. Faustus' blasphemous language of 'conceit' 'glory' and 'glutted' reveals his sinful desires to

learn more ~~about~~ ^{than} what is permitted. Marlowe makes clear to the Renaissance audience Faustus' ignorance to his greed ~~to~~ to learn more as he regards "necromantic books [as] heavenly" the ~~blasphemous~~ ^{blasphemous} language would be ~~seen as~~ ^{indicated to the} Renaissance the damnation of Faustus. Furthermore, due to ~~the~~ ^{Faustus'} greed for learning he becomes "ignorant to the ~~lack~~ lack of power he has. Faustus to make the pact with Mephistopheles to gain more knowledge yet Mephistopheles only provides him with one book. ~~as~~ when he asks for another Faustus is dismissed as Mephistopheles claims "Here they are in this book" and regards the lines of the book as "gold". Faustus' greed for knowledge could be reflective of John De's greed for knowledge as he had the largest library yet it was all burned down. Marlowe would've been aware of this and perhaps bases ~~to~~ ~~as~~ Faustus' greed as limited. ~~Perhaps~~ It could be argued Faustus' ^{for learning} greed is reflective ~~of~~ of the free thinkers need to ~~to~~ have a holistic understanding of the world, combining ~~unseen~~ religious and scientific knowledge. (★)

Moreover, Marlowe uses Faustus as an example to the Renaissance audience of the

consequences of having this excessive greed for learning. Faustus is warned by the Good Angel at the beginning of the play to "lay that damned book aside" revealing that not all learning is beneficial. Faustus' desire to learn more turned him away from religion which leads to his inevitable downfall. Faustus' last ~~an~~ desperate attempt to evade hell by his ~~exclamation~~ exclamation of "I'll burn my books" shows his ignorance as despite learning so much he knows so little. Marlowe could be using Faustus' ignorance to the power of religion to warn Renaissance audience as despite the Protestant reformation and questioning of religion they should not turn to necromancy. Moreover, the Marlowe uses the epilogue to reveal the wasted potential of Faustus due to his greed to ~~to~~ learn necromancy as "cut is the branch that might have grown full straight" adding to the sense of Faustus' inevitable downfall. The word 'cut' is harsh perhaps Marlowe could be questioning the leniency of religion as Faustus' mistake led to his downfall.

In conclusion, Marlowe makes use of the character of Faustus as a warning to Renaissance audience of the

consequences of wanting to learn more than is permitted. Faustus' greed for learning led him to ~~the~~ down the path of necromancy which is forbidden in Christianity, thus he becomes damned.

② Faustus is ignorant

② Faustus is ignorant to the price he pays for his limited knowledge as he gives his soul as he with his "proper blood (he) assure [his] soul to be great Lucifers" giving away his connection to God as Christians believed our blood ties us with God.

Moreover, Marlowe explores the selfish nature of Faustus' pact as Jesus shed his blood to save humanity yet Faustus is doing so for selfish earthly desires to learn and gain more knowledge.



The candidate offers clear and relevant ideas in relation to all three Assessment Objectives.

Question 20

Doctor Faustus

The question asked about the extent to which evil characters are made to appear attractive.

There was a tendency for lower-level responses to this question to conduct a series of short character studies rather than to offer more developed and controlled approaches based on the idea of the attractiveness of evil. Such answers also tended to provide examples of characters who appeared attractive to Faustus but often omitted the 'evil' aspect, or treated all the attractive characters as if they were evil (e.g. Helen of Troy).

Stronger responses managed this more effectively and many engaged with how Marlowe's presentation of evil characters connects to the traditions of the medieval morality play. Good work was on display in relation to the masque of the Seven Deadly Sins, and the playwright's symbolic use of Helen of Troy, the Old Man, and the Good and Bad Angels. Candidates also discussed Mephistopheles' pleasing appearance to fool and seduce Faustus as compared to his 'horrible' true form, thus revealing the potentially seductive nature of evil. Several candidates, however, also considered the ways in which the attractiveness of evil was also undermined in the play which helped them to develop a nuanced argument.

Some observed how Faustus is blinded by evil characters because of their attractive appearance and what he believes they can offer him, and others wrote of religion and how Marlowe might be warning the audience not to stray from God's teachings. Some very strong answers also wrote of Faustus himself appearing attractive to the audience but ultimately falling to evil due to his desires.

The following extract is taken from a borderline Level 4/Level 5 script.

Throughout 'Dr Faustus', Marlowe's ^{dangerously} layered presentation of evil ~~and~~ characters representing and the concept of evil more broadly acts as a destabilising force across the play. ~~Marlowe~~ In particular, Marlowe's ~~presentation~~ blurring of evil as ~~a~~ represented by characters such as Lucifer, Mephistopheles and arguably at times even the play's eponymous protagonist himself, with rich ~~image~~ ^{power} depictions of Renaissance ideals, acts as a continuous source of tension for the audience. In this way, Marlowe may be seen to harness such tension to encourage the audience to interrogate their own relationships and understandings of evil, ~~whereas~~ in all its forms and ~~all~~ meanings, particularly in the context of ~~an~~ ~~increasingly~~ ~~to~~ ~~a~~ ~~spreading~~ ~~of~~ ~~an~~ intellectual movements away from medieval understandings of morality.



This is the introductory paragraph. Notice how it discriminatingly focuses on the idea of the presentation of evil in the play and how this connects to relevant contexts, including the ways in which audiences might receive and respond to the drama.



Incorporating well-placed initial observations about contexts and methods and connecting these to proposed lines of argument can enhance the effectiveness of introductions.

Question 21

The Duchess of Malfi

The question asked about the extent to which the play is designed to terrify the audience.

The use of terror in the play proved an engaging theme for candidates who selected this question. Weaker responses tended to catalogue scenes in which Webster creates terror in his audience without exploring how such terror is created and how this connects to the contemporary world of the playwright or to other contextualising factors. More effective answers engaged very effectively with a variety of the methods Webster employs in creating an increasing sense of terror and threat as the play develops. Some commented on the role of physical light and darkness and associated imagery, connecting this in some cases to the realities of theatrical performance in Webster's time. Others observed the steady escalation of mental and physical threat as the play progresses and the accumulation of terror this leads to. There was also some useful comment seen on the effects of isolation of different kinds in the play, Webster's artful development of trains of imagery, his ability to shock his audience, with action derived from the explicitness of his stage directions, and the impact of the Duchess' behaviour as a threat to male hegemony.

Here is an extract from a Level 5 answer.

Initially, Webster builds a sense of foreboding and anticipation within the first three acts of the play to allow for the terrifying climaxes in the final two acts. This is achieved using a ~~no~~ myriad of techniques - for example, in the Duchess' direct disobedience to her brothers as Ferdinand imperatively declares that he will "bespeak / A husband ~~for~~ for [her]", with her responding that "when [she chooses] / A husband, [she] will marry for honour", the agency that "she" will choose presenting her own courage as a woman, as well as the future tense in "will" a subtle lie - as she is already secretly married to Antonio. ~~This generates dramatic irony within the~~ ~~for~~ In Regardless of ~~how~~ the differences in audience response (a modern audience perhaps admiring her courage, and a contemporary one condemning her in her unconventionality, as she defies the procedures of marriage and her role as a woman by disobeying her male relatives), the same sense of dramatic irony is generated - as the themes of secrecy and lies between the siblings begin to

multiply. Again, this dramatic irony can be seen interpreted as Ferdinand tells the Duchess to "Go, be safe in [her] own innocence", the innocence she knows she doesn't have due to her ~~body~~ relationship, and she declares "This deadly air is purged!", the personification of "deadly air" and use of the ~~visceral~~ visceral verb "purged" not only an indicator of her misplaced relief, but a metaphoric foreshadow for what is to come through the deaths of almost all the characters.



The best answers are usually marked by sophisticated written expression and the fluent incorporation of textual evidence. Note these traits in the example.

Question 22

The Duchess of Malfi

The question asked about the presentation of women in the play.

There were some good answers on this question. Candidates seemed to enjoy discussing the women in the play. Most answers concentrated on the Duchess, but there were some that included Julia and Cariola. Patriarchal power was a dominant issue in responses to this question across all levels. Stronger responses, however, did not simply assert this, offering instead an exploration of some of the nuances in the Duchess' presentation as both a threat to and vulnerable to patriarchal power. Many candidates selected to write about the role of the brothers in the play. Clear and stronger responses often did this effectively, but in some cases discussion tended to drift into analysis of the men and lost focus on how this related to the presentation of women.

Many answers considered the Duchess and her unusual position in the court at that time and how this places her in a uniquely dangerous position. Some candidates interestingly compared her to Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman who is perceived as a threat. There was some controlled and nuanced analysis of the Duchess' role, the extent to which she challenges patriarchal control, and male anxieties about female autonomy. There was an interesting range of opinion on the Duchess and her part in her own demise.

Candidates wrote of the expected role of women in society, some linking this to ideas of dramatic tragedy and how the Duchess' attempts to subvert this and carve out her own destiny can only ultimately lead to her downfall and death as well as those around her. The abuse of women by male characters was discussed as well as Webster's possible views about power and monarchy.

This extract comes from a response demonstrating Level 2 characteristics.

During the Renaissance, men ran the society and also performed witch hunts, which would have hampered femininity and women's freedom. Plus, there were medical ~~advancements~~ theories, such as Galen's Four Humours: "Antonio previously mentioned Roderigo's melancholy, which is a sign of an overabundance of"

black bile; and using this information, it can be inferred that Ferdinand contains too much yellow bile, suggesting his madness and deterioration.* Overall, Webster's presentation of women can be seen by by contemporary patriarchy as secondary since it strictly follows conservatism and traditional values in the period.*



Typical of Level 2 is the general description and application of contextual material. This extract includes contextual information, but does not really make it relevant to the issues under discussion.



Try to avoid presenting contextual material just as 'sidebar' information. Always try to connect it to arguments about the text and the topic under discussion.

Question 23

The Importance of Being Earnest

The question asked about the play's use of uncertainty.

Uncertainty proved a clear and interesting theme for consideration and candidates approached the idea in a variety of ways. Some chose to explore uncertainty in relation to a set of opposing certainties in the play. Many focused on the play's central focus on the name of 'Ernest', what the name represents and the play's conjuring with the concept of personal origin and identity. Who – if anyone – is Ernest/earnest? This led to, in some cases, well-developed exploration of the idea of certainty and uncertainty in relation to personal identity in the play. Other typical issues for discussion included Wilde's comic exploration of the relationships between men and women in the play, and who is in control, thus challenging a range of the apparent 'certainties' of the Victorian social order. Naturally, many candidates were intrigued by Wilde's own highly irregular status in the Victorian scene and the way that his life in many ways captures the uncertainties of the era. Discussion of this was not always effectively applied and controlled, however.

Some candidates wrote well about Wilde's use of stagecraft, commenting on the role of certain stage directions, his use of dramatic set pieces, food and music to create moments of certainty/uncertainty. Here was much discussion of Bunbury and 'Bunburying' and Wilde's creation of deliberate creation of uncertainty in the play, as well as the impact of his language use and epigrammatic wit to create a brilliant surface that conceals deeper insecurities and uncertainties both in the play and in late Victorian society.

A characteristic of stronger responses is their embedding of discussion of playwrights' methods and an explanation of the effects thus achieved.

also each other. Additionally, Wilde explores another ~~layer~~ ^{layer} of uncertainty when the women both provide the 'evidence' in their diaries, "[shows diary]... [examines diary through her lorgnette carefully]" Arguably this provides another layer of uncertainty as their short-lived friendship continues to break down. Wilde could be referring to the Victorian importance of documents to provide factual ~~evidence~~ evidence. Wilde plays upon this in order to evoke humour further as Cecily's diary is ironically a version of events ~~that~~ craped in her head which only later came true. Through this added layer of uncertainty, Wilde again suggests the superficial nature of Victorian society as a method of inducing humour whilst also critiquing upper class society.



Here the candidate incorporates a discussion of Wilde's use of diaries and other documents within the play, relating this explicitly to the creation of uncertainty.

Question 24

The Importance of Being Earnest

The question asked about the extent to which the play challenges traditional values.

The question's focus on challenges to traditional values question encouraged many candidates to engage at length with the contexts for the play. Lower-level responses tended to offer lists of the different occasions in the play where traditional social values are challenged. Stronger responses linked Wilde's use of characterisation to attitudes towards marriage (e.g. Jack and Cecily's, or Algernon's views), or Lady Bracknell's obsession with social status. Others explored Jack and Algernon's use of fictional identities to escape social obligations and pursue their desires, highlighting the artificiality of Victorian social structures. Distinctions were also drawn surrounding Wilde's use of younger and older characters in the play and how they might represent shifting social expectations. Many responses demonstrated good contextual knowledge of the text and the ways in which its themes of duality and hypocrisy offer a comedic reflection on the often all-too-serious concerns of the late Victorian era. Stronger candidates were alive to nuances and subtleties in this respect, but weaker candidates tended to offer rather sweeping generalisations about Victorian society. Needless to say, there was widespread discussion of Wilde's personally scandalous life and the challenges this posed to traditional values.

The ability of candidates to handle context on Victorian values with control and nuance was usually the key factor which marked out more successful answers to this question.

Level 3 answers are clear and relevant, though ideas are not always developed. Look for these qualities in the following extract.

Wilde criticises the notion of marriage ~~through his~~ ~~though~~ due to its transactional value in Victorian society. Despite Jack's passionate outburst of being "in love with Gwendolen" and ^{his} desire to "propose to her", Algernon describes marriage as "business" ^{rather than} ~~over~~ pleasure. ~~The use of~~ Wilde uses bathos to emphasise the lack of genuine love in marriages, where marriages were ^{instead} for status and money, ~~rather than~~ love. Although the characters claim to be in love with

one another, their reasons for why are superficial, such as Gwendolen's idea loving "someone one of the name Ernest" because it "inspires absolute confidence". This is parallel to Cecily's fantasy for her "wicked cousin Ernest", with both women fantasising nothing but the name of idea of Ernest. Wilde further rejects the idea of marriage through the epigram "divorces are made in ~~ten~~ Heaven", perhaps ~~completely rejecting marriage~~ reflecting upon his own life in leaving his wife and children ~~for~~ in order to pursue a life with homosexual freedom.



See here how the candidate includes a number of issues, textual evidence and contextual material relevant to the play's challenging of social convention. Together these provide evidence of a clear, if not fully developed, response.

Question 25

The Rover

The question asked about the extent to which this is a play about material gain.

Material gain proved an interesting theme for candidates. Weaker answers catalogued situations related to money and other financial issues in the play without really engaging with the ways in which these are presented and their broader significance. Other, stronger responses were able to explore themes such as the notion of the impoverished and exiled Cavaliers, the commodification of women in the play, and the role of women who had no independent wealth and were therefore at the mercy of patriarchal family members. Particularly popular were the discussion of Angellica Bianca as a financially independent woman and the gulling of Blunt by Lucetta.

Some stronger answers took the opportunity offered by the question to consider how the play might also be about other things and reflect wider concerns. Typical issues included the relationship between the sexes, ideas of personal autonomy and ideas of pleasure and pain. As necessary, better candidates were able to build connections between these issues and the question's focus on material gain.

Candidates also often wrote well about the contexts in which the play was written and received. Many were interested in Behn's highly unusual position as a female professional writer and how this related to issues of female characters' relationship with finances and financial gain in the play. Many also used Bakhtin's concept of Carnival as a key context for considering an array of characters and situations in the play in relation to notions of social construction and wealth.

Where questions ask candidates to consider 'the extent to which' a proposition is true of the play, they are free to introduce alternative ideas of their own, provided they always bring this back to the proposition of the question. The candidate in the following extract does this very effectively.

The women in *The Rover* do not seem to be chasing material gain, rather instead aiming to fulfil their desires in marriage and love. The play begins in ^{the} women's space ~~where~~ ~~into~~ (which we do not see again) where they are free to express their desires - Florinda desires to ~~mar~~ escape her ~~marriage~~ planned marriage to Don Vincentio and ~~or~~ Don Antonio as ^{instructed} ~~suggested~~ by her brother ^{for Belvite} ~~whereas~~ Hellena wishes to escape ~~the~~ her fate of the nunnerys. At the time this was typical of richer families as it was expensive to marry off daughters & hence the eldest would be married to a wealthy man whilst the youngest sent to be a nun. The ~~to~~ carnival time provides a setting in which social expectations are lifted temporarily and the women aim to use this to their advantage - 'I will provide for myself this Carnival'. This sets up the theme of women chasing their desires which in Hellena's case is love and marriage. The carnival time allows the women some control over their destiny through mask and disguise - for example Hellena uses the disguise of a 'gipsy' in order to talk to and seduce Willmore. ~~Then~~ Hellena plays the game of love and succeeds in securing a marriage proposal from Willmore in the final act ~~is~~ despite Willmore's aversion to marriage - 'Priest and Hymen? Prithee add a hangman to 'em to make up to consort'. With her wit and withholding of her sex Hellena is able to gain her desire.

'I adore thy humor and will marry thee', achieving her desire. Similarly, Florida uses disguise in order to send messages to Belmont (her love) and ends up naming him in the ~~expos~~ denouement of the play. Here Behn shows the ability of carnival to help women gain their true desires rather than achieve material gain.



The candidate engages in sophisticated ways with the women of the play, questioning the extent to which their motivations relate to material gain.



Making regular explicit reference to the terms of the question helps candidates to ensure they remain relevant throughout their responses.

Question 26

The Rover

The question asked about the use of settings in the play.

There was widespread consideration here of Behn's use of the exotic setting of Naples and the Carnival setting for the play. Candidates were keen to explore the many opportunities this offers for comedy and deception and for the challenging of social norms and expectations. Many were also aware of the extent to which the Carnival setting is used to expose the threats and dangers the characters face. There was interesting discussion, by stronger candidates, of the significance of Behn's dramatic use of masks and disguise as methods both of deception and of taking control. This was connected to the use of disguise as well (e.g. Hellena's dressing as a gypsy and as a man) and the opportunities this provides for concealment and for freedom. Stronger candidates were able to draw on contextualising critical ideas from the work of Bakhtin, some applying these very effectively to the characters and the events of the play. There was also useful discussion of Behn's use of private and public settings and the range of effects she achieves from these, such as Angellica Bianca's house or Lucetta's chamber.

The question's focus on the play's use of settings encouraged many candidates to approach AO2 in more detail.

Here is an extract from a response awarded a mark in the Level 3 range.

Furthermore, the setting of carnival is used to explore the darker side of libertinism and its dangers for women. Florinda is found by Willmore in her garden at night to which Willmore immediately assumes she is a prostitute as this was very common in the carnivalesque setting. He says, 'why, at this time of night, was your cobweb door set open, dear spider, but to catch flies', which conveys his view that women are waiting for him. However, this rather creepy metaphor highlights the character of Willmore being based upon John Wilmot, the 2nd Earl of Rochester. Wilmot was synonymous with drunkenness and libertinism, along with his group The Merry Gang,

which is evident in the character of Willmore as he drunkenly stumbles into Florinda's garden. Moreover, we see an even more dangerous side to the setting of carnival through the character of Blunt. Florinda seeks refuge in his house from her brother, but unfortunately at a very bad time as Blunt wants to 'be revenged on one where for the sake of another', immediately portraying the danger she is in. The periphrastic word choice of 'where' and



The candidate offers a relevant discussion of Behn's use of setting in the play, connecting it here clearly to the threats faced by female characters in the play.

Question 27

A Streetcar Named Desire

The question asked about the extent to which the play makes use of the conventions of tragedy.

This question led to a wide range of responses. Some candidates did not really engage with 'conventions of tragedy', and weaker responses tended to write about generalised concepts linked to death and suffering or approached the play by running through a mental 'ticksheet' of tragic conventions, rather than considering the extent to which the play is a tragedy. Many candidates in the mid- to higher-range suggested how Williams subverts notions of tragedy by having Blanche metaphorically rather than literally die. More discriminating and evaluative responses established the argument that Williams was influenced by – amongst others – Aristotle, Seneca, Nietzsche and Miller, but ultimately wanted to create a unique tragedy specific to post-World War Two USA.

There was much useful and well-handled discussion of plastic theatre and expressionism and the ways in which Williams' use of these provides a particular inflection on the presentation of tragedy. As always, there was considerable focus on Blanche and Stanley, but answers in the mid and upper levels made reference to the roles of Stella, Mitch and Allan Grey and the ways in which they experience personal tragedies of differing kinds.

AO3 was often effectively covered. Candidates frequently grasped the power dynamic between Blanche and Stanley and what that can also be seen to represent in terms of changes in the southern USA – though this is frequently rather simplistically seen as a dichotomy between 'old' (feudal and genteel) and 'new' (industrial and brutish) South. At the lower end of the mark scheme, candidates tended to rely heavily on Williams's life as context (alcohol addiction, homosexuality, his sister Rose) without linking these clearly to the text. It is notable, too, that there is still a tendency to suggest that events take place just after the American Civil War rather than in the 1940s.

Good Level 3 responses typically bring together effective textual examples with the consideration of dramatic methods and suitable contexts. Here is an example.

~~Initially~~ Williams presents ~~the~~ Blanche as a tragic protagonist that doesn't conform to the ~~tragic~~ traditional tragic conventions. ~~Despite this~~ Initially, the ~~the~~ construction of her character as the archetypal Southern Belle - where her gentility made her 'incongruous to' the 'raffish' ~~setting of~~ the ~~After~~ industrial setting of New Orleans - ~~a~~ perhaps compare to the Aristotelian convention ~~the~~. Her character is ~~as~~ immediately established as one of ~~the~~ high birth where her ~~French~~ ^{the} 'Dubois' ~~and~~ ~~Blanche~~ even her name 'Blanche Dubois' meaning 'white wood' evoke a sense of superiority. This superiority is weaponised ~~to~~ against the ~~the~~ 'Heterogeneous types' of ~~the~~ The Cosmopolitan New Orleans as ~~the~~ ~~her~~ 'disturbances' of the 'two strong' ~~representations~~ she compares it to the 'ghoul haunted woodland of Weir'. The ~~the~~ juxtaposition of ~~her~~ ~~her~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~her~~ ~~tragic~~ perceived lucidity ~~and~~ ~~a~~ representative of the Old

South is heightened in the New world that rejects the 'hoity toity' (as Stanley terms it). However, this facade or semblance of superiority and nobility degrades as the 'sensitively' of her character ~~and~~ reveals her lack of adherence to the typical tragic protagonist. ~~She gets drawn to the 'whisky bottle' and with immediacy and speaks with a 'feverish vivacity' of the~~ Through theatrical convention, Williams heightens the present 'hamartia' of her character as ~~in~~ her initial introduction is defined by her ~~and~~ drinking of the 'whisky bottle' and the 'feverish vivacity' of her speech. ~~Despite this passion, both shown in her Southern & archetypal Southern Belle persona and in~~ She depends on 'intimates with strangers'. Arthur Miller asserts that in modern tragedy that the 'Common man' isn't defined by an intrinsic nobility ~~and~~ and is a character who suffers due to her ~~summed~~ ~~society~~ society. Blanche fits this convention as her fragile persona is likened to a 'moth' and suffers ultimately due to her dependence on men. She moves from 'leaky roof to another leaky roof' and when the fragility of her initial characterisation reveals itself shows that her tragic fall is from her 'intimates with strangers'. In modern tragedy, the tragic protagonist too is often defined by their lack of possibility, ~~however~~ ~~even~~ Although she realises from the start ~~that~~ of her fragile position in a society that ~~totally~~ ~~she is~~ ~~at~~ rejects her 'I hurt

him the way you'd like to hurt me', this awareness isn't culpable ~~and~~ as she succumbs to ~~her~~ her fragility. Evidently, the whiteness ~~of her~~ ~~of the~~ of her 'fluffy bodice' at the start that represents her 'high birth' ~~and~~ deteriorates into a 'soiled and crumpled gown'. ~~Therefore, the her that~~ William ~~presents her as~~ deviates from the conventions of tragedy as his tragic protagonist doesn't ~~reflect a sense of~~ Blanche is nuanced in her tragic fall and characterisation.



This candidate does not always develop arguments, but they do a good job of bringing together their discussion of the presentation of Blanche and ideas of tragedy. There is some interesting connection of Williams' methods in presenting Blanche and Arthur Miller's famous views on tragedy.

Question 28

A Streetcar Named Desire

The question asked about the presentation of insecurity.

This was by some margin the more popular question on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Many candidates engaged with the idea of insecurity well, but in a significant number of cases, responses tended to become character studies of Blanche and/or Stanley rather than retaining a tight focus on insecurity. It was pleasing to note, however, that there was also much discussion of other characters who experience insecurities of different kinds, such as Stella, Mitch, Allan Grey and Eunice. Some also considered effectively how contextual factors are used to explore broader societal insecurities.

Prompted by Williams' almost novelistic stage directions, many candidates were able to engage with Williams' use of stagecraft and the practices of plastic theatre to present insecurity. In less effective answers, candidates often identified that insecurity is presented by devices such as costume, sound, lighting and music. More effective answers were able to engage with how Williams uses these to suggest the characters' insecurities and/or the inherent precarity of the situations, people and places they encounter (e.g. Blanche's feelings of inadequacy and fear of aging or losing status).

Many candidates made good use of context in relation to ideas of insecurity. In lower-level responses, such references tended to be vague (e.g. to Blanche as representative of the Old South, unable to conform to post-war USA, and Stanley as the representative of the New South). Stronger answers were able to consider how both of these versions of the South come with their own insecurities – often gender- and class-based. Such answers also often explored how characters' behaviours reflected their insecurities (e.g. Stanley's violence, Blanche's bathing).

Level 2 responses tend to be general in nature and are often underdeveloped.

Insecurity is portrayed as being a crucial theme and characters like Blanche and Stanley often experience this feeling. Stanley's assertion of dominance is as a result of his insecurity. Whereas, Blanche's fragile psyche is ultimately caused by her deepened insecurity.

The play was based in the 1940s when ~~the~~ society was undergoing economic crisis. Blanche is a representation of the decaying Southern aristocracy, contrastingly, Stanley represents the new, modern working class. ~~The differing social classes and~~ There appears to be historical tensions between characters like Blanche and Stanley due to their differing social classes. ~~Blanche's insecurity perhaps might have stemmed from Stanley's harsh view of her, which is deeper due to Stanley's harsh view of her.~~

Blanche's insecurity might perhaps stem from the death of her young, homosexual husband. She is haunted by the trauma of her past and this is reflected through the repeated musical motif of the polka and waltz. This music is continuously played when Blanche reaches a peak in her mental ~~and~~ instability. '[polka music starts in a minor key faint with distance]'. ~~When~~ This stage direction may perhaps even demonstrate her ^{gradual} descent into madness. As well as this, Blanche is presented as always wearing white clothing. The colour white initially represented purity and innocence which Blanche ultimately does not uphold. She attempts to portray the fact that

she is in touch with her southern roots by wearing elegant pieces of clothing. However, Blanche is slowly having a looser grasp ^{at} ~~over~~ ^{over} her roots, ~~past~~ as a Southern Belle.

As well as this, Blanche is increasingly insecure of her age, past and appearance and she attempts to conceal these in order to portray herself as a different character. The ~~the~~ paper lantern ~~which~~ has been utilised in order to alter perceptions and it may reflect the theme of illusion vs reality. Blanche falls into this state of illusion as a result of her inability to accept reality. Stanley's animalistic, brutal action of ripping the paper lantern can demonstrate how he asserts his power through dominance and violence; 'he tears the paper lantern off the light bulb'. By doing this, he also strips Blanche away from ~~her~~ her illusions. The ~~is~~ verb 'tears' portrays Stanley's aggression and his inability to control himself.

Moreover, Blanche seems to be insecure of her sexual past and in order to be presented as a ^{pure} ~~man~~ female, she takes baths ~~and~~ in hope of cleansing herself; 'she's soaking in a hot tub to calm her nerves'. Blanche uses this as a coping mechanism in order to come to terms with her past. ~~the~~ Blanche suffers from extreme marginalisation and vulnerability and Williams ~~in~~ himself experienced this as he was a homosexual man in a repressive society which ultimately rejected him. He therefore crafted the character of Blanche ~~is~~ through his own experiences and feelings.

The rape scene is the climax of the play where Stanley's insecurity is presented. Men were expected to be dominant providers ~~who~~^{that} asserted their power and control over women. From the moment Blanche arrives in Elysian Fields, Stanley feels threatened by her presence and eventually acts upon this, in the brutal rape of Blanche. 'We've had this date from the beginning'. This quote implies that Stanley was thinking of ~~abusing~~^{signify} sexually controlling Blanche from the start of the play. This could ~~imply~~^{signify} that women were forbidden from having sexual independence and promiscuity, and Stanley grasps this from Blanche.

Consequently, Blanche's insecurity was even more exploited by Stanley's actions and Stanley feeds his insecurity through the aggression which he asserts onto Blanche.



In this example, the Assessment Objectives are all covered, but in general and under-developed ways.

Question 29

Sweat

The question asked about the relationship between Chris and Jason.

This question prompted a range of responses. Some candidates engaged in a full and balanced consideration of the personal relationship between Chris and Jason and how this changes as the drama develops, placing this in the context of the significant social and cultural factors affecting the kind of US community depicted in the play. Other, less effective responses were somewhat perfunctory and only made passing generalised comments on rustbelt crash-era USA. Stronger candidates were also able to discuss in detail the ways in which changing contexts of US racial politics is significant in framing and shaping the relationship between Chris and Jason. Less effective answers tended simply to chart the major scenes in which the two men appear without developing a broader sense of how the relationship develops as the play progresses. Stronger candidates were able to comment on some of Nottage's dramatic methods, including the role of the dual timeframe of the play, her use of overlapping dialogue and her use of press headlines. Less effective coverage of AO2 was characterised by straightforward word-level analysis of brief textual extracts.

One examiner commented that '[c]ontext seemed to be a strength of the responses I read as candidates were able to clearly draw relevant parallels to the impact of the financial crisis and the failure of the American Dream'.

Here is an extract from a Level 3 answer.

Nottage's use of a flashback, non linear relationship highlights changing relationships ~~in the present~~ over time and a sense of nostalgia. 'Sweat' is set in 2000 and 2008: pre and post the Credit Crunch which was the largest financial crash since the Great Depression in 1930 and created mass financial insecurity for millions of people. Due to this the lives of many people changed causing tension in relationships. In 2000, Chris and Jason's friendship is seen in ^{their} youthful mannerisms such as "Chris and Jason stumble in all energy". Their ~~own~~ colloquial language and jokes shows their peace and comfort with ~~each~~ each other reiterating their close friendship. For example ~~then~~ "did I hear you say school? / yeah school. S-C-H-O-O-L / thanks for that clarification" their youthful language and understanding shows

how close they are which contrasts 2008. In 2008, Jason has "white supremacist tattoos inked across his face" which were ~~for his survival~~ for his survival in prison, now cause tension among all his relationships especially Chris. Chris says "I had to deal with that bullshit on the inside.... But Jason... that shit surprised me" highlighting ~~his~~ he is a victim of racism and also shocked by his best friends behaviour which contrasts massively to their relationship in the past. Chris and Jason reflect the lives and friendships of many people in America. During her research for 'Sweat', Nottage spent two years interviewing citizens of Reading Pennsylvania which she described as "a city that lost its ~~the~~ narrative'. With the influence of verbatim theatre, Nottage wrote 'Sweat' to raise awareness and to represent lives changed by an economic crisis. Through an exploration of past and present of Chris and Jason's relationship, Nottage shows how relationships change in a crisis.



The candidate has addressed each of the Assessment Objectives in clear and relevant fashion. Their ideas are presented in straightforward ways.

Question 30

Sweat

The question asked about the impact of the play's final scene.

Many candidates observed the significant shift in tone in the final scene of the play, considering how this related back to the event of the rest of the play. There were particular comments on the role of Oscar and his change in social status, and how this reflects a change in ethnic relations in the play. A number of candidates commented on the way that this scene builds connections between the two time periods of the play and the ways in which it creates some closure – even potentially healing – for the events we have seen. There was also some useful analysis of some of the other characters in the play, such as Jason and Chris. The central role of Stan and his injury was also considered by some candidates. Candidates had evidently been well prepared to locate the play within relevant contexts, both in terms of Nottage's use of theatrical form and in terms of the American political scene that provides such a crucial context for the play.

Here are two extracts from a Level 4 response. The first is the introduction.

gynn
Nottage's play 'Sweat' is a naturalistic play inspired by the rustbelt town of Reading, Pennsylvania. Nottage felt taken aback by the stories of the working-class community living there, hence drawing on realism in

Order to ~~fully~~ ^{expose} ~~context~~ their struggles. She says that "theatre should reflect America as it is lived in today," which is perhaps why the ending of the play denies the audience ~~a~~ catharsis, or mirrors the fairytale 'happy-ending'. What the play's ending does do, however, is extremely impact it's audience members, provoking them to question the politics ~~of~~ within society and ask about the injustice that many communities face. Ultimately, the hard-hitting impact of Nottage's ending emphasises the importance of community and critiques the illusion of the American Dream.



Note how the candidate here has made very thoughtful use of contextual material in order to provide a way into their discussion of the significance of the final scene of the play.

This is another passage from later in the same response.

group are not stand alone individuals, but instead ~~broken pie~~ 'fractured' members of a community. Whilst NoHoDe denies cotinorcism, she still grants us this slither of hope - a hope that is only expressed through this moment of community, suggesting it's importance. This scene mirrors Act 1, Scene 2 when, unlike the ending, the group is fully united, celebrating. The characters Tracey and Cynthia are described as "dancing together with the intimacy of close friends who've shared many adventures." Immediately this moment ~~for~~ juxtaposes with the ending given their physical closeness. The act of 'dancing' displays their light-hearted yet intimate bond, becoming one as they dance together. ~~Furthermore~~ Despite their ~~en~~ financial hardships, they appear content due to the company they have. This is reinforced when the group joke about NAFTA: "NAFTA? Sounds like a laxative. NAFTA." Tracey's humorous and joking tone ~~it~~ expresses ~~thei her~~ the joyful mood she is in, simultaneously creating a relaxed atmosphere on stage. ~~NoHoDe~~



The candidate here offers discriminating observations related to Nottage's use of stagecraft and dramatic structures.



Look for opportunities to discuss how scenes from different parts of the play reflect upon each other and consider the dramatic effects playwrights achieve by the structures of their works.

Question 31

Waiting for Godot

The question asked about the presentation of human endurance.

Answers across the full range were seen on this play. Many candidates seemed to approach the play via 'isms' – absurdism, existentialism, nihilism and others. Strong candidates proved well-informed on these topics and were able to use them effectively as context and, indeed, as a starting point for the consideration of the playwright's methods. In the case of lower-level responses, however, these were not always well understood, and this in turn meant that they are not always effectively connected to the play. More effective mid-level responses tended to start by considering the ways in which Beckett explores ideas of human endurance and how audiences might respond to this. Is it disturbing? Is it entertaining? Is it funny? Is it poignant? Does it speak to me? Such issues provide a useful way into considering how contextual background cultural references then feed into personal response. Some also observed – with or without irony – that there are many ways in which the play also pushes audiences to the ends of their endurance.

There was much comment on Beckett's use of the four central characters and the situations they have (repeatedly – though with some variation) to endure, stage directions, repetitious dialogue and dramatic structures, and the possibility of an end to the need for endurance represented by the leaves on the tree in Act Two. There was also sometimes detailed, sometimes very general reference to a range of contexts. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* was widely – if not always effectively referenced – as were contexts related to music hall tropes and the filmography of Laurel and Hardy. In the best responses these were embedded and rich in their contribution; in weaker answers, they tend to appear as information.

Here is an extended extract from a Level 5 response.

immediately, there is a strong sense of
human endurance through suffering. This is
evident when Vladimir questions if 'they'

boot' Estragon, to which Estragon replies that they 'certainly' did. This casual ^{dismissal} ~~dismissal~~ of ~~the~~ the violence he has experienced by the ambiguous 'they' is demonstrative of human endurance to suffering as Estragon has clearly become desensitised to this violence. Moreover, after the opening description of setting, the first stage direction of the play depicts human endurance through Estragon's attempt to 'take off his boot' before 'giving up' then he ~~tries~~ 'tries again'. This cyclical depiction of human endurance mirrors the cyclical structure of the play but also immediately demonstrates Beckett's criticism of human endurance as having no reward in this scenario. Estragon's boot remains on and on causing him pain. Furthermore, this vaudeville slapstick comedy is disrupted on page seven where Estragon's endurance has 'supreme effort' and endurance has allowed him to remove his shoe but 'nothing' is inside. This again demonstrates the futility of human endurance whereby action and ^{persistence} ~~persistence~~ through pain has no pleasing outcome. This is a clear reflection of absurdism, a popular philosophy in the mid ^{1900s} ~~1900s~~, especially

in 1952 when Beckett published *Waiting for Godot* in France. Absurdism, largely popularised by Albert Camus and his contemporaries, centred around the belief that life was inherently meaningless and any attempt to impose meaning would be futile. Beckett's depiction of Estragon's endurance having no tangible outcome is a strongly absurdist notion, a defining theme of *Waiting for Godot*. Moreover, this idea of pointless human endurance through pain is also evident in Beckett's characterisation of Lucky. Lucky is described as having a 'running sore' on his neck, a mark of physical degradation from his ~~slave~~ ^{rope} that symbolises his effective enslavement. However, Lucky's ~~continuous~~ ^{continued} continuous obedience and deference to Pozzo is another example of pointless human endurance in the play. Beckett deliberately provides no meaning or reason ~~for~~ behind Lucky's existence and ~~emphasises~~ ^{emphasises} the futility of his endurance in Act 2 once Pozzo has lost his sight. Pozzo's loss of sight should rationally allow Lucky to escape his endurance and suffering as the power between the two has altered. However, his self-enforcement of his enslavement

is perhaps Beckett arguing that human endurance, whilst noble ^{an} attempt to find meaning or purpose, ~~is~~ is ultimately results in character internalisation and prolonging their own suffering ~~can~~ under the guise of endurance. This reiterates his earlier portrayal of Estragon's endurance through suffering.



It is good to note here the fluid and sophisticated movement the candidate maintains between material covering the three Assessment Objectives.

Question 32

Waiting for Godot

The question asked about the extent to which the play can be considered a comedy.

This was the less popular option on Beckett's play. Some candidates engaged well with the troubling question of the play's genre, drawing on the playwright's own designation of the play as a tragicomedy. This naturally feeds into the question's focus on 'the extent to which' the play is actually comic. Weaker responses tended to focus on moments of humour in the play – dark as these moments might be. More developed answers were able to identify the tropes of stage comedy and to use examples from the drama to consider Beckett's use of them. As with Question 31, there was a tendency for some candidates to approach the play from critical perspectives that could dominate rather than liberating arguments.

The play's methods – including repetition, slapstick humour, its use of absurd situation, and the almost ubiquitous stichomythia – were used as means of approaching Beckett's methods in relation to comedy. Other answers took the opportunity allowed by the question to consider whether the play is in fact more tragic than comic in its impact and effects.

A variety of useful contexts related not only to the post-war setting of the play, but also to a range of comic contexts, such as music hall and comic duos such as Laurel and Hardy were effectively used by some candidates.

Here is a full Level 2 response, awarded a mark of 7.

Samuel Beckett's ~~tragic~~ 1953 play "Waiting for Godot" ~~can be~~ has been subtitled "A tragicomedy in two acts", a successful description when judging it to the extent of comedy; whilst humorous through black comedy, wordplay and absurdism, the play is equally as tragic. As Beckett says "There is no laughter without suffering."

~~Beckett most commonly expresses comedy through absurdity, focusing on repetition, ~~dark~~ dark humor and nonsensical dialogue. The world of Waiting for Godot is inherently absurd and devoid of meaning as it is a ^{dramatic} reflection of humanity.~~

Beckett primarily explores humour through the characters of Vladimir and Estragon, ~~as~~ the two ~~main~~ opposing ~~characters~~ men, who are arguably two parts of a whole, allow for many comedic moments. Beckett was an admirer of film and television, particularly of early slapstick comedians such as Laurel and Hardy whom Vladimir and Estragon were inspired by. Such clownery and slapstick comedy was included through the 'hat swapping sequence' as a physical homage from Beckett. The absurdity of these repeated hat swaps is

What creates the humour, a common trait of theatre of the absurd. Additional absurdist comic elements include the vexing cycles of language, movement and structure. ~~The play being structured as two almost identical acts, with no conflict nor resolution, subverts all traditional expectations of theatre and forces audiences to grasp that there is nothing sensible ^{to be} expected, this release of expectations from the audience allows it's comedy not to be analysed.~~

~~Throughout the play, Beckett creates 'pairs' such as Pozzo & Lucky, the two acts, tree & ~~and~~ mound, and tragedy & Comedy. In 1955, Peter Woodthorpe asked Beckett the meaning of his play, to which Beckett responded "It's all Symbiosis Peter." Whilst Symbiosis is usually reduced to species that benefit from and depend upon each other, it can also be applied to the idea of pairs, all being simply half of a whole and needing it's partner. From this you can understand that the play must be equal parts comedy to tragedy, as each genre depends upon the existence of the other. This can be exemplified through "It'd be~~

bottom if we parked // you always say that, and you always come crawling back." As it acknowledges ~~an aspect~~ a codependency, and though it is spoken by Vladimir and Estragon, every pair ~~can be divided into them~~ whether sentient or not, is dependable in the same way.

In conclusion, Waiting for Godot, whilst containing many ~~com~~ humorous elements, cannot strictly be considered a comedy as it is equal parts tragedy too, and that is often what brings the humour.



This response covers each of the Assessment Objectives, but in brief, general and under-developed fashion.

Paper Summary

Section A

General: It was very good to see responses to all of the Shakespeare texts and on all questions. Centres are to be commended for taking on the breadth of the specification, and it was evident to examiners that their candidates had enjoyed the challenges and opportunities the different texts have to offer. Tragedy continues to be more popular than Comedy, but candidates of both had evidently been largely well prepared to consider the plays they had studied as examples of these genres.

AO1: Many candidates demonstrated the ability to communicate effectively – some very effectively – using the written word. Many candidates were able to establish and maintain clear and relevant lines of argument, and some writing in the higher levels was of very high quality. Most candidates were able to draw on useful examples from the texts they had studied. However, some responses made little use of such reference, therefore appearing more general in nature, even if the ideas were of higher quality. It is important for candidates to root their answers explicitly in the text. Relevant use of literary terminology was seen, though much of this was targeted at Shakespeare's use of language rather than at the dramatic methods he employs.

AO2: This tended to be the weakest component of most candidates' responses. The discussion of Shakespeare's use of language and of verse in particular is, of course, an important element of textual analysis. However, relying too much on word-level analysis is not helpful to candidates. As one examiner observes, doing so 'often bogs answers down without adding much'. The works studied on this paper are works of drama, and as such, candidates need to be exploring the kinds of dramatic techniques Shakespeare employs, including his use of dramatic structures, and going on to consider the ways in which these help shape the meaning of the drama. They need, in other words, to be looking at drama as drama.

AO3: Candidates had evidently been introduced to a wide range of contexts for the texts they had studied. Stronger candidates demonstrated the ability to incorporate contexts seamlessly within their own developing arguments and discussion of the plays, and many others applied contexts in a clear and relevant fashion, but still there is evidence of candidates presenting such material as 'bolt on' information, or in a more descriptive fashion. It was also interesting to see many candidates referencing and discussing particular staged or viewed versions of the plays. These productions can provide candidates with an invaluable context for their reception of the plays, but centres are reminded that as with any context, these need to be applied closely to the written text and used as means of exploring the candidates' own readings and interpretations of the plays.

AO5: It was commendable to see the range of critical material to which centres have introduced their candidates. In the best responses, critical ideas were woven very effectively into candidates' arguments and there were genuine attempts to evaluate differing critical points of view. Centres have evidently ranged well beyond the critical anthologies Pearson supplies. While it is understandable that candidates learn some critical quotations, it is important that they are used in a clear and relevant fashion, and examiners observed cases where quotations did not really fit the arguments candidates were constructing. There were many effective examples of paraphrasing critical positions and supplying the name of the associated critic in brackets. This

encouraged a more flexible and responsive approach to the use of critical ideas.

Section B

General: As for Section A, it was very good to see responses offered on all the texts available in Section B and on all questions. A growing number of responses was seen on the recent additions to the specification – *Les Blancs* (Lorraine Hansberry) and *Sweat* (Lynn Nottage). There were some examples of candidates who had evidently left insufficient time for the completion of their responses to Section B, having spent too long on their Shakespeare play.

General: A number of candidates had evidently undertaken wider reading surrounding their texts for Section B. This is to be encouraged, as reading critical essays can provide candidates with stimulating material for thought and a variety of ways of thinking about the texts they are studying. These can be used as interesting contexts for the reception of the texts they are working on. They are reminded, however, that AO5 is not formally assessed, and so they do not have to use these in the same way as in Section A.

AO1: There were many examples of effective – and some very effective – writing in Section B responses. The best candidates developed sophisticated arguments, deploying an array of relevant literary concepts and – as appropriate – terminology. As for Section A of the paper, it is worth observing that some candidates from across the range made comparatively little specific reference to the texts they were writing on. It is very important that candidates use textual references – including but not limited to quotation – to root their responses in the texts.

AO2: In questions explicitly focused on AO2 issues, candidates demonstrated the ability to focus on many examples of the ways in which playwrights use a variety of methods to shape their meanings. In other questions, however, with theme or character foci, the coverage of AO2 was typically the weakest element of performance at all levels. It is very important that candidates engage with and are able to explore the methods dramatists employ and to think about the ways in which these methods lead to particular effects on an audience.

AO3: As for Section A, it is evident that candidates have been introduced to an array of interesting contextual material. It is important that this material is deployed effectively in responses, by ensuring that it is relevantly applied and – if possible – closely connected to and incorporated in candidates' arguments. This makes contextual ideas do genuine work by tying closely into what candidates have to say about the works they have studied.

Grade boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>

