

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCSE English Literature (5ET03)
Shakespeare and Contemporary Drama

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General Overview

Students complete two tasks – one Shakespeare task and one contemporary drama task. Task-taking time will be up to four hours to complete both tasks. The unit represents 25% of the overall GCSE.

Both tasks are set by Edexcel and accessed via the website. Students study one of the following Shakespeare tasks: characterisation; performance; theme; or relationships.

In their response to the chosen task, students will:

- make comparisons and explain links between their own reading and an adaptation (20 marks);
- explain how Shakespeare's use of language, structure and form contribute to his ideas, themes and setting, supported by examples (10 marks).

Students study one of the following contemporary drama tasks: characterisation; stagecraft; theme; relationships.

In their response to the chosen task, students will:

- respond to the chosen drama text critically and imaginatively;
- support the comments with evidence from the drama text.

Shakespeare

This third series of Unit 3 (5ET03) saw the largest entry so far, with a large number of centres entering students for the first time; it was also the first for students to 'cash-in' and receive a full GCSE result.

The Shakespeare assignments covered a range of texts, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The adaptations chosen were mainly the popular *Zeffirelli (1968)* and *Baz Luhrmann (1996)* for *Romeo and Juliet*; *Polanski, Robert Goold (2007)* and BBC animated tales for *Macbeth* and *Radford (2004)* for *The Merchant of Venice*. The choice of adaptation is a key part of enabling students' access to the higher bands for AO3; although there are a wide range of adaptations, especially of *Romeo and Juliet*, some, such as *Gnomeo and Juliet (2011)*, are very limiting for students in terms of analysis and links with the original drama text. The chosen adaptations were invariably helpful in prompting focused, detailed and appropriate responses to meet the demands of AO3

There is some evidence that some students were basing their responses on a very limited selection from the play rather than the complete Shakespeare text. Although detailed work can rightly focus on selected key parts of the play, the whole play should be read and awareness of the whole play should be evidenced

in the students' responses. So, although there is no requirement to write about the whole text, there is a requirement to show awareness of the text as a whole.

Some centres created a rigid framework for their students to work from, even to the extent of providing identical quotations. It raised the issue of how students can address aspects of structure and development, particularly for the character task, when they may have been confined in their study to a thin representation of the text. Clearly, in the two hours of a controlled assessment a specific focus is often more suitable than a whole play response, but a more substantial study of the play is required than was indicated in some very narrow responses.

Better responses focused on the language of Shakespeare and its effects, connotations, themes (AO2), and then compared these ideas directly with the way the adaptation tackled these same ideas (AO3); high quality responses often did this frequently within the same paragraph. Some students wrote what were in essence two responses – one on Shakespeare's text and then the second on the adaptation. This was difficult to moderate as the comparisons and links (AO3) were not made. Other students seemed to forget that part of the task was comparison and spent too much time discussing how a theme is present in Shakespeare, with a cursory comment on the adaptation.

Most students addressed both AOs at once, with varying degrees of success. Many students did not make it clear enough when they were discussing Shakespeare's text and when they were discussing the adaptation. Weaker responses pointed out where language had been cut out in the adaptation but failed to explain why this choice might have been made, beyond it something on the lines: 'making it easier for the audience to understand'. Stronger responses explored this area of director's choice suggesting ways, for example, in which characterisation may have been affected by such omissions.

One issue causing some concern is the balance in the responses between AO2 and AO3 – a large number of responses focussed excessively on the adaptation, to their detriment: one third of this Shakespeare task is entirely based on AO2 – focussing on Shakespeare's use of language, structure and form (10 marks); two thirds are based on AO3, comparing writer's different ways of expressing meaning and achieving effects (20 marks), which again would require analysis of Shakespeare's text. Therefore, when both these AOs are taken into consideration, it seems logical that approximately two thirds of the task should refer to the original Shakespeare text, and only one third to the adaptation. Obviously some points are integrated and we do not want to see students or teachers word counting, so a 'sense check' of the balance should be sufficient.

When discussing costume, props and special effects, weaker responses often made assumptions about how the play would have been performed in Shakespeare's day, or focused too heavily on the generalisation that

Shakespeare would have done it differently because he didn't have access to different camera shots or fast cars etc. Stronger responses looked at these features in the film adaptations and discussed what it was in the original text which gave the director the idea to use them in the way he did, for example, Tybalt's flamenco style gun-toting in Lührman; Lady Macbeth's cobweb dress in the Manga graphic novel.

The ability of some students to consider language in detail was particularly impressive. Some perceptive points regarding Shakespeare's original text were made. However, some students over-analysed the language to the detriment of their responses – one centre had students writing two pages analysing one line of text. These responses were excessively overlong and certainly not 'discriminating', even though these were able students. On the other hand, some students failed to consider word choice or the actual effect of language at all.

Contemporary Drama

As in the previous two series, the range of Contemporary Drama choices provided a challenging selection from: *The Crucible*, *An Inspector Calls*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Journey's End*, *Educating Rita*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Blood Brothers*, *Our Day Out*, *Kes* and *Whose Life is it Anyway?*

The majority of tasks set were appropriately used. Again most centres focussed on the comparison of character in three or more specific scenes. These responses were generally successful for all students and allowed them to explore language in detail. Where centres had only looked at one key moment from the play there was a lack of depth and understanding to student responses.

Students that focussed on theme produced interesting and engaging responses and these tasks enabled able students to produce perceptive writing. Students who focussed on performance produced interesting responses, but less able students struggled to analyse text in detail with this focus.

Marking for AO1 was generally accurate, although some centres were generous in their marking at the top end of the mark range.

There were a number of examples where students had spent time in writing about matters that were not directly relevant to the task they had been set. There were many introductory statements, some very long, mostly about the contemporary social and cultural context of the texts. This was particularly prevalent when the task was set using *An Inspector Calls*. In many instances teachers had commended these in their comments even though they were not

relevant. The best students got quickly into the task and focussed throughout on answering the question.

'Scaffolding' that was highly prescriptive was also a problem in the contemporary drama task, where identical responses on Mr Birling were evidenced in certain centres. Lower ability students all wrote the same and appeared disengaged, while higher ability students were severely limited by the quotations, scenes and points they had clearly been told to write on.

General comments

Several submissions were longer than they need to have been and longer than students were able to sustain a display of relevant skills. The recommendation is to allow "up to" four hours. Teachers must judge how much time, realistically, is necessary for the chosen task. It may be helpful to start thinking of this by asking how much more than an hour do students really need.

Teachers should look again at the clear advice Edexcel offers on the use of notes for all Controlled Assessment tasks. Although some students may derive a strong sense of purpose and confidence from having extensive notes, unfortunately, too often the purpose is insufficiently focused on criteria and the confidence is a false one that misunderstands what moderators are looking for in students' work. It is clear to moderators that there is no correlation between quantity of notes and quality of response. Rather, the reverse seems to be the case. Where students simply write out more fully what they have prepared in condensed form as a draft answer, it soon becomes apparent that their use of the controlled assessment time was for repeating, not building from their notes. This does not in any way advantage them. Notes should be brief and help to remind them of the skills they need to show to meet assessment objectives and/or band criteria, and some page references.

A number of centres provided helpful detailed and supportive annotations on their students' scripts; however, a large number of centres did not. The purpose of annotation, as it was in coursework, is to show where students have fulfilled criteria and to justify the mark awarded. Sometimes, this is not what appears in annotation. Some annotation shows no awareness of the skills hierarchies built into the mark bands. For example, writing 'language' in the margin where a student has mentioned language means nothing in terms of professional assessment. There has to be use of the qualifiers – limited, some, sound, specific, discriminating and perceptive, and there has to be some use of the discriminator nouns such as understanding, insight, etc.

The annotations and comments should be addressed to the moderator and not the student; the annotation that gains a moderator's confidence in the accuracy

of the centre's assessment is that which shows a sensitive and critical application of 'best fit' features – indicating realistically what the student is doing. Annotation supports a moderator in their ability to confirm a centre's marks by showing how the centre has reached their decision.

Administration

As in the previous two series, the presentation of the student folders had improved significantly and it was obvious that centres had responded to the moderator comments from January; however, there are still a few issues that need to be addressed for next year:

- Front sheets must be completed with the correct student and/or centre details. It can be rather time consuming for the moderator to try and match the name, student number and mark awarded, especially from large entry centres, with the online system.
- Marks must be put onto the online system and a copy of the Optem sheet included within the sample.
- Marks need to be checked carefully - a number of centres had incorrectly totalled all 3 AOs and this led to discrepancies.
- The marks awarded for AO2 and AO3 need to be written separately on the Shakespeare response.
- Top and bottom student folders **MUST** be submitted in addition to the requested sample. Likewise, if a student has been withdrawn the centre **MUST** substitute the folder with a replacement of a similar mark.
- The full details of the task need to be written on the coversheet, to indicate which of the four tasks the student had chosen.
- Centres need to illustrate where (for more than one teacher) internal moderation of students' work had taken place – initials from members of the department would be sufficient.

What seems impressively evident from the submissions is that students are bringing enthusiasm and commitment to their Controlled Assessment tasks, and rigorously applying guidance and direction provided by their teachers. This makes it all the more necessary that teachers are providing guidance and direction that is based upon sound pedagogy and assessment practice, as exemplified in the extensive professional development and training, which has been nationally available since the launch of the new specification.

The senior moderators would again like to thank all centres for their hard work and commitment to the new Unit 3 specifications. I hope that the comments and observations arising in this report will be helpful to centres planning their submissions for next year's entries. Good luck for 2012-13.

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