

Moderators' Report
GCSE English Literature 5ET03 01

January 2013

Shakespeare and Contemporary Drama

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Introduction

Candidates 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.

Tasks

Both tasks are set by Edexcel and accessed via the website. Candidates study one of the following Shakespeare tasks:

- Characterisation
- Performance
- Theme
- Relationships.

In their response to the chosen task, candidates should:

- 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 in terms of meaning and achieving effects (10 marks)
- support the comments with evidence from the drama text.

Candidates study one of the following contemporary drama tasks:

- Characterisation
- Stagecraft
- Theme
- Relationships.

In their response to the chosen task, candidates should:

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

Shakespeare

Macbeth and *Romeo and Juliet* were the most popular choice for the Shakespeare task, with *The Merchant of Venice* chosen by a couple of centres. The tasks selected by the candidates were equally balanced between character, relationship and theme – stagecraft being the least popular option.

It was apparent from the moderating team's feedback and E9 reports that centres have taken on board comments from the Principal Moderator's Report in the summer. Candidates had focused on the language of Shakespeare and its effects, connotations, themes (AO2) then compared these ideas with the way the adaptation tackled these same elements (AO3), the more able candidates combining these ideas within the same paragraph. The balance was in favour of the text as opposed to the adaptation.

The majority of responses covered a range of Acts within the chosen play. It was felt that this had enabled candidates – even the weaker ones – to show a greater understanding of the text and allowed them greater scope when it came to selecting appropriate textual evidence.

It was also pleasing to note that compared to the summer series only a couple of centres appeared to provide a framework to aid the candidates in scaffolding their responses. Responses were felt to be far more independently written and allowed candidates the ability to explore their own interpretations of the text and adaptation, rather than be restricted by teacher-led structures.

Contemporary drama

As the entry was far smaller than the summer series, the majority of drama texts chosen were either *An Inspector Calls* or *A View from the Bridge*. One centre had studied *Blue Remembered Hills*, which was extremely well approached and very enjoyable to read – the candidates had obviously enjoyed studying the text.

During the summer series it was noted that candidates were approaching the contemporary drama from a contextual aspect and marks were lost as a result – AO4 being awarded on the exam Unit 1. Many centres had obviously taken on board the Principal Moderator's comments and there was less evidence of responses focusing on historical and social context, especially within the *An Inspector Calls* tasks.

The majority of tasks set were appropriate and used one of the Edexcel prescribed tasks for this series. The most popular tasks chosen were character, whilst stagecraft was the least favourite choice.

Marking for AO1 was thought to be far more accurate than AO2 and 3, although some centres were generous in their allocations of a Band 5, awarding marks for straightforward interpretations rather than a perceptive analysis.

As with the Shakespeare task, it was felt there was less scaffolding in the contemporary drama, with candidates exploring the texts in a more fluid approach. This allowed higher ability candidates to explore a greater range of scenes and points rather than follow what they had been told to write.

General comments

Following the very large summer 2012 series, the January 2013 was comparatively small for entries to the Literature Controlled Assessment Unit 3. Moderation of the specification again provided evidence of how well centres – teachers and candidates – have met the challenges of the change from coursework to Controlled Assessment. This series, in the majority of cases, moderators have reported that candidates seem to have been well prepared – demonstrating the benefits of greater maturation by candidates and increased knowledge by the teaching staff of the unit's requirements. There has been some outstanding work by candidates in response to thoughtfully framed tasks.

In the great majority of cases moderators have confirmed centre assessments. Centres where marks have been adjusted will understandably be concerned, but it is hoped that the Moderator's Feedback Report (E9) will provide some explanation and guidance for future series.

Where centre assessments are confirmed, there is invariably evidence of sound internal standardising often to be seen in additional comments on candidates' work. Moderators know from leading standardising meetings and from their role as subject advisers that it has become increasingly difficult for English departments to find the time to properly standardise, but there is some clear evidence that a lack of thorough internal standardising can lead to some significant adjustment of centre marks.

The attention is drawn to the paramount importance of effective adequate internal standardisation – as required by the GCSE Code of Practice. Centres are reminded that internal standardisation is now required to up to four separate components. Reliable annotation of candidates' work is important. Where moderators confirm centre marks they are usually confirming the reliability of centre annotation. Where there is effective internal standardising there is a shared understanding of key terms and appreciation of details from the assessment criteria.

Probably the greatest source of disagreement between moderator and centre is the decision of centres to place a response in Bands 4 or 5 and support the mark with marginal annotation which asserts 'developed' and 'sustained' for Band 4 and 'discriminating' or 'perceptive' for Band 5. The previous report provided some support in explaining these terms but some points are worth repeating. Most disagreement about marking is based on reading skills, and in the mark schemes in all units the same key terms feature in Bands 4 and 5.

In Band 4, the terms 'developed, specific and sustained' are particularly important. The words do not appear in Band 3. This means there is evidence of depth and sustained lines of discussion in a Band 4 response. Moderators sometimes find simple evidence of the kinds of understanding found in use of PEE which has been annotated as 'sound' but which should be placed in either Band 2 or 3. A Band 5, 'perceptive and discriminating' response – of the kind that will probably equate to high grade A or A* – will display even more depth and perception. It refers to use of textual detail and is important because it suggests the element of independent thought that can sometimes be lacking from well written, conscientious, but heavily scaffolded responses.

Candidates identified as being capable of addressing Band 5 criteria must be given tasks and approaches to tasks which allow them to display some imagination and independence of thought. They must be allowed to 'interpret', and they should be given sufficient material to write 'discriminating' and 'perceptive' responses. There has been considerable promotion of the 'write a lot about a little' approach. It is very good advice but it does not mean that Band 4 or 5 responses should be based only on one

small part of a text. It means that candidates should focus on significant parts of whole texts and explore each selected part in some depth and detail. Moderators have, for example, seen some responses to *Macbeth* which are still based on the old coursework task based on Act 1 of the play and the changes in Macbeth's character. The responses illustrate a kind of 'write a lot about a little' approach based on small sections of the Act, with every candidate using the same textual details to make the same points in the same order. There is little evidence that candidates have read the rest of the play because they seem unable to explore the significance of the Act to the rest of the play, and therefore moderators find it difficult to support centre marking that places some candidates' responses in Bands 4 or 5.

Moderators have noted inconsistent use of annotation in a few centres. Centres are strongly advised to develop a consistent approach to the annotation of all folders. Some approaches should be discouraged. It is not helpful to write terms such as 'language' or 'context' in the margin. These words appear in every band of mark schemes so serve no purpose in placing a response in a band. Some centres have used an abbreviation of an assessment objective in the margin; this is only helpful if it is accompanied by a band number. Summative comments which are clearly meant to encourage candidates are often unhelpful to the moderator: the purpose of annotation of GCSE Controlled Assessment is to explain the award of the mark. The best approach is based on a kind of running commentary in which brief remarks are placed next to parts of the candidate's response in which there is evidence of meeting a particular criterion at a particular level. The most reassuring annotation recognises that in most responses there will be evidence of a candidate meeting different criteria in different bands at different stages of a response. A point made in a previous report is worth repeating: when moderators find a comment such as 'sophisticated interpretation' next to the opening three or four lines of a response they will invariably find an over-rewarded response. The early use of 'sophisticated' before any line of thought has been developed is usually an indication that the marker's mind has already been made up that this particular response will be Band 5. In most centres there are examples of some superb annotation: brief, insightful marginal comments and concise, well focused summative comments. The best annotation is also very well balanced, with the marker recognising that some criteria have not been met as well as others.

Candidate notes could often be of more use to candidates if there were a clearer recognition of the different strands of the mark scheme. Many centres have an excellent approach to notes: candidates' notes are individual, brief and based upon assessment criteria. Candidates should use the notes page as an aide memoire and it is particularly important that they do not forget to address all the assessment criteria reflecting different weightings of AOs.

Defining appropriate notes has not been easy but the vast majority of centres have used a common sense approach to determine what is 'brief' and have advised candidates to make simple notes consisting of a few key points and page references/quotations. In most centres notes consist of things like bullet points or spider diagrams and candidates avoid full sentences or pre-prepared drafts. The issue of pre-prepared drafts was raised at standardising meetings last autumn and it was made clear that **under no circumstances should notes consist of the skeleton of something previously written with some words missed out.** Such notes are, by no stretch of the imagination, 'brief'; they also mean that what candidates are writing in 'controlled' assessment is not 'controlled' because candidates are copying something out that was written before the control was applied.

It is hoped that centres will take note of the autumn standardising materials as a guide to what may be best practice in this unit for the summer series.

The senior moderators would again like to thank all centres for their hard work and commitment to English Literature Unit 3. I hope that the comments and observations arising in this report will be helpful to centres planning their submissions for the summer entries.

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