



ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

GCE English Literature

Specification B

Guidance Notes: Exploring AO4

© AQA 2003

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres of AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet **for their own internal use**, with the important following exceptions: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales 3644723 and a registered Charity 1073334. Registered address Addleshaw Booth & Co., Sovereign House, PO Box 8, Sovereign Street, Leeds LS1 1HQ. AQA was formed by the merger of the Associated Examining Board (AEB)/Southern Examining Group (SEG) and the Northern Examinations and Assessment Board (NEAB). Kathleen Tattersall Director General.

ENGLISH LITERATURE SPECIFICATION B

EXPLORING AO4

Literature depends upon how it is read, Mr Carson. It must be read in a different way.
(Oscar Wilde at his trial)

1. The official wording of this AO is as follows:

The examination will assess a candidate's ability to:

Articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by **different interpretations** of literary texts by **other readers** (our highlighting)

It is how students access and write about different interpretations by other readers which has proved difficult for some.

2. AO4 appears in Unit 1, often placed alongside AO5 in the questions

AO4 is not in Unit 2

AO4 is a heavily weighted component of Unit 3 and so is the driving force behind teaching/assessing. AO5 is also in this unit.

AO4 is part of Unit 4

AO4 is paired with AO3 in the poetry section of Unit 5

AO4 is part of unit 6

A useful exercise here would be to consider the implications for students and teachers of where and how AO4 appears across the course.

3. At the heart of AO4 lies the theoretical perspective that meanings in texts belong to readers not authors. So, it is pointless to pursue a line of enquiry which asks 'what did the author intend here?' Instead we need to consider the following:

- What meanings do I find in this text? (and so linking with AO2)
- What methods have I used in finding meanings in this text (and so linking with AO3)
- What different contextual materials have I applied to this text? (and so linking with AO5)
- What critical/theoretical models have I used in thinking about this text?

4. Looking at the above it should be clear that different interpretations of texts involves looking closely at the text itself as a starting point. There may be different interpretations of people/events **within** the text, but that as such is not what AO4 is about. AO4 involves the students in understanding that literature is cultural representation, and as such, unfixed and fluid in its meanings. The logical conclusion to this is that students are required by the official wording to 'articulate independent judgements and opinions' – in other words to recognise multiple possibilities while possibly giving some preferred readings. They are not being asked to consider two or more views and say one is right!

5. So how do students and teachers access these other readings? There is a number of possible ways:
- They can come from within the group itself
 - They can come from critical reading
 - They can come from theoretical speculation based upon the understanding of various critical ‘positions’.

Extracts from Two Recent Reports on LTB3

The way this specification is designed means that in unit 3, easily the most important assessment objective is AO4: it carries half of the weighting for this unit. The fact that it has two strands in the mark criteria reinforces this point.

AO4 assesses candidates’ ability to:

Articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary text by other readers

This AO, then, carries two requirements, which this specification acknowledges in its two mark criteria strands for AO4. The first requirement is that candidates are aware of different interpretations, and that at the higher levels they are able to evaluate these interpretations. The second is that having considered some interpretations, they then show some judgements of their own. The key point to make here is that when candidates are asked by their teachers to *describe* a critical response or to *show* where a theme occurs they are unlikely to be engaging in any real critical debate, because they are not being asked to.

(June 02)

The recent support meetings and the Autumn round of standardising meetings/materials have continued to stress how important AO4 is to this unit. Where centres have understood this, and placed this assessment objective at the heart of their teaching and task-setting, then things have generally gone well. There are still some centres, though, which are ignoring the demands of AO4, yet awarding their candidates very high marks. Tasks in these centres either seemed very similar to those set in examinations which were not governed by such clear assessment objectives or were not tasks at all. The mere identification of a topic (‘Noting in Much Ado’, ‘Madness in King Lear’, ‘Revenge in Hamlet’ ‘Women in Othello’) is not enough – it places far too great a burden on candidates, who usually respond by telling the story. Each of the topics mentioned above could be at the heart of a task, though, if presented clearly. Centres are reminded to consult their coursework advisor if in doubt about any aspect of this unit.

Those centres which are encouraging and enabling candidates to debate issues about plays, in terms of both the text and the possible reception of the text, are showing good understanding of what is required. The best responses are sharply focused on a particular part of a play and/or a critically controversial issue. Candidates do not, of course, need to say one side of the argument is ultimately the ‘right’ one – to do so would go against the whole idea of multiple readings of texts. Film and video productions can inform a response, but merely comparing two versions of the whole play does not work.

(Jan 03)