



General Certificate of Education

**English Language and Literature
6726**

Specification B

NTB5 Talk in Life and Literature

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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General

The following comment from a team leader provides an encouraging picture of this summer's performance by candidates: 'There have been some really good papers this year. Centres are teaching from a solid base of discourse theory and candidates seem to really understand what's going on when people talk'. It has certainly been impressive to read the confident, fluent, wide-ranging and informed answers of candidates achieving marks in the higher bands.

There remain, however, a few hoary problems which centres may wish to note. It is several years since there was any reference to 'everyday talk' and 'attitudes and values' in the rubric for Question 1, and candidates are disadvantaged who 'add' these elements into their answers. 'Dramatic effects' are still not understood by some candidates, who make unsupported assertions that they exist in a given passage with no reference to the literary or linguistic feature or convention which created the particular 'effects'. Less confident candidates still write about punctuation features ('exclamation *marks*' instead of 'exclamations'), seemingly oblivious to the fact that Shakespeare's editors, not the playwright himself, are responsible for punctuation. It is always better to refer to a 'pause' rather than the punctuated break in a passage. Candidates do need to be reminded that ignoring the bullet points in either Question 1 or Question 2 can be a recipe for disaster. They are meant to provide a structure if one is required, and certainly a reminder of the areas to be covered in an answer. One last problem is the fact that far too many candidates are still confused about blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter). They seem to think that they are *different* entities!

Newer problems occurring relate to the use of film versions of the texts. Seeing a film version can be hugely helpful to candidates at various stages of their study. However, they must remember that the version they will be examined on is the printed text, not, for example, Kenneth Branagh's interpretation of a particular scene in *Hamlet*, or the version of *Twelfth Night* which starts not with Orsino's speech, but with the shipwreck. Candidates who referred to the film version were often confused when attempting to contextualise a passage. Another more recent – but growing – problem is the temptation to use the spoken register instead of more formal lexis in answers. The occasional use of 'sweet-talk' or 'wind-up' or 'clocked on to' can be witty and apt, but maintaining this informal register throughout an answer can have a reductive effect on the overall argument.

QUESTION 1

All the texts were popular with centres, with the exception of *The School for Scandal*, chosen by only one centre.

Hamlet

Candidates found the passages interesting but challenging. Generally there was no problem with context on A, but some candidates were uncertain whether B occurs before Hamlet's final fight with Laertes or earlier than this. Candidates found Hamlet's challenges to Ophelia difficult to explain but recognised that he was hostile to all women, not just to Ophelia. There were some exaggerated views of the down-trodden nature of Elizabethan women, especially Ophelia. Hamlet's 'madness', affected or real, was cited automatically by many candidates as an explanation of his contradictory behaviour towards Ophelia – an answer to all problems! It was disappointing that imagery was neglected in A ('Virtue cannot inoculate our old stock...'), though more candidates did explore the hyperbolic language used by Hamlet in B ('make Ossa like a wart!'). As always, feature-spotting was the resort of the insecure; comment on the discourse structure of the extracts was a mark of the more confident candidates.

Twelfth Night

There was near universal recognition of Passage A as the first scene in the play (except for those who recalled the film version rather than the text). Despite this, candidates found it hard to discuss the imagery of excess (music/food/love) and reverted to general comments about blank verse and status, ignoring the Cupid imagery and preferring the 'hart/heart' punning. Passage B presented real problems of context, however; most candidates recognised that it was part of the scene in which Malvolio discovers the false letter composed by Maria, but too many thought he had already read it. Shakespeare prepares the audience for the 'gulling' by having Malvolio fantasising in soliloquy about his dreams and aspirations (much to the outrage of the hidden Sir Toby). Some candidates not only got the context wrong but tried to create a non-existent dialogue between Malvolio and the conspirators (which basically made no sense of the passage). Dramatic function as well as dramatic effect was important in A, as many candidates noted, establishing key themes and introducing the audience to key characters.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The context of Passage A was generally recognised by candidates, though its exact position in the scene was less clear. Less successful candidates confused Egeus and Theseus and assumed that Hermia was another Elizabethan down-trodden woman, quite contrary to the textual evidence! Opportunities were missed by some candidates to comment on the discourse structure of the passage (length of turn, etc) which has dramatic significance. There was some confusion about Hermia's ironic reference to 'his lordship' (Demetrius) and the terms of address 'my lord' used to Theseus. An example of semantic shift appeared in this passage – the phrase 'made love to' simply means in the Elizabethan context 'wooed', unlike the modern usage. A nice point made by one candidate was that the power of love leads Hermia to challenge not only family authority but also the authority of the state. Passage B shows Theseus in less authoritative mode, willing to reward 'simplicity and duty' despite Philostrate's advice. As Master of the Revels (a point missed by 99% of the candidates), his job was to ensure high quality entertainment for the Duke, and he feared public embarrassment if the rustics' play was chosen. His reasons for trying to persuade Theseus not to choose the rustics were quite

different from the explanations (snobbish/unkind) offered by some candidates. Most candidates were aware that the audience is in suspense here as Theseus chooses – longing for him to select the play which has entertained them so much already.

The School for Scandal

This play was studied by only a few centres but most candidates performed extremely well on it, and had no difficulties with either passage.

Question 2a

This question was chosen by most candidates, though not all showed evidence of enjoying the humour in Text B as much as had been hoped. However, one candidate at least commented that it had been difficult to abide by the rules of the exam room and not laugh out loud! The least successful approach was to adopt a deficit model of comparison – what Text A had, Text B didn't, and the reverse. This approach tended to be limiting and didn't take into account the crafting of dialogue to replicate spontaneous speech. A better approach was to start with the genre of the service encounter, comment on the schema or expectations and show how B subverted them for comic purposes. A surprising number of candidates found the surreal nature of the comedy hard to pin down and explain.

Question 2b

Those candidates who chose this option found it relatively straightforward. The most perceptive candidates commented on the historical differences in attitude to debt between the nineteenth century and the present day, and linked this to the attitudes and values displayed by the speakers in both passages. It was notable here that the theory of service encounters (Ventola) was applied effectively by candidates across the ability range – an example of how theory 'beyond Grice' is genuinely useful to candidates in their exploration of texts.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.