



AS

English Literature A

7711/1 Love through the ages: Shakespeare and poetry

Report on the Examination

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Summary

Overall performance compared to last year

Performance is in line with last and previous years. The discriminators remain as outlined in the guidance and priorities section below

Areas where students excelled

- directly addressing the given view and key words as a way to explore interpretation.
- linking methods to meaning, stressing the relevance of chosen methods to the question.
- communicating a structured argument as the best way of answering the question.
- knowledge and understanding of the Shakespeare extract and wider play.
- grasp of the Shakespeare text as an example of its genre.
- considering Shakespeare as drama for the stage.
- understanding the form of the chosen poem in Section B.
- enthusiasm for the writer's methods to present the speaker in Section B.

Areas where students struggled

- planning the argument and selecting material/detail carefully.
 - shaping and structuring a clear and relevant argument.
 - exploring interpretation in a tentative and measured way.
 - making clear, relevant and sufficient use of the Shakespeare extract.
 - linking poetry methods to meaning and the question in Section B.
 - distinguishing between the speaker and writer in Section B.
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General Remarks

This report should be read in conjunction with the report on 7711/2. It might also be relevant to consult to the report for the equivalent A level component, 7712/1.

It was evident from the marking of Papers 1 and 2 that the historicist philosophy of the Specification is positively embraced for providing clarity and coherence. Historicism sees texts not in isolation but as products of their time. As such, it encourages the exploration of the relationship between texts and the contexts in which they are written and then in which they read and interpreted, along with how they have been interpreted over the intervening time period. Key to the engagement with a historicist approach is the focus on a shared context. In both Paper 1 and Paper 2 this is the diachronic context of Love through the ages.

Importantly, this specification aims to encourage confident, independent readers who can 'make meaning' through both close textual analysis and a wider understanding of the contexts that might inform their literary study. Students are encouraged to pursue clear, authentic arguments with conviction.

Such responses are best rewarded by the holistic marking of five Assessment Objectives using a 25-mark scale divided into five bands. The holistic use of assessment objectives allows for a flexible mark scheme which aims to encourage independent work not limited by formulaic constraints. Holistic marking enables responses to be assessed as organic whole texts in themselves. Assessment objectives are not tracked in the marking or reported on separately in summative comments. This enables the genuine inter-relatedness of assessment objectives to be respected. The best advice to students is to concentrate on answering the question set and let the assessment objectives look after themselves. Because the quality of written expression is crucial in enabling literary skills, students should be particularly mindful of *how* they answer the question too.

Guidance on priorities

In the first few series of this examination, the emphasis of reports and subsequent training was on historicism as the underpinning philosophy of the Specification. The following areas of priority build on that foundation:

Extracts

It is important to remember that the Shakespeare extract in Section A is selected and printed on the examination paper for the express purpose of relevant analysis and to give a full and detailed answer to the question. It is surprisingly still quite common to under-use the extract. The extract will have been chosen with a clear beginning and end, to enable analysis of structure. The key words of the given view in the second bullet are intended as a lens through which to view the extract and wider play. Therefore, there is every reason to spend a substantial amount of this time slot analysing the details, methods and contexts embedded in the extract. An answer that does not fully engage with the extract is likely to be self-penalising.

Examiners often came across otherwise strong answers on the Shakespeare play that attended to the given view and the wider play but under-used the extract so ended up with, at best, marks low in Band 4. These answers often had Band 5 potential, so it can be frustrating to see insufficient relevant attention to the details of the extract.

As the Shakespeare extract is from a play, it is particularly important to accessing dramatic methods that the text is seen as drama for the stage and not just the page. Precise relevant references to aspects of dramatic presentation and stagecraft are encouraged. Reference to specific productions is often used to good effect and this is also to be encouraged.

There are, of course two bullets to the extract question and it is worth noting that there are different acceptable approaches. Some are taught to tackle them separately. Others concentrate on the second conflating the first into it as part of the natural focus on love taken by the Specification as a whole. The latter approach is probably more popular and rarely involves ignoring or under-valuing aspects of love, so Centres who might need reassurance and confirmation that this approach is acceptable and not an obstacle to success should take note.

The poetry questions in Section B tend to involve fewer pitfalls. As the 'extracts' here are, of course, complete poems, there is no immediate 'wider play' issue to worry about and there is a single focus on the given view. At the same time, it is worth stressing that the reproduction of the text is still an invitation to read closely and concentrate efforts on exploring the methods and contexts revealed by the text.

At the same time, both Section A and Section B extracts are parts of a greater whole and questions still come up about how much time should be devoted to the wider play in Section A and to the rest of the Anthology for Section B. The wider play is explicitly referred to in Section A questions so it is a requirement of the answer; in Section B it is not a requirement so, aside from references perhaps to poetic typicality, explicit reference to other poems is not required and not recommended as it can compromise the relevance of the answer. In Section A references to the wider play should be limited to specific, carefully chosen cross reference to scenes, moments or quotations of direct relevance to the extract as points of similarity or difference. Students should avoid unnecessary narrative or exposition about other points in the wider play. Reference to other plays by Shakespeare is rarely helpful. These tend to be made as an attempt to address typicality rather than as part of an authentic direct answer to the question

Question key words

The command words of questions in Section A do not vary. The first bullet is always: How does Shakespeare present aspects of love in this extract? 'How' places immediate emphasis on methods and implies the need for detail and explanation of techniques and effects. The second bullet always begins: Examine the view that, in this extract and elsewhere in the play, Shakespeare presents... Again, 'examine' puts immediate emphasis on the need to look closely and explore. Engaging with both these injunctions is crucial to progressing up the mark scheme.

Likewise in Section B, questions will always begin: Examine the view that... 'Examine' here encourages thorough attention to the given view and to the poem that follows.

Both 'how' and 'examine' are prompts to analyse within a clear, coherent argument. This is a higher-order skill that opens up the upper reaches of the mark scheme.

Genre-specific analysis of methods

In Section A both dramatic methods and poetic methods are relevant. Plays have audiences, involve stagecraft and visual as well as aural effects. Dramatic irony is often at work and the student responds to dramatic methods as part of the wider audience. It is awareness of these aspects of extracts and plays that acts as the main discriminator in these questions. At the same time, Shakespeare's poetic techniques can be scrutinised; employed by speakers for rhetorical effect on other characters and the audience. Successful responses scrutinise interactions between characters at particular moments in the extract and the wider play. This flexibility between dramatic and poetic methods is a particular demand of this question. When it comes to Section B, students tend to engage readily with poetic methods to show the application of their learning. However, they should choose aspects of methods that (a) are relevant to the question and (b) they are confident about. It is common for students to engage at the word level and then go on to mis-label word classes in the process. There is no need to label word classes but if students choose to do this as a chosen aspect of methods then they have an obligation to do so accurately. Similarly, there is no obligation to scan poems for metre or to use letters to label rhyme schemes, but if students take this path, then they must get it right. There are two crucial priorities here: (i) choosing relevant methods that are of genuine interest to students in answering the question and (ii) the need to link methods clearly to meaning so that methods are not simply identified. Effects need to be explained rather than simply asserted.

AQA's **Teaching Guide to AO2** offers a productive way into thinking about the different ways in which meaning is shaped across the three different genres.

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-a/teach/teaching-guide-ao2>

Individual questions

Question 1

Othello

Extract from Act 3, Scene 1:

- How does Shakespeare present aspects of love in this extract?
- Examine the view that, in this extract and elsewhere in the play, this is a play more about hate than love.

What students did well

- considered how far Roderigo's infatuation with Desdemona equated to love.
- explored Iago's cynical reduction of love to a sexual transaction.
- contrasted the above with the best of Othello's and Desdemona's love affair.
- picked up on Iago's references to hatred for Othello in the extract.
- examined Iago's soliloquy at the end of the extract – the motivations for his hatred of Othello, and his commitment to malicious manipulation.
- made judicious references to manifestations of Iago's hatred elsewhere in the play.
- appreciated the extent of Iago's corruption of Othello and the tragic arc of the play.
- thought about the extent to which hatred might stem from the Venetian and/or Cypriot settings.
- wrote thoughtfully about hate and love in wider play without losing sight of the extract.

Common misunderstandings

- wrote a character study of Iago.
- spent too much time on the arc of Othello's and Desdemona's love affair.
- did not consider the worst excesses of hatred in the play.

Question 2

The Taming of the Shrew

Extract from Act 4, Scene 1:

- How does Shakespeare present aspects of love in this extract?
- Examine the view that, in this extract and elsewhere in the play, Petruchio is playing roles in order to win Katherina's love.

What students did well

- concentrated on the extract finding good things to say about the 'stage business'
- saw Petruchio as a performer keen to show authority over his servants as a way of taming Katherina.
- considered the significance of Katherina's interjections.
- were able to consider the extract and question as an opportunity to discuss comedy.
- made judicious links to the other scenes where Petruchio is performing.
- were able to balance how different audiences might view Petruchio's behaviour and how this opens up different interpretations of him.

Common misunderstandings

- Wrote a character study of Petruchio.
- Generally described/narrated the taming process.
- Struggled to apply the concept of roles to other scenes in the play.

Question 3

Measure for Measure

Extract from Act 4, Scene 1:

- How does Shakespeare present aspects of love in this extract?
- Examine the view that, in this extract and elsewhere in the play, deception is always a terrible thing, especially when it is done in the name of love.

What students did well

- focused on the extract and particularly its structure.
- appreciated the stagecraft of exits and entrances.
- identified different kinds of deception.
- considered the dramatic irony of the Duke in disguise as a friar and the duplicitous nature of his relationship with Mariana and Isabella.
- considered the significance of the Duke's soliloquy, and his role in the wider play
- paid due attention to 'in the name of love', identifying different kinds of love relationships.
- tended to distinguish between Angelo's selfish deception in the name of his own lust and the higher-minded, selfless deceptions of those seeking the greater good in the name of genuine love.
- understood the significance of the bed trick.

Common misunderstandings

- Wrote about deception with no clear focus.
- Resorted to describing events/narrating the plot.

Question 4

The Winter's Tale

Extract from Act 4, Scene 1:

- How does Shakespeare present aspects of love in this extract?
- Examine the view that, in this extract and elsewhere in the play, Shakespeare's use of miraculous appearances and unusual stage effects is primarily to demonstrate the power of love.

What students did well

- examined the extract for evidence of different kinds of love.
- understood the structural significance of this point in the play, and the interplay of tragic, comedic and romance features.
- linked the use of Time as an allegorical figure with other unusual stage effects in the play such as the appearance of the bear and Hermione's 'statue' coming to life.
- considered the staging and presentation of Time and the other unusual stage effects in the play.
- appreciated the contrasts inherent in the play – Sicilia/Bohemia, Leontes/Polixenes, older generation/ younger generation, courtly/pastoral, sin/redemption, death/life, etc.

Common misunderstandings

- neglected the details of extract.
- gave narrative accounts of before and after this scene.

Question 5

AQA Anthology of love poetry through the ages pre-1900

Examine the view that in 'Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae', Dowson presents love as more of a source of pain than pleasure.

What students did well

- understood the speaker's situation caught between a recent romantic/sexual liaison and a genuine passionate obsession with the irretrievable Cynara.
- identified different manifestations of pain and pleasure.
- used the biographical context judiciously to illuminate the speaker's predicament
- linked relevant tropes of Decadent poetry and the use of the Alexandrine form to meaning.
- explored the ways in which methods convey the speaker's conflicted emotions.

Common misunderstandings

- confused the two women referred to in the poem and were unsure of the speaker's relationships.
- conflated the writer and the speaker in an assertive fashion.
- identified poetic methods without linking them relevantly to meaning.

Question 6

AQA Anthology of love poetry through the ages post-1900

Examine the view that 'Talking in Bed' is wholly pessimistic about love.

What students did well

- tuned in to the sardonic, detached and ambivalent tone of the speaker.
- appreciated the significance of setting.
- could unpick the ways in which pathetic fallacy is used.
- linked the tercet structure and the use of different kinds of rhyme to meaning in a relevant way.
- found nuance in the apparent paradoxes and double negatives of the final stanza
- used biographical context judiciously.

Common misunderstandings

- asserted that the poem was post-modern and did not contain rhyme.
- conflated the writer and the speaker in an assertive fashion.
- identified poetic methods without linking them relevantly to meaning.

Further support

Mark ranges and award of grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [results statistics](#) page of our website.

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Our friendly team will be happy to support you between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 0161 957 7504

Email (GCSE): english-gcse@aqa.org.uk

Email (AS and A-level): english-gce@aqa.org.uk