



A-level

English Literature B

7717/1B

Report on the Examination

June 2025

Version: 1.0

Contents

The below table is interactive. You can press the control button click on the title of the question to go directly to that page.

Contents	Page
Summary	3
Introductory comments	4
Individual questions	9
Further support	15

Summary

Areas where students excelled

- When they focused on the Q set through the entirety of their answer
- When students had excellent knowledge of their texts, engaged with the stories being told and could range around them for relevant details
- When students made good choices of which parts of texts to use to best answer the questions
- When students were thinking clearly and independently in the construction of their arguments

Areas where students struggled

- When students had their own agendas and largely ignored the questions set
- When textual knowledge was sketchy so that errors of fact were made and ideas couldn't be supported
- When students included generalised external contextual material and wrote about that instead of the text itself
- When students incorporated material that had been learned or partly learned with little regard for question relevance, for example material about the Green World and critical views

Introductory comments

Examiners across all four papers have reported seeing some excellent work this year which suggests that students and teachers are enjoying English Literature Specification B.

Although the comments made and teaching guidance given in previous reports are still relevant, this report will focus on four key issues: i) Answering the question set: knowing what this means and what it doesn't mean; ii) knowing how to effectively deal with 'significance' questions; iii) knowing the texts in detail and responding to the texts as stories; iv) understanding the perils of including and focusing on external contextual material.

i) **Answering Questions**

Answering the question set is the mantra for Spec B. Although the issue has been raised in previous years, it remains the key concern of examiners. Marks can only be given for relevance to the question so students must focus exclusively on what is being asked. This means they must not subvert the question or ignore it and write about something else. However interesting the 'something else' is, students will only be given marks if their comments are relevant to the question. Teachers can help their students by telling them clearly during teaching and practice essay writing that only relevance to the question will be rewarded.

In the 'To what extent questions', a debate is set up for students to think about - and 'thinking' is vital. Before they start writing, students need to ascertain what exactly they need to focus on, what debate is set up and, importantly, what the question isn't inviting them to do. The premise of the question is never a trick; there will always be a genuine line of argument students can pursue whether they agree or disagree with the given view. Question-setters have ensured that there is plenty of material in the text to support the given view and plenty too for a counter argument. When students choose to disagree, some careful thinking is needed to make certain that what they write is still on task. They need to be sure that their challenge is legitimate in terms of the grammatical structure of the given argument. For example, in the question on *Othello*: 'Othello is presented as having no moderation: he loves and hates with the full force of his emotions', the counter argument is that Othello does have moderation. A viable counter argument isn't that Othello's emotions are a result of his insecurity or his race or Iago. Neither is it valid to argue that it is Iago who has no moderation and not Othello and then write about Iago.

During revision time in centres, it would be useful for teachers to spend time with their students looking at a variety of past questions (even those on texts their students are not studying) and asking students to think about what precisely is being asked, where the debate is and importantly what isn't being asked. For many students, particularly those who are less confident in countering arguments, it would be sensible to advise them to agree with the given view as there will always be plenty to say and if they agree, then at least they will not produce writing which is unfocused and irrelevant - providing they keep to the question.

The most successful answers on the 'To what extent questions' this year seen were from those students who pinned down what the question was asking, then went straight into the debate set up by question, stated their view and supported their ideas with close reference to

well-chosen and specific parts of the texts. These students engaged with the text as a developing story and linked their references and quotations to events in the story's narrative trajectory.

When they construct their arguments, students should be reminded not to spend precious exam time writing ineffective introductions and repetitive conclusions. Neither should they complicate questions by adding additional clauses. For example, in the *Othello* question cited above, some students added something in their introduction like, 'Othello is presented as having no moderation: he loves and hates with the full force of his emotions,' *and this is linked to his insecurity*. Over-complicating arguments usually got students into a muddle.

ii) Dealing effectively with 'significance' questions

Significance questions offer a different way for students to explore meanings in texts. Significance is a key word in several questions and it is followed by either an extract from a Shakespeare play, an unseen extract or an aspect of tragedy, comedy, crime writing or political and social protest writing or a topic that students need to explore in relation to the genre: for example 'Explore the significance of prejudice in two political and social protest texts you have studied.' Significance is about what is signified - what meanings arise in terms of values and ideas and how these meanings are produced by what writers do and the methods they use. Significance invites students to think about the narrative; it also invites them to think about the characters, as well as the cultural, moral and social contexts that arise from the texts.

The most successful answers to the significance questions were by those students who, at the start of their answers, pinned down what they were asked to explore the significance of. So, in the Shakespeare extract questions on Paper 1, they pinned down the story of the extract from its beginning to its end; in Paper 2 Q1, they gave a clear sense of what takes place in the extract, seeing its trajectory from the start to the end and in other significance questions, they pinned down the specific topic they were asked to write about (for example 'secrets' in *Atonement* or 'murder and killing' in *King Lear* and *Othello*). The mark schemes give precise details of the trajectories of the Shakespeare extracts and the unseen extracts for Paper 2 and if students pinned these down, they were rewarded. Similarly in the other 'significance' questions, there are precise examples in the mark scheme to suggest what students might have focused on.

A good strategy for students answering significance questions in Sections B and C, is to begin by immediately identifying an example of the topic and then developing ideas about it. Having done this, they can then move on to another example and write about that and continue in this way to the end of their answer. If they do this, students can easily accumulate marks. So, for example, in Question 7 Paper 2B ('Explore the significance of Falstaff to the political and social protest writing in *Henry IV Part I*'), they could pin down, at the start of paragraphs, Falstaff as a representation of those who reject authority; his being an agent in transforming Prince Hal into a capable future monarch; and his challenging authority by mocking the king and taking the credit for the death of Hotspur. After establishing some precise significances of Falstaff, students could then develop detailed ideas about them and in this way shape their writing.

When students were less successful on significance questions, they either didn't engage with the story of the extract, or they wrote vaguely and generally about the question topic without being specific. Sometimes they subverted the topic altogether and claimed that what was asked wasn't significant and then they wrote about something else. The significance questions do not invite students to say that the extract or topic is not significant.

iii) Knowing texts and stories

The most successful responses were seen by students who knew their texts and the stories of those texts very well and then selected appropriate details. When students engage with stories, plots, events and characters they naturally connect with genre and tragic, comedic, crime writing and political and social protest writing narratives (in drama, prose and poetry). When they engage with the stories of their texts, they also find it easy to respond to the set questions and authorial methods. The text and its story are the body of knowledge that English Literature student need to have; it is the foundation for assessment. There is nothing outside the text that students must know. So, they cannot sidestep the text and if they do not know it in a detailed way then they are seriously disadvantaged when it comes to answering questions.

Students struggle when they only know bits of the text or random quotations, with no sense of where the quotations occur in the story. Students need to see that in texts and stories writers construct events to happen in a particular order with characters operating and developing in tandem with those events. The speech they are given reflects the developing situation and what one character says affects how other characters speak and how they behave. In stories, most writers represent interactional dialogue. Speech is rarely random (unless the writer has a purpose in doing this). What Othello says when he is confessing his love for Desdemona to the Senate in Act 1 ('She loved me for the dangers I had passed,/ And I loved her, that she did pity them./ This only is the witchcraft I have used') is dependent on the contextual situation at this point in the play (he has been accused by Brabantio of practising upon her with 'spells and medicines'). Shakespeare shows Othello as alert to the circumstances he is in. Othello is keenly aware of his onstage audience; his words have a particular purpose. It is therefore ineffective for students to quote Othello's words without providing their dramatic context. Othello could not speak in this way at the end of the play. It is also the case that in extracts, what a character says at the start of an extract could only happen at that point in the story; 50 lines later and the same things could not be said because the story has moved forward.

In all stories, the situations and the characters at the end are not the same as they are at the start. Stories involve change and in drama texts, that change takes place as we watch since we are imagining the stories as operating in real time: in the here and now with the potential for a variety of outcomes. And, just as characters change and develop, so too do the reactions and feelings of readers and audiences.

In the light of the above, it is clearly unhelpful for students to learn a bank of decontextualised quotations said by Iago, Emma, Daisy, Nora, or Claudius which they churn out when writing about a character as if the characters are fixed and unchanging and could say what they say at any point in the story. References and quotations must be contextualised

if they are to be meaningful and if they are to support meanings in students' arguments. Students need to be taught to contextualise briefly and succinctly.

If students have sound textual knowledge, then they are in the best position to answer the questions in the ways outlined above. When students have insecure textual knowledge then their chances in the exam are significantly impaired. Insecure knowledge leads students to write in a generalised and vague way.

iv) Understanding the perils of including external contexts

One reason perhaps why students do not know their texts in sufficient detail is because they think they need to know other things instead of the text, for example external contextual material and the random views of critics, particularly 'feminist critics' about which much is asserted. This is a mistake for those doing Spec B. We are only interested in contexts that arise from the text itself and critical views if they are specifically used in arguments related to questions. But we are more interested in what students think.

Examiners frequently note that when students move away from the text and write about external contexts, they lose focus on the questions and write irrelevantly. No credit is given for generalised and sweeping contextual material which often takes the place of any engagement with the text itself.

As has been pointed out before, it is irrelevant for students to include biographical information about the authors' lives or to include generalised (and often made up) material about historical periods. Teachers should tell students not to write about Aristotle, or the 16th century or the 19th century or the Romantics or the 1980s or patriarchies in the real world. Writers might well represent patriarchy in their stories, and it might be relevant for students to write about the representation. But it is not relevant to write about the patriarchal situation of the 16th century as if there is a single view that applies to the whole century and to the whole of any particular country. The 16th and 19th centuries, of course, span a hundred years and one play or novel or poem can hardly be claimed to speak for an entire century - or even a bit of it, and for students to draw conclusions about 16th century society (or Elizabethan England) or people's attitudes from one play of Shakespeare or one Hardy novel is clearly unwise.

It is even more unwise to impose loose contextual material onto texts. One play of Shakespeare's might well - and often does - contradict what is said in another. The same Shakespeare who created Desdemona, also created Regan and Gertrude and Bianca, so it makes little sense for students to claim that in the 16th century women were all passive or submissive or dependent on men, or that men were all misogynistic. The texts themselves tell us that there were dissenting voices to such views and plenty of political debate too. Hardy, for example, foregrounds this dissent in the creation of Angel Clare who challenges conservative views and Bolingbroke clearly does not believe in the Divine Rights of Kings.

It reduces the power of the text if Desdemona is discussed just a representative of 16th century passive women. She is a character in a play created by Shakespeare for dramatic purposes. She interests us because her character changes. She may be submissive at her death (but even then, she begs to live another day), but she is not submissive when she defies

her father, when she insists to the Duke and her husband that she goes to the war zone of Cyprus or when she repeatedly appeals for Cassio's reinstatement. In his saner musing during Iago's manipulation of him, even Othello refers to her depth of character ('O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear! Of so high and plenteous wit and invention').

Students need to think about the subtleties of their texts and the subtleties of character creation. Desdemona and Emilia are created with nuance; they are characters who change as events develop. Some students were all too ready to claim that Emilia and Desdemona, like 'all women' of the time, have no power, have to obey men and have no agency. While it is relevant in response to the *Othello* extract question, for example, to say that at this point in the play Desdemona is subdued and desperate not to displease her husband, it is because of the dramatic situation that Shakespeare has created. Othello has just hit her in public; his behaviour is unfathomable to her; she is young and terrified. Her response is a very human one and to shift the argument to one about 16th century women is a reductive way to respond to the intense dramatic scene in front of us.

Another reason why students' incorporating external contextual material into answers should be avoided is that it is a sign that they are leaving the text - and the question is invariably left behind too. So, the solution is easy. Teachers must tell students to focus on the story itself and the characters within it who are often created as multidimensional and whose fates engage and interest readers and audiences.

The above advice needs to be heeded as it directly relates to how scripts are marked. Marks are awarded for ideas (as required by the question) about the texts and the story worlds within them. The ideas need to be directly related to the questions set and the ideas should be developed by students using detailed knowledge of the text and its story.

Specific comments on 7717 1B

This year's Aspects of Comedy paper proved, once again, that most students who sit 7717 1B have a good and sometimes excellent grasp of the texts studied. Examiners reported reading responses that dealt with questions in incisive ways, demonstrating high-level thinking around the comedic concepts and aspects foregrounded in the questions. Where responses were less successful, a less secure grasp of story was often evident, and sometimes, a desire to overlay reading positions (often gendered ones) at the expense of what was actually happening in the texts.

Section A

As has been said in previous reports, the key to success in the extract-based tasks is to arrive at the exam hall door with a sound grasp of the story of the play. This doesn't mean knowing countless quotations or numerous academic theories of comedy. It means being confident in knowing the sequence of the play's action - the order of events, the journeys of the characters in the narrative, who knows what and when, and how the story concludes. This type of knowledge of a text brings confidence: if a student knows a text well, then they can answer any question and see the overall sweep of a story; they can see how an extract contributes to the development of the comedic narrative at that particular point in the play. When they don't know the story, they tend to pick away at individual words, focus on gender theory (at the

expense of the play) and spend lots of time on other parts of the play that have a slender link to the extract.

Question 1

This question invited students to explore the significance of a passage from 1.1 in *The Taming of the Shrew*. As ever, better answers commenced with an overview of the comedic trajectory in the extract. Writing an overview is beneficial in several ways. First of all, it helps students identify the overall shape of the story, keying them into the main comedic issues arising and starting their thought process as to which aspects they might wish to comment on. It also signals to an examiner that the student has knowledge of the action and is a good 'settling activity' at the start of an exam for students.

There were many good answers to Question 1 that explored the introduction of Lucentio as a comedic hero, both a romantic, go-getting one, and also a faintly ridiculous one. The master-servant dynamic between Lucentio and Tranio was fertile ground for comment, and many students explored the position of Katherina in the horse-trading that occurs between Baptista and Bianca's suitors. Things went awry where students briefly identified Katherina's situation and then used it as a springboard to write a few paragraphs about the role of women in Elizabethan England and how badly they were treated. This attempt to write about history is almost always worthless – it deals in generalisations that suggest women of all classes and parts of the country over 45-year period experienced life the same way. It also says nothing about the play. This is why Specification B discourages students to write about historical context. Writing about power and gender *as it is shown on the page* in comedy is far better. Once students step out of the text and write about 'the real world', the text vanishes, and point-free generalisations emerge.

Question 2

The most effective answers to Question 2, as with Question 1, commenced with a good overview of the action, identifying events such as the playful dialogue between Sir Toby and Maria, the mockery and foolishness of Sir Andrew, the profligate nature of Sir Toby, and the position of Maria in the scene. Students who have a good handle on how comedic drama operates were able to comment on the initial conflict between Maria and Sir Toby which in performance is usually delivered as a flirtatious scolding. Good answers also saw how the structure of the scene sets up Sir Andrew's foolishness prior to his entrance and then confirms it via his dull-witted conduct when he appears on stage. Some responses referenced the 2013 Globe production where the sexually charged mockery of Maria's 'buttery bar' line provokes much laughter. Although there is no expectation that students reference specific productions in their answers, watching the play in performance helps students to see how dramatic structure and performance heightens the comedy.

There were some less successful responses that looked away from the extract, preferring to write about other parts of the play such as Sir Toby's spat with Malvolio. Although there is some relevance to this, students should be in no doubt that what they need to focus squarely on is the printed extract and how the comedy works in it. When students write large swathes about the rest of the play, an examiner rightly surmises that the student doesn't know or understand the extract well enough. There were also occasional responses that used comedic

terms in a loose way, e.g., deeming anything funny as 'bawdy' (rather than comic indecency) or general conflict as 'slapstick', but for the most part, students wrote well and thoughtfully about this extract.

Section B

Question 3

Question 3 asked students to consider a reading of Petruchio – whether his actions 'are disturbing rather than entertaining'. As previous reports and webinars have stated, there is no expectation that students need to write a response that unpicks both sides of a debate in equal measure (although they are free to do just that and could score very highly). It is perfectly feasible to write an excellent response arguing that Petruchio's actions are wholeheartedly disturbing. Likewise, it is possible to write an excellent response that argues that all of Petruchio's attitudes and actions are entertaining, given that this is comedy and played for laughs. What matters is the quality of the argument, so responses that carefully showed how Petruchio's marital intentions, control and humiliation of Katherina, and ultimate victory over a cowed wife are a cause for much opprobrium worked well, especially when the detail of the text was marshalled to show these key moments and how for some modern readers, his conduct is highly questionable. There were many lively and well-written responses that showed how the frame of the play sets the whole narrative up as a ridiculous fantasy of Sly's – one that isn't endorsed by the reader – and that the joke is clearly on men's daft conception of power. When well-argued and supported by apt references (and this doesn't always mean lots of direct quotation), responses worked well.

When things were less effective, it tended to be where the question focus – Petruchio's behaviour – mutated into a detailed assessment of Katherina's final speech, or where a generalised view of gender was overlaid on the events of the play. It's never a good idea to apply a wholesale, simple contextual view on a text. For instance, arguing that 'men back then were powerful' doesn't hold up in the light of the play, given that Gremio is presented as old and foolish, Lucentio becomes a kind of victim of Bianca's true nature, and in some readings, Petruchio is Katherina's dupe – a man who only thinks he's won. It is fair to say that comedy usually centralises women and offers female characters who are sparky and resourceful, but even this needs to be explored through the details and nuances of the action rather than declared as if it were a wholesale truth.

Question 4

The inclusion of the opening statement in this question provided students with a helpful definition of courtship and invited them to think about the significance of this process. In significance questions, it's important that students understand that 'significance' means 'the meanings that arise'. In other words, Question 4 invited students to show their best thoughts on what is being revealed about courtship, and this might be on its function in the comedic narrative, the oddities of the wooing process in the play, the values of courtship shown, and the outcomes of courtship, alongside other ideas. When responses were successful, students first of all pinned down a specific courtship – and the go-to example was Petruchio's highly unconventional courtship of Katherina – before exploring the ideas arising from it. Most students were alert to the fact that the play (as comedy tends to) presents comic and unexpected versions of romance, and this is fertile ground for humour. There were some

excellent responses showing how Petruchio's courtship of Katherina upends the usual notions of romantic words, meals, gentility, gifts of clothing, and beautiful marriage ceremonies – and how these features of courtship are rendered as deeply comic or disturbing, depending on your point of view. Likewise, the more recognisable yet still bizarre courtship of Bianca through disguise and intrigue led one student to argue that courtship was basically subterfuge.

Less effective responses had little sense of the process of courtship – how it begins, develops and ends. Taking notice of the process of any aspect of comedy is a vital part of story and a great way to think about narrative structure. Specification B is less interested in individual word choices and sees structure as the defining method choice that writers make – how they sequence and develop a comedic aspect is far more telling than commenting on adjectives. In regard to Question 4, the story of Lucentio's courtship commences with his energetic and amusing desperation to secure Bianca's affections, leading to the donning of disguise, the besting of the other suitors and then the wager scene where a comic reversal takes place. Seeing this sequence allowed one student to remark how courtship is marked by sexual desperation that blinds characters to reality until it's too late.

Question 5

This question, inviting students to consider whether it is 'funny when authority figures are disrespected and mistreated', proved a popular choice. There were several characters that students chose to focus upon, such as Olivia and her absurdly prolonged mourning period that is acerbically queried by Feste. Some students set up an argument around Orsino, arguing with some merit, that a general level of writerly disrespect is levelled at his grandiose over-emoting. The obvious choice of a 'mistreated' character was Malvolio, whose experience of being gulled and incarcerated was the subject of most responses, during which many students argued that his treatment ceased to be funny and tipped onto mental torture. This argument opened up discussion about the shadowland in comedy between mockery and cruelty, with some thoughtful students arguing that in our modern world, it's difficult to be amused by the spectacle of a man being tortured, no matter how much of a killjoy he is. There were also plenty of excellent responses that took the alternative view, arguing convincingly that Malvolio's hypocrisy and po-faced puritanical manner deserves being brought low by a largely harmless prank.

As mentioned in the previous section, an awareness of how comedy is structured is an essential aspect of this component and when students understand how the playwright plays with different levels of knowledge (of both characters and readers), it can illuminate how the comedy works. For instance, the audience, unlike Malvolio, are in on the joke – they know about Maria's letter and the intended prank, so when we watch the hapless Malvolio being taken in, we are invited to side with the pranksters and share their amusement as the plan takes effect. It also allows us to anticipate the cringing scene where Malvolio appears in cross-gartered stockings, further ramping up our entertainment – if that's what it is. Looking at method from the point of view of structure leads to a richer understanding of the comedy and usually results in better, more debate-focused points being made than simply picking out individual words such as 'mad' and writing about the connotations of them.

Question 6

The points made in the Question 4 section about the set-up of this task and the value of seeing the sweep of the narrative journey are applicable here given that the two questions are the same - but with a different play.

With specific reference to *Twelfth Night*, it is fair to say that the students who attempted this task did so very well. The majority clearly identified examples of courtship and then went on, with general success, to write about their significances. Most students noted that the play presents some skewed examples of courtship – Orsino’s distant and overblown pursuit of Olivia that draws attention to the hollow nature of courtly love, Viola’s painful longing and coded relationship with Orsino and Olivia’s skittish attempts to ensnare Cesario resulting in the mistaken betrothal with Sebastian, and the flirtatious and unusual pairing of Maria and Sir Toby. Better responses delved further and noted the cruelty of Cesario’s role in wooing her love rival on behalf of Orsino, the failure of courtship in the sense that many objects of affection prove to be ultimately fruitless choices, and the amusingly one-sided fantasy courtship between Malvolio and Olivia that results in humiliation.

There is a tendency on some students’ part to draw Antonio and Sebastian’s relationship into just about any response to *Twelfth Night*, no matter how irrelevant it is. While it is possible to construct a homoerotic reading of this relationship and view it as a type of thwarted courtship, it is worth students considering whether it is the best choice of content for the question: there are clearly several other more tractable courtships that, in a 50-minute response, might be better avenues to explore. The importance of choice is one that has been addressed in previous reports – the choice of task, the choice of content and examples, and the choice of references. As has been said, the first few minutes of a response where students plan their argument is a vital time, and it crucial that students make sensible decisions about what will be most profitable to write about, rather than trying to impress by selecting off-kilter and less fruitful choices.

Section C

The final section of the paper invites students to write about a comedic aspect in two texts and here, choices become even more important – and given that two years of study of one text are reduced to 25 minutes of a single response, deciding which would be most telling parts of a narrative to write about are clearly crucial.

Most students are aware that there is no comparison required in Section C. Here, once again, is the guidance from the 2023 report:

...there is no need for students to compare how different writers treat a comedic aspect. It is better to think of this response as one where a connection is made by the question, and all students need to do is explore how one writer presents a comedic aspect and then explore how a second writer presents that same aspect. The connection is therefore with the genre, rather than the texts. Thankfully, most students have approached their Section C response in this way and felt the liberation that this essay structure brings, rather than tying themselves in knots using comparative discourse markers and trying desperately to find ways to compare two very different texts.

Question 7

This was the most popular of the two Section C questions and was handled well. Most students saw the central debate, triggered as these things sometimes are by the 'always' in '*...they always get away with it.*' Few had problems identifying examples of bad behaviour including mendacity in Wilde, Tony Lumpkin's trickery, Emma's meddling, Bernard's racism, and so on. The discriminating factor was how thoughtfully the debate was engaged with. Some students argued convincingly that Jack and Algernon's lies ultimately go unpunished and they are in fact rewarded at the play's conclusion. Others posited that in the eyes of the audience, the shallowness of the men's behaviour is not forgotten, and the audience refuses complicity in the happy ending. Emma's interference and mistreatment of Miss Bates which results in Mr Knightley's scolding was also seen as bearable comeuppance as she is finally rewarded with marriage. On the other hand, the complexity of Swift's poem shows that the General appears to have gone to his grave unpunished, yet his reputational damage is a belated comeuppance.

When responses were less successful, it once again came down to choices. Students often wanted to write about *Sunny Prestatyn*, perhaps because it was the poem they most enjoyed from the collection, but in the majority of cases, they struggled to say much of note beyond the badness of Titch Thomas's graffiti and the less convincing view that the replacement poster is a kind of comeuppance for him. Although it is possible to make Larkin's poem work for this task, students and centres should be aware that not every poem in the Anthology will be equally well for a question – in this instance, *Tam o'Shanter* would seem a better choice than *Sunny Prestatyn* for this particular question.

Question 8

The second option was a question around a narrative element – the significance of climaxes. This task was done very well by the students who chose it, primarily because they made sensible choices of climax, and crucially, they remembered that they were writing about comedy. Consequently, one very strong response noted how the climactic reveal of Jack's parentage in *The Importance of Being Earnest* leads to a happy ending, the thwarting of the comedic obstacle, and is also a knowingly absurd *deus ex machina*. Likewise, one thoughtful reading of *Small Island* remarked that a happy ending for Gilbert and Hortense as they finally become lovers, parents and homeowners, is a far less happy climax for Queenie, thereby reminding readers that comedy is a bittersweet genre.

The statement accompanying the question offered students a clear definition of a narrative climax – a moment 'where situations reach a peak or a crisis occurs'. Therefore, it was harder to reward responses that identified less climactic moments. For instance, one response that suggested Tony Lumpkin's revelry in the pub as a narrative peak struggled to make an argument stand up. Similarly, the declaration by the speaker of *The Flea* that their bed is a marriage temple was an odd choice of a climax – a more obvious one who have been the crushing of the insect and the way it suggests a resourceful and strong love interest and leads to a further witty response by the amorous speaker.

This series has, once again, shown that the majority of students and their teachers have approached the component in a spirit of engagement and endeavour. It is clear that students were well-prepared for this exam and were able to respond to demanding tasks in a fluent and thoughtful manner.

Conclusion

Students are at their best when they take ownership of their writing, when they have the confidence to think and respond independently and when they are not constrained by thinking they must include material (context or critical views) regardless of the question. The best responses seen were by students who looked at questions independently and creatively, focused on the key words, stayed on task throughout and produced tight focused writing. Such responses were a joy to read.

Looking forward

While this report focuses specifically on what happened in this year's examination, there is much in it that can help teachers as they prepare for the future. For teachers new to report reading, new to teaching, new to Specification B and those preparing for teaching in September, there is also much support available on the AQA website (Go to 'subjects' - select 'English' - select 'AS and Level Lit B') and Centre Services (use the tile for teacher support and then the filters). On the website you can look at all the training materials and previous reports to help you to understand how best to support your students.

As teachers prepare for the 2026 examinations they might like to give the following quick tips to their students:

- Know your texts thoroughly.
- Focus on all the words of the question set and base your argument on the subject of the question.
- Root your arguments in details of the story itself.
- Do not write about critical theory or critical views in a detached way.
- Do not write about worlds or society outside of the text.
- Think before you write.
- Make sure that your first sentence is relevant to the question - and that you never veer from it.

Further support

Mark ranges and award of grades

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

Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA)

Use our exam results analysis tool to create and customise as many different reports for comparison as you like.

Professional development

Attend one of our feedback [courses](#) where you can review example responses from students and commentaries from our examiners.

Contact us

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