



A-level

English Literature A

7712/C NEA: Independent Critical Study: Texts across time

Report on the Examination

7712
June 2024

Version: 1.0

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

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

PART ONE: GENERAL REMARKS

For the majority of centres, the New Historicist philosophy of the specification continues to be embraced successfully as a major ingredient for providing clarity and coherence in NEA. New 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, received and understood. In NEA, it is the idea of ‘texts across time’ which allows for a diachronic or a synchronic approach with a chosen focus, selected independently by the student and ratified by the centre. Key to NEA is the selection of appropriately interesting and demanding texts which will enable students to make sensitive and pertinent comparisons and contrasts, more or less equally across both texts.

NEA aims to encourage confident, independent readers able to ‘make meaning’ through not only a close reading of both the selected texts but also a wider understanding of the contexts that might inform their literary study. Because this is coursework, it is expected that students will have worked hard to establish the contexts of their texts and will also have found time to conduct adequate and meaningful research into the reception of their texts across time, in order to use academic debate as a helpful focus for the construction of their own arguments. Paper 3 NEA is different to Papers 1 and 2 which are examined under timed conditions. NEA affords students the opportunity to conduct their work as a long project which will be free of the blemishes of expression and confusion which may feature when working against a time constraint of three hours for Paper 1, and two and a half hours for Paper 2, therefore proof-reading is an important skill in NEA. Because the quality of written expression is a vital component in being able to present an argument showing the students’ literary skills, students should be as careful as possible with the quality of their written expression.

PART TWO: PRIORITIES

The following areas of priority are designed to build on the foundations built up in NEA since the beginning of the specification and will also form the basis of autumn feedback training later this year.

Text Selection

The NEA task is explicitly comparative, and texts should be selected because the student has found enough ‘common ground’ between the texts to make a comparison both interesting and thorough. As per the specification, at least one of these texts must have been written before 1900. Other than texts cited in the specification as ‘prohibited’, students really do have the world of English Literature at their feet from which to make their choice of two texts, therefore it is always a disappointment to see ‘old’ GCSE texts being recycled. As in previous examination sequences, in 2024 some students offered *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Lord of the Flies* and *War of the Worlds*. Some less successful students experience difficulty in analysing ‘GCSE’ texts at the deeper, more sophisticated level required for higher band A-level work. The same can be said about texts which seem superficially attractive to students but may prove to be lacking in the

depth and complexity necessary for detailed literary analysis, especially when contrasted to the other text selected. This year individual volumes from Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series of novels and G.R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* (*Game of Thrones*) novels were offered. We are not saying that these and similar novels lack literary merit. What we are saying is that they created very real difficulties for those students unable to write coherently about form, structure and language. Such novels also mostly lack a serious critical heritage making reception over time and critical debate almost impossible for a student to access. Centres are advised to proceed with caution when allowing students to use GCSE type or populist / young adult texts.

There are essentially six different routes through NEA. Students can pair like with like: ie write about two prose texts, two drama texts, and two poetry texts or could mix genres, ie write about drama with prose, drama with poetry, or prose with poetry. Two drama texts, two prose texts and a dramatic text with a prose text (usually a novel) are by far the most popular routes with hardly anyone electing to write on two poetry texts. The specification states that ‘whole texts’ must be studied, and this idea of ‘whole texts’ sometimes causes problems for centres.

We hope the following sections will clarify.

What does AQA mean by ‘whole texts’ in poetry?

The specification document makes it clear that a single Keats’ narrative poem ie *The Eve of St. Agnes* (378 lines) is not a whole text and that students offering Keats should offer *Isabella* and/or *Lamia* too. Here is the exemplar question:

Compare and contrast the presentation of women in Keats’ narrative poems *Lamia*, *Isabella* and *The Eve of St Agnes* with that of Anne Brontë’s in her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

In what ways do you think the Gothic settings of these texts help the writers to shape their presentation of heroines in peril?

The Eve of St. Agnes is 378 lines on its own, *Isabella* is 504 lines long and *Lamia* is 311 lines long and when we add the three Keats poems together, we have 1,193 lines. A moderator, therefore – because the specification offers the Keats / *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* task as an exemplum - will certainly accept that **1,193** lines of Keats’ poetry from *Selected Poems* is the equivalent of a whole text such as a Shakespeare play or a significant novel. However, AQA also accept that Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (the five-canto version of 1714 of **794** lines, not the 1712 two-canto version) is also a ‘whole text’. Therefore, it seems like common sense to suggest that as long as at least two of Keats’ narrative poems are offered and that their combined length is approximately equivalent to between approximately **800 to 1,200** words, students will have ‘hit’ the criteria for whole text equivalency in poetry. *Goblin Market* by Christina Rossetti has been the subject of much debate in 2024 and before. It is only **567** lines long and therefore cannot be realistically considered as a whole text, equivalent to, for example *Hamlet* or *Mansfield Park*. Students who offer it in the future should treat it as one poem in a collection and find at least one other poem to complement it from, for example, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (ISBN 13, 0486280551).

Based on the above, the advice is **wherever practically possible** to apply the same 800 to 1,200 lines ‘rule of thumb’ to the other poetry texts selected by your students. However, sometimes decisions can be more complex: this year, students offered Ocean Vuong’s *Time is a Mother*; Amanda Gorman’s *Call Us What We Carry*; Mary Oliver’s *Devotions*; Carol Ann Duffy’s *Rapture* and Helen Dunmore’s *Inside the Wave*. Clearly, such collections do not lend themselves as easily to the same criteria for ‘whole text’ accreditation as does Keats’ narrative poetry. With these texts - collections of poetry written and edited by their writers - it is important to convey a sense of whole text via a very careful analysis and consideration of structure (beginning, middle, end or early, mid, late, etc). For example, the 52-poem structure of Duffy’s *Rapture*, equating to the number of weeks in a year, is ideal for an in-depth analysis of the importance of the poems in the order in which the poet has placed them. It will be impossible to construct a sense of whole text on ‘at least two’ poems if the centre allows the student to answer on only two poems, so the advice here is to ensure that at least half of the 2,500-word answer is about *Rapture*. The Lead Moderator cannot envisage a Band 5 answer on *Rapture* containing close reference to less than, say, five or six poems from across the whole collection, especially since some of the poems are very short indeed: *Grace* is only 7 lines long and *Fall* is 9 lines long. Consequently, in cases such as this, in future series, moderators will not accept 16 lines of poetry as a whole text equivalent, even if the rubric of ‘at least two poems’ has been met. Students and centres are reminded that ‘at least two’ does not mean ‘two and only two’. This year, some students successfully offered John Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets* in an edition which contains over 50 poems. The most successful students found between four and six poems (excluding *The Flea* which is prohibited due to it featuring in the AQA Poetry Anthology) which were useful to their arguments and managed to convince moderators that they had easily covered enough material to be able to access Band 5.

‘Whole Texts’ in Collections of Short Stories

For students offering short story collections, it is now very rare that moderators see Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* offered as the equivalent of a whole text. The majority of centres have learned over the years that, as is made clear in the specification, ‘single authored collections of short stories are permissible. If using a collection of short stories, students must have studied the whole text and select at least two stories to write about in detail as examples of the wider collection.’ Yet this year, as last, Edgar Allan Poe caused problems. There is an edition of Poe’s *Selected Tales* (Oxford World’s Classics ISBN 13, 9780199535774) which contains 24 stories. Some students offered *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat* in the hope that because ‘at least two’ short stories had been covered, the ‘whole text’ criterion had been met. Essays which opt for ‘minimalist’ interpretations of what constitutes a whole text tend to self-limit because they do not enable the student to explore the range of a writer such as Poe. More successful students analysed three or four Poe short stories (including a more substantial story such as *The Fall of the House of Usher*) with much greater effect.

For the avoidance of doubt, centres are reminded that they have access to an adviser for NEA who will be happy to clarify any issues they may have around the issue of ‘whole texts’. If you do not have an assigned adviser, please contact eos@aqa.org.uk

Comparison

Though it is certainly true to say that successful students write about comparisons between texts, they also write about interesting and essential differences between texts. Past reports on Paper 1 have urged students to concentrate more on differences than similarities as areas for particular exploration. On the written papers, similarities are essentially a given in that love will be the theme and the lead examiner will have chosen the poems with coherence of subject matter in mind. However, across all three papers, specific similarities can be explored to help shape the answer. Identifying similarities is often a useful way into discussing key differences. In NEA, moderators will look for a satisfying balance between the ways texts are treated.

Task Construction and Assessment Objectives

As in the written papers, the command words of tasks and questions in NEA are of vital importance. Section C on Paper 1 is comparative and uses such phrases as ‘Compare how the authors of two texts you have studied...’. A similar framework of ‘compare and contrast the presentation of...’ is popular in the construction of NEA tasks. Sometimes as in Section B of Paper 1, a quoted or reported view complete with its own key words might be given. Another popular method for task-construction for NEA is for the task to use the word ‘significance’ to frame a focus. However, some less successful students embark on their essays in the belief that ‘significance’ is a mere synonym for ‘important’, but it is not. In the literary-semiotic sense of the word, ‘significance’ means ‘encoded with meanings’. This is the same sense in which it is used frequently by the paper-setters on Papers 1, 2A and 2B and when moderators see it in a 7712/C task, the literary-semiotic meaning is the one which is applied. Good NEA tasks replicate another feature of questions on the written papers: all key words are important and must be addressed by the student. Sometimes, however, tasks contain too many ‘moving parts’ for the student to manage. Here is an example from 2024:

Compare and contrast the presentation of marriage in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) and Graham Greene’s *The End of the Affair* (1951) in the light of the view that “marriage is used to enforce patriarchal control, impose conservative religious values on women and restrict romantic love.”

Despite the fact that this is a very interesting and exciting pairing of texts, here we have an example of an unnecessarily ‘busy’ task, the like of which would not be found in Papers 1 and 2 where the questions have a clearer focus and fewer moving parts. This NEA task asks the student to examine three different propositions about both novels: 1 marriage is ‘used’ to ‘enforce patriarchal control’; 2 marriage is ‘used’ to impose ‘conservative religious values’ on women; 3 marriage is used to ‘restrict romantic love’. The task, therefore, gives the student a great deal to manage. As well as the three strands to the task there are other questions, for example, who in the texts is ‘using’ marriage to do the three things the student has outlined? Who are the controlling patriarchs in both novels? What do they do to ‘enforce’ their control. What exactly does the student mean by ‘conservative religious values’? Once the ‘conservative religious values’ have been made clear (might the texts include ‘liberal religious values’ too?), the moderator will expect to see the student demonstrate which characters ‘impose’ them on women and will reasonably

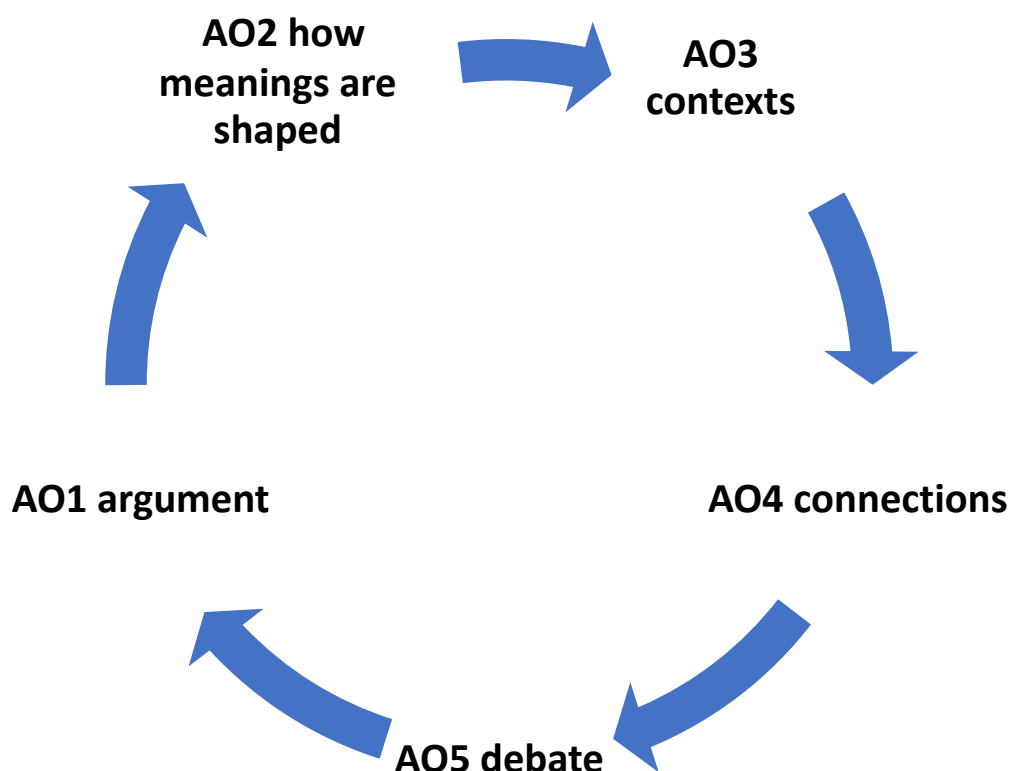
expect to see which women are and are not impacted by the imposition of such conservative religious values. On top of all that, the moderator will reasonably expect the student to show how and by whom ‘romantic love’ is ‘restricted.’

Moderators are delighted when they see a well-constructed question.

Compare and contrast the ways in which Christopher Marlowe and Peter Ackroyd present the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles in *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592) and Dyer and Wren in *Hawksmoor* (1985).

Explore the significance of religious belief in both texts in the light of Dyer’s claim that “There is no Light without Darkness and no Substance without Shadow.”

The use of the command words ‘compare and contrast’ instructs the student to make connections between the texts in terms of subject matter and authorial method, and also invites the student to organise the response around relevant similarities and differences in the presentation of relationships in the chosen texts. Thus AO4 and AO1 are liberated. The key word ‘present’ explicitly invites the student to write about the different genres of the chosen texts (drama and prose) and, together with ‘the ways in which’, signals the need to discuss a range of authorial methods involved, thus enabling the student to address AO2. The focus on specific relationships and on the significance of religious belief via a direct quotation from one of the texts links to how literary representations can reflect social, cultural and historical aspects of the time periods in which these texts were written and set, enabling the student to access AO3. The directive to ‘examine’ a clear viewpoint - that ‘there is no Light without Darkness and no Substance without Shadow’ - signals the need to debate this given opinion and so to engage with multiple readings and interpretations in order to liberate AO5. All of the foregoing encourage the student to ‘articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology’ which brings the student back to AO1. It is perhaps useful, therefore, to think of the assessment objectives within NEA as cyclical rather than linear. Such a methodology allows coursework to be an organic and fluid enterprise in which one literary discovery informs another and so on, enabling the development of an argument.



The model outlined above begins with AO2. Experience has taught moderators over the years that students who begin with the internal mechanics of their texts and then move out into contexts, perform better than those students who assume a set of contexts about a historical period and then apply them to the texts whether they fit or not. In the case of the *Doctor Faustus* / *Hawksmoor* task, a successful student will ask, ‘What do these texts tell us about religious belief?’ before researching the religious debates of the late-sixteenth, the early-eighteenth and late-twentieth centuries (*Hawksmoor* is set in two different time periods). The best Band 5 essays in 2024 began with how meanings are shaped within their texts and worked their way out to those contexts suggested by close reading. Also, the most successful and persuasive students understood that AO3 and AO5 work best in unison where a consideration of relevant, useful, and well-considered contexts adds to the success of the debate. This is what is meant by ‘fluidity’: AOs 3 and 5 can drive the AO1 argument just as much as AO4 can balance it. The most successful students see the Assessment Objectives holistically. To be excellent in AO3, a student needs to be prepared to put in the serious hard work required to understand the contexts of literary works. Contexts cannot be just assumed or grafted on to texts; they emerge from within the AO2 heartlands of texts as areas to be researched, considered, and in the case of the very best students, re-considered.

Five Considerations when Task Setting

1. Ensure that texts and tasks dovetail tidily and are commensurate with the demands of advanced level study.
2. Check that the task offers the opportunity to liberate all the assessment objectives as in the manner of the *Faustus / Hawksmoor* task above.
3. Remember that students are expected to focus on the key words of their NEA task in exactly the same way as they would be expected to respond to an exam question: more key words in an NEA task will mean more moderator scrutiny.
4. Try to keep the wording of the task simple and unambiguous. Usually within NEA task-setting, ‘less is more’.
5. For the purpose of clarity and aiding the moderator, ensure that the selected texts with the authors’ names and dates of publication are named in the task.

GENRE-SPECIFIC ANALYSIS OF METHODS

There are three genres students can study for NEA: drama, prose, and poetry.

Drama

Drama causes many students problems, mainly because it is often written about as merely an alternative form of prose. To be successful, students need to explore the dramatic methods chosen by playwrights to convey meaning: dramatic structure; stagecraft; dramatic characterisation; as well as dramatic speech and language.

Successful students consider the central importance of **dramatic structure** ie how meaning is enhanced by the organisation of events in a play; how playwrights add to the significance of certain events by the position of those events in the play’s narrative; and what characters know and don’t know at specific times. This year, moderators reported that Band 4 and Band 5 awareness of dramatic structure was signified by:

- conventions of structure in both traditional and modern drama eg a classic five-act Shakespearean play includes: introduction, exposition, complication, crisis, resolution and dénouement; a classic three-act ‘well-made play’ such as Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* which is far and away the most popular drama text on NEA
- the division of the play into acts and scenes
- linearity (if it is a traditional play); ‘real-time’ plays such as Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; how past events may be sequenced in a non-linear way, for example in Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* of which the playwright said, ‘There are two or three sorts of time in that play. One is social time, one is psychic time, the way we remember things, and the third is the sense of time created by the play and shared by the audience.’ The ‘flashbacks’ (Miller didn’t like the term) fuse the present with Willy Loman’s remembrance of different times from his past.

- naturalistic versus non-naturalistic dramatic effects
- the use of features such as sub-plot
- choice of setting ie taking into account ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’ where we know we are in a theatre: does the play show us open spaces in the ‘Green World’, for example as in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*; does the play show us enclosed spaces (castle, home, walled city, single room etc) as in *Hamlet*; or does the playwright use a combination of open and enclosed spaces such as in *As You Like It*?
- the use of features such as sub-plot
- inclusion of protagonist, antagonist and catalyst
- the privileged position of beginnings and endings in terms of dramatic structure and their importance in introducing and concluding key aspects of setting, character, themes and contexts.

The most successful students considered **stagecraft** as a vital component in how meaning is made. The very best students understood the text as incomplete in written form, a blueprint for performance that needs the directors' and actors' input and interpretation. Vital features of stagecraft include: stage directions; lighting; music/sound/sound effects; set design; costume (including disguise); play / act / scene openings and endings; entrances and exits with opening and closing lines. The very best students were also able to write about tension / suspense / surprise / twist / comic relief. Relevant and well-chosen reference to productions students have seen is always most helpful.

The most successful students considered the range of strategies used by playwrights to create and develop characters. This year these features of **dramatic characterisation** included:

- how characters are established
- how characters are subsequently presented - their physical appearance or suggestions about this
- how they interact with others; what others say and think about them
- the design and function of minor characters.

Perhaps most importantly, the very best students fully understood that language is the map of a character’s mind, especially in soliloquy. Playwrights seek to give their characters personal vocabulary and syntactic patterns that project a certain way of seeing the world, which can either fit with or subvert stereotypes ie Alan Strang’s Old Testament idiolect in Shaffer’s *Equus* or Lear’s frequent references to animals in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*.

Following on from dramatic characterisation, and dovetailing neatly with it, is the consideration of **dramatic speech and language**. In 2024 the most successful students considered the ways in which playwrights organise speech and language across a whole play via:

- dialogue
- use of monologues
- soliloquy

- asides
- Shakespearean conventions of verse and prose.

The most successful students were also able to consider and debate, for example, whether certain characters such as Tom Wingfield in Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* were constructed to act as a spokesperson for the playwright.

PROSE

Of course, there is some cross-over between drama and prose and many of the considerations of drama (above) can be applied equally to prose, for example whether a character may be a vehicle for the author's views. Clearly, the idea of language being the map of a character's mind is as applicable to prose as it is to drama, as is the privileged position of beginnings and especially endings due to what John Fowles, author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, famously calls 'the tyranny of the final chapter'. In 2024, as ever, students who understood the central importance of the need to explore how writers use narrative structure, time and place, characterisation and point of view to shape meaning in their prose texts performed far better in NEA than those who did not.

In 2024, successful students understood **point of view and narrative perspective** by being able to consider the (frequently shifting) perspectives through which prose narrative is presented. It is not just that some prose texts such as the increasingly popular novel *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn have different narrators, it is also that characters are developed and changed by writers over the course of a text. Writers give their constructs 'character arcs' linked deliberately and self-consciously to the structure of the text so that, for example, by the middle and end of Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* we may have formed very different impressions of Tony Last to those we had in the novel's early chapters. Some of the methods used by writers to present narrative perspectives include:

- different types of narration eg first-person, second-person and third-person. Omniscient third-person narrative often privileges the perspective of a given character such as Oliver in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Many first-person narratives utilise a single voice such as Dickens employs in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*. Some first-person fiction utilises multiple narrators each bringing their unique perspective to the events of the text as is the case with Fowles' *The Collector*, which is initially narrated from Clegg's perspective, then from Miranda's via her diary fragments before chillingly returning to Clegg's voice in the final section. The very best students were not only able to consider the idea of the reliable versus the unreliable narrator, but were also able to discover changes to the patterns of characters' speech at different times in the novel
- the use of the subjective narrator who draws attention to the novel's artifice as in Nabokov's first-person *Lolita* and Fowles' seemingly objective but intrusive third-person narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

The most successful students were able to explore how the events in a story are organised by analysing **narrative structure** including features like:

- simple chronology, framed narratives, use of flashbacks, cyclical structure, shifts in time and place, foreshadowing, analeptic / proleptic narrative, stream of consciousness
- episodic novel, epistolary structure, autobiographical or diary form
- organisation by features such as volumes, chapters, and sections. The most successful students were able to direct the moderator to relevant sections of the texts by using signposts ie ‘in Chapter 40 of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth tells Jane the truth about Wickham ...’ Without the signpost to Chapter 40, the phrase ‘the truth about Wickham’ would be confusing because Elizabeth’s ‘truth’ about Wickham changes as the novel progresses. Her ‘truth about Wickham’ in Chapter 16 is that he had planned on entering the clergy, rather than the militia, but was unable to do so because he lacked the necessary funds due to Darcy exploiting a loophole in his father’s will to keep all the money for himself. Centres and students may consider these signposting issues to be comparatively insignificant, but they are not: signposting indicates that the student understands structure, a key ingredient in making meaning.

The best students consider the importance of the **times and places** in which the story is set.

Furthermore, successful students analyse:

- the ways the writers use timeframes and sequencing to add complexity to a narrative, for example, the use of flashback as in *Heart of Darkness* where Conrad sets up a story-within-a-story and a place (the Congo) within a place (London’s own dark River Thames); different narrators for different time periods as used by Ackroyd in *Hawksmoor* where Dyer narrates the eighteenth-century sections, and an omniscient narrator tells the story of the twentieth-century murder mystery being investigated by DCS Nicholas Hawksmoor
- the ways writers describe settings and the importance of those settings ie the inn and its environs in Du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn* or the farmhouse and the village of Howling in Gibbons’ *Cold Comfort Farm*
- how choice of place(s) can symbolise aspects of characters and relationships ie in Lodge’s *Nice Work*, the University (Robyn Penrose’s environment) and J. Pringle and Sons Casting and General Engineering plant (Vic Wilcox’s environment) within the fictional city of Rummidge.

Following on from the example of novels such as *Nice Work* where place (environment) is a feature of character and vice-versa, the most successful NEA students in 2024 were able to consider the range of **characterisation strategies** used by authors and readers to create and develop characters.

Characterisation strategies include:

- how characters are presented: physical appearance; their actions and motives; what they say and think; how their language is constructed; how they interact with others; what others say and think about them; any direct or implicit revelation of author’s / narrator’s attitude to them

- how realistic or unrealistic the presentation of character is. In satire, for example, characters are often presented in a non-realistic, exaggerated manner. This year there was some good work on Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Orwell's *1984* and Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm*. The very best students were able to consider caricature as part of satire.
- manipulation of reader response via making characters empathetic or not
- as with drama, the construction of characters as a vehicle for the author's views, often through the use of direct or indirect speech.

Alert and successful students were always aware of character arc and plot and could demonstrate a knowledge of whole text (AO2 structure) via precise and helpful signposting.

POETRY

Comparatively very few students offer poetry for NEA. Less successful students tend to ignore genre and want either to 'translate' the poems they offer or to tell the 'story' of the poem. Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (from *Selected Poems* ISBN 0 00 2555794) suffered in this regard. Hardly any of the students who offered *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* took any notice of the seven-part structure and were seemingly oblivious to the variable stanza length, rhyme schemes or the loose patterning of tetrameter for odd-numbered lines and trimeter for the even numbered lines. Even terms like 'ballad' were ignored. A particular feature of less successful students - in all genres, not just poetry - is a tendency to respond to single words when attempting to address AO2: how meanings are shaped. Hence, in Coleridge's 625-line poem, some students alighted on single words such as 'mariner', 'hellish', 'slay', 'black', 'pray', 'sweet' and 'kirk' and tried to extrapolate meaning applicable to the whole poem from such tiny fragments. Other, more useful and interesting language features such as the poet's use of repetition, archaic language, natural versus supernatural imagery, use of dialogue, alliteration, the personification of the albatross, water, death etc, the unexpected insertion of First Voice and Second Voice in Part Six, and the function and language of other characters such as the wedding-guest, the sailors, the hermit, and the pilot and his boy were largely ignored.

The most successful students understand that in the analysis of poetry there is an absolute necessity to explore the poetic methods chosen by poets to convey meaning. Some of these methods are poetic structure, poetic imagery and sound effects. The best analyses reflect the conventions of relevant poetry movements (eg Metaphysical, Cavalier, Victorian, Modernists etc) and relevant poetic form (eg elegy, ballad, lyric, dramatic monologue, sonnet etc). Students answering on *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* could have saved themselves a world of pain by analysing the poem as lyrical and a ballad which was first published as part of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's joint enterprise of 1798.

The most successful students were aware that demonstrating a coherent or sophisticated knowledge of **poetic structure** was of key importance, so were able to consider how meaning could be shaped through such aspects as:

- stanza length (eg couplet, tercet, quatrain, sestet, octet etc.), shape, regularity
- line length (metre), shape, regularity
- end-stopped lines, caesura, volta in sonnets, enjambement etc
- other features common to prose and drama can also be considered ie contrast, motif, cumulative effect (especially in narrative poems), climax and anti-climax, shifts in mood or tone and whether the poem has a linear or cyclical structure. The following list of features are common to all literary genres but perhaps feature more prominently within the parameters of **poetic imagery**: symbolism; simile and metaphor; images both concrete and abstract; colour imagery; nature / pastoral imagery; and diction ie the linguistic choices made by a writer. More successful students often make telling observations about the **sound effects** employed by poets. These include rhyme and half-rhyme, alliteration / assonance / onomatopoeia, and sibilance.

PART THREE: FINAL POINTS

- Moderators were very happy to report that they had seen some stunning work this year with some very interesting pairings: eg Shelley's *Frankenstein* with Süskind's *Perfume*; Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* and Hampton's dramatic version of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*; Sophocles' *Antigone* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*; Edwin A Abbot's *Flatland* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*; Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Du Maurier's *My Cousin Rachel*; Defoe's *Roxana* and Rhys' *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*; Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Camus' *The Plague*, Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* paired with Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*.
- Texts which have been popular for years continue to be popular. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Stoker's *Dracula*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Alcott's *Little Women*, Collins' *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*, Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Ellis' *American Psycho*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and *A View From the Bridge*, Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* were all well-represented once again. Intriguing texts not mentioned elsewhere in this report which stuck in moderators' minds because students usually performed well with them included: Wilde's *Salomé*; Atwood's *The Penelopiad*; Kay's *Trumpet*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Flammenberg's (nom de plume for Karl Friedrich Kahlert) *The Necromancer*; or, *The Tale of the Black Forest*, Faulks' *Charlotte Gray*, De Bernière's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and *The Goldfinch*.
- Centres which were moderated down were most frequently given mark adjustments due to not paying due care and attention to student's errors of expression or clumsy written English. AO1 is the gateway through which *all* of the assessment objectives must be marched.
- Moderators reported that they still see essays well in excess of the allowed upper limit of 2,500 words. Students who write over-long essays almost always self-limit due to their inability to write

to instructions or to proof-read and edit their work to fit the brief they are given. Often, such work is repetitive or argues circuitously.

- Tasks which were clear, unambiguous and liberated all of the assessment objectives resulted in much better responses than ambiguous or over-complicated tasks.
- Historical context should be used carefully and should emerge from a consideration of the texts. Non-judicious use of context included assumptions about historical periods (ie ‘everyone was a Christian in sixteenth century London’), asserted contexts which are not supported by historical evidence (ie ‘Victorian women were not allowed to work’) or were inappropriate ie citing U.K. property laws as evidence of how women were ‘controlled’ in American texts such as Alcott’s *Little Women*, or claiming that Ibsen, Dumas, Dostoevsky, Twain, Flaubert et al are somehow ‘Victorian’.
- Where a core text had been taught in a centre, students sometimes produced similar comments and even used the same core quotations, thus making the idea that NEA is “independent critical study” something of a misnomer.
- Some students are happier writing about sociological, psychoanalytical, or media-based theories than they are about literary ones. This year, moderators reported seeing work featuring ‘Spear and Distaff’ analysis. At least one student thought that Kafka constructed Gregor in *The Metamorphosis* as an example of a repressed, early-twentieth century ‘therian’. Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* was variously described as a sociopath, a psychopath, a misogynist, an alpha male, a beta male, a delta male, and in one essay as ‘suffering from NPD’ (Narcissistic Personality Disorder). This essay also argued that Mrs Bennet suffers from Histrionic Personality Disorder with a touch of Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder, Mr Bennet has Avoidant Personality Disorder, Lydia clearly has Impulsive Personality Disorder and Jane suffers terribly from Dependent Personality Disorder. The moderator was glad to learn that Elizabeth was fine.
- As usual, general commentary about ‘the patriarchy’ was common, and this often drew less successful students into making sweeping assertions about its literary manifestation. Students and centres are reminded that if the world of a text is to be described as a patriarchy (many literary worlds are, indeed, patriarchies), the moderator must be shown which characters are patriarchs and what they do that makes them patriarchal. The term ‘the male gaze’ from John Berger in art criticism via Laura Mulvey in film criticism was also popular. Though some students did a thoroughly good job of analysing the importance of male gaze in such diverse texts as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (intriguingly utilising Milton’s blindness as significant) and Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, many students struggled to identify the male gaze or write about it clearly.
- Centres are reminded that annotation is not for the benefit of the student but for the benefit of the moderator. The most useful sort of annotation aids the moderator in providing an evidence trail showing how a particular mark was reached within a centre. Helpful centre annotation acknowledges both the strengths and the weaknesses of the essays and indicate the degree to

which and in what ways the assessment objectives have been addressed through precise reference to the five-band mark scheme. Merely to identify different assessment objectives is of no value to a moderator. Also, the most successful centres (ie those whose marks are most frequently agreed by the moderator) ensure that the summative comment makes sense in terms of the final mark awarded: some centres describe students' work as, for example, 'straightforward' or 'relevant' ie Band 3 criteria (11 – 15 marks) but award a Band 4 mark. Moderators are sure to pick this up. Summative comments are an important method of conveying centres' overall judgements. These judgements are best conveyed through the teachers' own words, but with appropriate and selective reference to the criteria and bands within the mark scheme.

- Those centres which made use of past T-OLS materials when arriving at their final marks were adjusted far less frequently than centres which did not make use of T-OLS. Teachers can find good examples of centre annotation in past T-OLS materials.

Administration

There was much evidence this summer of excellent administrative practice. However, centres are reminded to:

- adhere to deadline dates. The deadline date for NEA is always May 15th or the last working date before this. This is the deadline for centres to submit to AQA, not for students to hand in their work in centres
- secure essays with treasury tags and only treasury tags ie NOT paper clips or staples or document wallets or bulldog clips...
- complete a Centre Declaration Form (one per centre) and a Candidate Record Form for each student in the cohort, making sure that centre name and number and candidate numbers are accurate
- ensure that students use a sensible 12-point font with double line spacing. This year some centres accepted and then passed on work which was written in tiny font and which was difficult to read
- ensure that all pages are numbered and that the essay is paginated in the correct order
- ensure that bibliographies (including the editions of the central texts), an appropriately academic form of referencing, and accurate word counts are provided
- present the folders in the sample in student number or descending rank order.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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