Examiner Report Synopsis Literature 2018

Literature GCSE

Overall, examiners felt that the papers did their job well: candidates across the whole ability range were able to access the questions and got on with the business of responding, showing real engagement with the texts (Eduqas, AQA). There was plenty to challenge the higher attaining pupils, while lower-attaining candidates managed to gain respectable marks with secure knowledge of narrative and character (Eduqas). Many candidates managed their time extremely well, and centres should be congratulated for preparing their candidates so well (Edexcel). The closed book style of the exam has been felt to enhance students' responses. The absence of the text has encouraged students to make their own connections and construct their responses from their own ideas. (AQA)

Shakespeare

- **Don't include 'bolt-on' contextual information**. It needs to be integrated (AQA, Edexcel).
- Students were just as able to **access marks for context by exploring ideas** – e.g. for Macbeth about superstition, moral choices and moral disintegration which showed they were engaging with the situation Macbeth and Banquo found themselves in and the different ways in which they responded to it (AQA).
- Knowledge of the whole text seemed stronger, although the **sequence of events within the text was sometimes an issue**. Revision tasks that involve sequencing the events of the play would certainly be helpful for candidates close to the exam (Eduqas)
- It's important to **keep reminding candidates they are studying the play rather than a particular film version**, and perhaps where possible, giving them the chance to **see how different directors treat the same scene** (Eduqas, Edexcel).
- Some candidates produced **pre-prepared responses** on how Macbeth changed or how he swapped places with his wife in terms of wavering, which **prevented them from achieving higher marks** (Edexcel)

C19th Literature

- Students are clearly well drilled in analysing language, but are less confident in **making connections to the broader themes** of the texts (AQA)
- **Thought and planning time given to considering how students are going to use the details they choose**, not only to explore writer's methods, but also to discuss writer's ideas, would be beneficial here (AQA)
- There seemed to be more **biographical information** than ever – particularly around Stevenson and Dickens, but across all the texts. This **was rarely used astutely** and often added little to a candidate's response to the question (Edexcel)
- Ways in which performance could be improved: ·
  - Plan where coverage of the extract will be best placed in the essay ·
  - More focused and integrated discussion of how contextual factors influence writers' characters, themes and ideas.
  - Avoid contextual 'bolt-ons' (Eduqas)
- Ensure pupils explore the extract enough and give more than only one or two examples (Edexcel)

Modern texts

- The potential damage of over-reliance on **acronyms and mnemonics** was less prevalent, although it was still noted by many examiners that **some still relied upon these structures too heavily** (AQA).
- **AO3 seemed to be an aspect that students struggled with**. For example, students who wrote about Blood Brothers often wrote about the 1980s and Thatcherism as if it was the Victorian period and showed no awareness that the ideas, conflicts, and inequalities of that era have not vanished (AQA).
- Contextual comments are required in part b) (of both questions) and should explore their relationship with the text. The **assessment objective assesses the candidate's knowledge of the text and its relationship to context and not language, form and structure** (Edexcel).
- At times, the **context overwhelmed the exploration of the text and theme**; for example, some candidates got confused between Stalin and Hitler (Edexcel).
- There were also a large number of pupils still **forcing subject terminology** (especially word class labelling) into their responses to the extract – either incorrectly or very tenuously (Eduqas).
- **Unnecessary labelling** and reference to the effect of every word and **unhelpful comments on the impact of punctuation marks**, left insufficient time to demonstrate their wider textual knowledge which would develop a more effective response and a higher mark (Eduqas).

Poetry - Taught

- For Section B, pupils should **start the response with an opening statement that thematically connects the two poems** they are going to use to answer the question (AQA)
- The approach that works best is for students to **know the texts really well**. Contextual information about Rameses II, Stormont and the IRA, or Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's father's disapproval did not help most to answer questions, whereas what did help was thorough knowledge of the cluster of poems (AQA).
- Context comes from the key word in the task, and that the 'ideas / perspectives' elements of context (power / conflict / love / relationships – all in the widest sense) are vital in dealing with fifteen different individual poems in a cluster (AQA).
- Where comparison was treated as a thinking methodology explicitly linked to the task rather than an inherent way of structuring the responses, students did seem to fare better. **Treating comparison as a 'connection' enables students to make more judicious selections of second poem** (AQA).

- Students often address structure at the end of a response, as though they feel they must mention it; all too often, it adds absolutely nothing to what they have already achieved. **There is no specific requirement to write about any particular method** (AQA, Eduqas).
- Rather than writing contrived and implausible comments on structure, candidates would be better off spending their time analysing language choices (Eduqas).
- Candidates did not always use the range of knowledge of Mametz Wood that they had already shown in 7.1, making the comparison less effective and losing marks: it's important to remind candidates they can replicate comments they have made in 7.1 in 7.2 (Eduqas)

- Some responses focused more on their selected poem rather than **balancing the analysis between the named and their own choice**. These did not score as well as those which looked at the named poem first and then brought in similarities (Edexcel)
- A lack of development of analysis prevented candidates from moving up from Level 2. In some cases, this was due to **feature spotting** without considering the effect on the reader or considering analysis of quotes (Edexcel)
- **A lack of contextual focus** hampered some candidates' marks (Edexcel).

Poetry – Unseen

- Many more students than last year focused on AO2 (methods to create meanings). **Possible methods could include**:
  - the creation of a mood / tone
  - the use / effect of particular word choices
  - the use / effect of description
  - structural elements
  - titles
  - sound patterning
  - imagery
  - perspective / voice
  - tense
  - punctuation (AQA).

- It is important for candidates to **engage with the broader ideas presented in the poems and the overall meaning**. The best responses contained a clear and brief overview of the poem as well as thoroughly tracking through details (Eduqas).
- Avoid spotting techniques and patterns with no reference to meaning. **Provide pupils with experience in reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets** (Eduqas).
- Lower-attaining pupils were able to draw comparison between title, topic and imagery whilst the higher-attaining candidates were able to consider tone, structure and various aspects of language and form (Edexcel)
- There is a slight issue in that **lower-attaining candidates are not really comparing the poems**, but instead analysing them in turn, with a few tokenistic comparative phrases thrown in (Edexcel).