



General Certificate of Education

English Literature *Specification A*

LTA1B World War One Literature

Report on the Examination *2009 examination - January series*

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General

The first examination of LTA1B, the new English Literature Specification A Literature of World War One option, attracted a relatively small number of students. This was most welcome, because it suggests that centres are understandably cautious about entering their students for the new examination until they are properly prepared in June. It is strongly advised that students are fully prepared before entering for this examination to enable them to have developed the necessary breadth of knowledge about World War One literature through a course of wider reading. Generally this will be after a year of study.

Although only a relatively small number of students took this first examination there was a range of marks in evidence. This is still less than the full range anticipated in the summer so some of the report will serve as a reminder to centres about what their students will be required to do if they are to succeed in future. The report also offers advice on how centres can most effectively prepare their students for the LTA1B examination. Centres will find the January 2009 LTA1B mark scheme a very useful document here, as it contains not only the assessment grids which will be familiar from the previous English Literature A specification – but also an Indicative Content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful students might adopt in their responses.

To look at the achievement of students question by question:

Question 1

Centres will notice some slight alterations to the format of this question since the specimen paper was published two years ago. In response to the views of centres, the unprepared passage has been made slightly longer to ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the students and to offer them further scope for the establishment of links to their wider reading. The wording of the generic question has also been adjusted slightly: examiners on the current LTA6 paper (in many ways the model for this question and this option) have expressed their concern that students sometimes become bogged down while trying to address the idea of “typicality”, so students on the new specification are directed simply to compare the extract with relevant aspects of their wider reading. Of course, in answering this question, students will still be considering what is typical of the literature of World War One, but they will be doing so through the more direct means of exploring the similarities and differences between the extract and the most relevant parts of their wider reading.

Those centres familiar with the legacy specification would do well to bear their current practice at LTA6 in mind when preparing students for the new LTA1B module: the skills which will be required by students to cope with Question 1 are very similar to those necessary to meet the demands of the legacy synoptic paper. Of course, the contextual linking extract question is less demanding – students respond to one unprepared extract rather than three and the outcomes will be assessed at AS standard rather than A2 – but the best way to prepare students for Question 1 is by providing them with non-fiction extracts from the literature of World War One as part of their wider reading in the similar way that successful centres currently offer their students a broad course in LTA6. Although centres have already identified three wider reading texts (one from each literary genre) and submitted details of these to their coursework advisers, students would certainly gain from extending their reading beyond the three compulsory texts. Students whose wider reading only stretches as far as their centre’s three nominated texts may well find themselves at a disadvantage in the examination if their opportunities to establish relevant links to the extract are limited by the narrowness of their reading: this was certainly evident in the response of the January candidature. Students are, of

course, able to refer to their prose and drama coursework texts too; indeed, as these texts are liable to be very well-known to them, they are likely to be able to refer to these in some depth and detail. Centres are reminded that there is further guidance on how to prepare students for Question 1 in the 'Contextual Linking' advice which was issued in the summer of 2008.

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 1 will relate to at least one of the six key areas identified to help centres focus their studies in the rich area of the literature of World War One. These areas are:

- The realities of war
- 'Man's inhumanity to man'
- Patriotism
- Politics
- Physical/mental/spiritual consequences
- The role of women and the Home Front

The wording of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to students as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract. Centres should use these topics when planning their course of wider reading; they may also refer to the wider reading list on pages 18 – 20 of the specification, although the list is not exhaustive: the best centres will introduce their students to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that students' wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: students are required to refer to at least one example of their wider reading in each genre when answering Question 1 and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded.

In attempting Question 1, students are advised to split their time evenly between the two parts of the question. It is perfectly acceptable for students to focus on the extract for thirty minutes, then spend the next thirty minutes writing about their relevant wider reading; however, more confident and sophisticated students may be able to produce integrated responses in which the extract and the wider reading comparisons are interwoven throughout the answer. Contrasts will also be an important part of successful responses, but their inclusion should be coherent: arbitrary, bolted-on texts with no obvious connection to the extract will not help students reach the higher bands of the mark scheme. However, this is most likely to occur in the responses of students whose wider reading has been limited to three texts: it should not be a problem for those students who are able to draw on a truly wide experience of the literature of World War One.

Perhaps the key feature of the Pankhurst extract is her mixed feelings about the War. Students who detected and examined these conflicting feelings demonstrated a confident grasp of the extract. She is both elated by the opportunities for women and appalled by their human cost when she remembers and further considers men dying at the Front. The most successful students explored the ways in which these mixed feelings are revealed and how they interplay in Pankhurst's writing, in particular the change of mood and tone in the third paragraph. More confident students looked further and reflected on Pankhurst's return to stress exciting opportunities once more at the very end. Students who would not accept or engage with Pankhurst's dilemma were tempted into assertion and misreading, claiming that Pankhurst's exuberant mood at the outset must be sarcasm. These students tended to want to make Pankhurst, and indeed other wider reading authors mentioned, either pro- or anti-war. This over-simplification perhaps stems from a desire to make comparison straightforward, but the approach is deeply flawed and closes down rather than opens up possibilities for analytical exploration.

When it came to looking at AO2 aspects of the extract, the most successful students related aspects of form, structure and language to meaning. It was reassuring to see how many were able to use Pankhurst's change of subject matter, tone and mood as an opportunity to engage with structure. This contrast also led logically into looking at Pankhurst's different choices of language. Only the best, however, considered aspects of form. Given that this is a memoir and therefore a very personal response, form might have been the most logical place to begin a consideration of AO2. Almost all students commented on Pankhurst's use of exclamation marks. The most successful noted this feature in proportion and linked it to subject matter, mood and choice of language whereas the less successful pointed them out randomly and made empty assertions about their use.

Wider reading is obviously crucial to giving a full answer to the second part of the contextual linking question and the need to cover prose, poetry and drama has already been stressed. Typicality needs to be demonstrated rather than asserted in sweeping statements that are not properly supported. Some centres had done an excellent job of encouraging breadth as well as depth in wide reading. These students were able to choose the wider reading that best fit the Pankhurst passage in their view so as to make coherent and illuminating links of similarity and difference. Many had read well beyond their coursework novels and drama texts; one or two centres had supplemented the Gardner or Stallworthy anthologies with more poetry by women, usually from *Scars Upon My Heart*, and to good effect. Most centres had ensured that students could reference a range of non-fiction to so as to confidently contextualise the Pankhurst. There was some evidence of too much wider reading looked at too hurriedly. In these cases, it would have been better to train students to select and plan around the idea of at least one well-chosen wide reading reference per genre and to explore the links further. Where a candidate lacked the necessary range of wider reading, it tended to be drama that was most frequently absent. Students and centres should consult the wider reading suggestions in the specification and perhaps refer to the texts referred to in the next section of the report.

One purpose of this section of the report is to encourage centres and students to read widely in their courses and to explore the wealth of wider reading possible in this topic. In no sense is there a canon of works that must be studied. At the same time, it might inform centres and students of some of the wider reading texts that students put to effective use. Drama texts included: *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop); *The Accrington Pals* (Peter Whelan); *Black 'Ell* (Miles Malleston); *The Silver Tassie* (Sean O'Casey); *Blackadder* (Richard Curtis and Ben Elton). A range of early patriotic poetry, including Jessie Pope, was used in connection with the first part of the extract; the third paragraph of Pankhurst and particularly the reference to "the slaughter" was linked to a wide range of trench poetry illustrating graphic realism and horror. The most popular novels included *Birdsong* (Sebastian Faulks), *Regeneration* (Pat Barker) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Erich Maria Von Remarque). There were also a small but significant number of references to *The Return of the Soldier* (Rebecca West) and *Tell England* (Ernest Raymond). Non-fiction was represented by Vera Brittain, Paul Nash and a range of lesser-known letters and memoirs.

In June, successful students will:

- explore the ways the writer's thoughts and feelings about aspects of World War One are presented in the extract
- establish a range of links between the extract and their wider reading
- refer to all three literary genres when writing about their wider reading, commenting on the writers' choices of form, structure and language, as well as subject matter.

Questions 2 -7

The new poetry set text questions should be recognisable to centres with experience of the legacy specification: just as Question 1 is modelled on the current LTA6 paper, Questions 2 – 7 operate in the same way as the post-1900 questions for the LTA3 module. This will be familiar territory for many centres: although the number of the Assessment Objective has changed (AO3 is the new AO4), the expectations of the AS students remain the same – they are required to produce a balanced debate in response to the given critical opinion, supporting their arguments with an analysis of the poetry they choose to use as evidence.

The most popular poetry text this January proved to be *Up the Line to Death*. None of the centres chose *Scars Upon My Heart*. There were many engaged and enthusiastic answers with most prepared to address poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language. Where problems occurred preventing higher achievement, they tended to be to do with:

- Balancing the debate

Some able students who demonstrated high Band 3/Band 4 descriptors in other ways were prevented from fulfilling their potential by not balancing the debate.

- Selecting appropriate material

There was a good deal of engaged and intelligent analysis that was not clearly relevant to the question or to the candidate's line of argument. Care should be taken to select appropriate poems and to select from those poems only the most relevant aspects. One of the answers to this issue is planning; time spent planning is crucial. Once students are writing, they should make frequent reference to the key words of the question and the central debate help to ensure that the answer remains on track.

- Exploring poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language

This remains a difficult area for many students. Exploring aspects of form, in particular, such as rhyme, metre and stanza form can lead students into empty feature-spotting with little relevance and/or asserted and unconvincing links to meaning. Such features, it is claimed, are chosen by writers to "make them stand out" (?) or to create vague effects such as "flow" and "pace". For examiners the key questions when faced with these assertions are "How?" and "Why?" Students should also ask these questions and use them to shape their responses when it comes to AO2.

Question 2

This was the most popular question. The majority chose to approach this referring to two or three poems rather than ranging more widely (a perfectly acceptable approach, of course). However, it was also the question where it was common for students to become so immersed in the issue that they either forgot to balance the debate or struggled to do so.

Question 3

This was also a popular question. Those who understood that 'appropriate introduction' was a key phrase and used this to reference other poems tended to do well. More confident students argued that Hardy's poem was ahead of its time in prophesying the horror of war and so the poem contrasts with the majority of poems in Gardner's first main section.

Question 6

A small number of students attempted this question. Perhaps because of the gloss of 'futility' given in the first sentence of the question, students did not find this concept difficult. Most used the suggestion of Owen's 'Futility' as a starting point.

Question 7

About the same number attempted this question. Responses tended to be superficial and there was limited reference to other poems about England and the Home Front. Some noticed the framing device of the lovers and the wood but did not explore its importance.

In June, successful students will:

- create a balanced debate in response to the critical opinion given in the question
- select appropriate poems to support their argument and counter-argument
- explore the poetic effects created by the writer's choices of form, structure and language.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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