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A-level

# English Language & Literature

7707/2 Exploring Conflict  
Report on the Examination

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7707/2  
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## General

Paper 2, Exploring Conflict, assesses all five Assessment Objectives across three tasks. Examiners were impressed with the students' ability to recognise the challenges in meeting these Assessment Objectives and in managing their time effectively.

Rubric infringements were rare. No penalty for Section A exists in either the recast or commentary task, as the rubric only specifies an approximate word count. However, going under or over word count for the recast was potentially self-penalising in terms of available time for the critical commentary and for maintaining control of the style chosen. In the commentaries, most students also understood that AO4 means that connections have to be made to the base text that they had studied and did this with varying degrees of success. Likewise, in response to Section B Dramatic Encounters, students understood that they were required to refer to different points in the play to shape their interpretation of the specific question focus. As this was the second time through, examiners noted that feedback from the 2017 series had clearly been taken on board and the level of linguistic precision seen as markedly weaker in Section B, Dramatic Encounters in 2017 was no longer the case.

In a large sense, Paper 2 is synoptic. Not only does it call upon all Assessment Objectives but also in the underlying focus of the specification on point of view and how language choices create representations. It was pleasing to see across this paper that students were able to demonstrate their understanding of concepts and methods that underpin this specification. Although AO1 is only explicitly awarded on Section B, students may also demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of concepts and methods from language study on Section A through their creative writing, for example in developing characterisation (a key concept) by representing speech and thought (applying a method) as well as by using features such as speech verbs (using a feature).

Creating the point of view and developing a character are important elements of students' AO5 mark for creativity. They then may have explored their creation of their character in their critical commentary and analysed aspects they used to create character (for example, various aspects of body language or the use of free direct speech), offering very specific features of this (for example, proxemics and haptics and the lack of reporting clauses) to explore the effects of these choices for their AO2 mark or AO4 connection to the base text. In Dramatic Encounters, students might have applied ideas about cooperation (concept) from pragmatics (a language level) by exploring the meeting or flouting of Gricean maxims (method) and exploring specific features that evidence these (for example, interruptions and turn-taking). A benefit of thinking beyond individual features for students was that they were both able to engage with patterns and with the larger picture when selecting significant and interesting aspects of their own writing or when constructing an argument for the drama question.

It should also be noted that although the specification values a precise focus on linguistic analysis, there will be occasions where students draw on different areas of linguistics, or on different ideas about classifying language and examiners are open-minded in their approach to recognising these in students' work. This means that although vague and impressionistic terms like 'imagery', 'tone' and high-frequency lexis are unhelpful, it is perfectly reasonable therefore for students to use a range of ideas and approaches as long as they are grounded in precise descriptive analysis and teachers can draw on different ways of thinking as they see fit. The AQA glossary still remains a good starting point for more general terminology as well as definitions of the key concepts.

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## Section A - Writing about Society

The most popular base text choice was *The Great Gatsby*, followed by *The Kite Runner*. *Into the Wild* was the third most popular and a relatively few number of students had studied *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* OR *the Murder at Road Hill House*. Whatever text they had studied, students communicated their enjoyment of these, as well as their pleasure in being creative.

### Recreative writing (Questions 1,3, 5 and 7)

In this recreative writing the assessment of expertise and creativity is through three different strands:

- flair and originality
- sustained use of style
- convincing use of base text

In the main, students responded well to the generic nature of the task and recasting the base text into an 'account'. Indeed many took the opportunity to make representational decisions about the use of dialogue, speech and thought and narrative modes etc. to meet the demands of the task and cover the bullet points. Overall, there appeared much more confidence in the following areas:

- constructing interesting and useful dialogue that drove the narrative forward
- developing aspects of the chosen characterisation through using various methods such as register, body language and speech and thought presentation
- recognising the imagined relationship between the account giver and intended audience and how this might impact the language used
- showing control in the opening and closing of the account
- combining dialogue with speech and thought representation and/or description to create a more complex account.

Students' use of the base text was often a discriminating factor in the ways that it was used either as a basis for reshaping for a different point of view, or for ideas about the content of the account and/or as a way of exploring the attitudes of the character being depicted towards the base text's participants. The students who showed flair and originality worked within the parameters of the base text and more broadly those of prose fiction/nonfiction but made imaginative creative choices around characterisation and the effective use of language and narrative devices to display flair. Students mainly did not choose to use a particular genre and this perhaps meant less distraction into replicating specific genre conventions, allowing more focus on narrative devices that were useful in meeting the different strands of the assessment objective.

The questions themselves varied in whether they featured an included participant or an excluded participant. Each carried comparable demands as often the included participant was not a major or rounded character, for example *The Kite Runner* task focusing on Dr Nawaz. With an excluded participant (such as the waiter from *The Great Gatsby*), 'gap-filling' was required and students responded well to the creativity required by developing a specific character and point of view and did not try to replicate either Nick Caraway's narratorial point of view or Fitzgerald's style this year.

Overall, across all the texts and tasks, more successful responses:

- understood the importance of creating an individual character with their own point of view of events being recast
- made judicious and careful choices about the presentation of point of view and narratorial focus

- chose to use particular genres as a way to support the shaping and representation of events rather than allowing the genre to become the dominant focus of the writing
- were imaginative in their development of their narrative and characterisation but grounded this in the bullet points they had been asked to consider and their knowledge of the base text
- when using dialogue, were effective in creating productive and accurately presented speech, recognising that speech can be presented in various ways (eg direct, indirect etc.) for different effects
- used thought presentation to good effect to support point of view and characterisation
- used multiple narrative techniques (descriptions of time and place, speech and thought, motifs and devices such as in media res etc.).

#### Less successful responses

- were over-reliant on the base text and introduced very few new dimensions to their account
- wrote very short or very lengthy responses that were self-penalising
- ignored the audience that they were given for the recast or acknowledged it in passing but in an unconvincing manner
- chose a style that was unsuitable for the character whose point of view they were creating
- ignored the bullet points given to consider in their transformations, interpreting the instruction 'you should consider' as optional.

#### **Question 1: *Into the Wild***

Examiners reported that this text was handled well and that it was evident the students who studied this had clearly enjoyed it and engaged with its main themes.

#### More successful responses:

- created an Alaskan voice carefully with a few well-selected orthographical representations
- used key details of the base text extract to inform their characterisation (e.g. some of the individual respondents to the Alaskan newspaper)
- created a dialogue between the Alaskan and the young man that demonstrated their conflicting attitudes and values.

#### Less successful responses:

- relied on non-standard clippings for words that seemed unlike an Alaskan accent or overused taboo lexical choices
- found it more difficult to create dual voices and attitudes for the recently arrived young man and the Alaskan
- tried to tie up the narrative rather quickly with the young man being browbeaten into going home after his brief exchange with the Alaskan resident
- did not make use of the Alaskan environment details given in the text as a whole to address the dangers of the place for inexperienced travellers
- missed opportunities to use what we learn of Chris' adventure to inform the new piece.

**Question 3: *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher***

Examiners saw relatively few responses on this text but reported that the majority of students were able to create a convincing voice for the juror.

More successful responses:

- used the wider text by suggesting the juror's knowledge of, and interest in, Mr Whicher and the Road Hill House case
- adopted a more formal register as suitable for a nineteenth century juror
- used interactional devices to include the intended audience and to describe both the convicted man and the court experience.

Less successful responses:

- chose a more chronological approach to describing the experience rather than picking out the salient details which would interest their audience.

**Question 5: *The Great Gatsby***

As this was the most popular of the questions, there was a wide range of quality in the responses seen. The success of the recasts depended on how closely they had read the bullet points and their acknowledgement of the "friend" audience. Many students seemed unfamiliar with the meaning of 'highballs' and this led to some unusual interpretations.

More successful responses:

- set up a convincing context for the account such as a meeting at a bar or in an apartment later that day, or even after Gatsby's death
- developed a real sense of character in the 'waiter', creating a voice that was convincing in dialectal and sociolect features and explored more subtle and conflicted attitudes towards the diners than simply class-driven ones
- worked hard on the structure, making a lively start and following strands through to a punchy conclusion
- incorporated elements from the wider text such as using the contrasts between West and East Egg as a basis for the waiter's backstory and experiences and an imagined personal knowledge of Gatsby's or Wolfsheim's notoriety
- made narrative choices about how much (or how little) a waiter might overhear and what their waiter knew (or didn't know) about Gatsby and his fellow diners
- used the friend audience as an opportunity for interactivity, representing speech in varied ways as direct speech, free indirect speech etc. and for developing an appropriate anecdotal and conversational style
- created a character for the 'friend', not simply using them as a foil to ask questions of the waiter
- cleverly wove aspects of thought into the dialogue to create a more rounded sense of character
- took contextual ideas of underworld of 1920s New York and used these imaginatively.
- explored the complex relationships between the three male diners carefully and added in the waiter's point of view of them thoughtfully.

Less successful responses:

- produced a narrative mimicking Fitzgerald's style

- ignored the second bullet point completely
- chose letters as a genre to communicate with the friend, which sometimes restricted opportunities to develop any interactional qualities, reducing some narratorial choices
- chose more of a monologue form and therefore struggled to involve their intended audience
- relied heavily on the given passage, often lifting heavily from the extract or being very literal in the descriptions of the three diners
- created an overly formal or an informal idiolect that did not seem convincing for an American waiter, using terms of address such as ‘mate’ for the friend and clippings that seemed unlikely representations for the phonetics of the words offered
- clearly added in features for the sole purpose of being able to talk about in the commentary, with a tendency to include ineffective choices of similes, pathetic fallacy and alliteration.

### **Question 7: *The Kite Runner***

This was the second most popular text choice and most responses showed a good understanding of the hospital context and the suitable register for a doctor-nurse interaction.

More successful responses:

- used the information from the base text and imitated an English style voice for the doctor
- used medical terminology convincingly and as a means to support the characterisation of the doctor’s professional role
- created a credible rapport with the ‘nurse’ and characterised the relationship between them as both professional (with the doctor giving convincing instructions) and personal with the doctor offering some private feelings about his experiences with Sohrab and Amir
- mixed dialogue and the interaction with the nurse with the doctor’s private thoughts
- used small details from the base text like the awareness of Dr Nawaz’s daughter to offer a connection to his own reactions to Sohrab’s experiences
- used speculation on the nature of Amir and Sohrab’s relationship to good effect to suggest the possibilities for a future solid relationship or to question Amir’s actions and involvement in Sohrab’s recent experiences.

Less successful responses:

- made very little of the nurse as the intended audience
- often wrote what appeared more like an internal monologue
- had the doctor adopting a more personal relationship with Amir, rather than a more suitable professional one
- tried to use the genre of a formal medical report and could not sustain the register
- tried to emulate some of Hosseini’s style rather than create their own character and distinctive register.

### **Critical Commentary (Questions 2, 4, 6 and 8)**

The task asks students to refer to specific aspects of language that they have used, make connections between their own decisions and those used by the writer of the base text and elaborate on these in a coherently structured and expressed piece of writing. The majority of students were aware of these and responded appropriately. Examiners reported a few formulaic responses; this resulted in students not making judicious selections as they were often choosing

aspects of language that fitted some preconceived plan and structure. This meant that the features had either been shoe-horned into the recreative writing deliberately for the commentary, or that the language choices made were not the necessarily the most interesting aspects for the actual task they had been given and students therefore had little to say about the effects.

Students' selections from their own text (as well as the base text) were key to success. Where selections were made carefully, students were able to offer some thoughtful comments on their writing. However, mechanical labelling led to mechanical responses - linking to the earlier general point raised about students' more productive use of their understanding of concepts and methods to help them select particular features, rather than starting from an individual word class or language feature first. As a reminder, the mark scheme reference to 'Language' in the AO2 descriptors is used in a broad way and students who explored concepts such as narrative point of view or characterisation could apply the methods they chose to create this more effectively than those who started with a simile or an example of sibilance. Indeed, those students who only picked individual features often found themselves with little to say in terms of the meanings created, especially when they were inaccurate in identifying them.

Interestingly, examiners noted that students could sometimes write effective commentaries even if their recast had not been entirely convincing to the reader. This was a result of selecting interesting aspects of their own language choices to explore the shaping of meanings, even if these had not been completely successful in the recreative writing itself. Another important point of note is that the base text counts as one of the prescribed set texts on the specification and students who made only cursory references to it, identified quotations that they had used without analysis or offered sweeping comments on context, were not able to secure a high AO4 mark. This was still the weakest element of the commentaries and many students did not even acknowledge the original writer in their writing and that they were not engaging with the requirement to discuss 'aspects of language and likely effects produced in the base text, compared with their transformed text'.

More successful responses:

- considered the relationship between their own writing and the base text, choosing aspects of language and narrative devices carefully to explore the connections between them and exploring the effects of the different creative decisions
- reflected on specific decisions that they had made in their own writing and used precision in identifying the specific examples and techniques used
- moved beyond a narrow definition of 'language' as individual features, successfully highlighting ideas about language, such as the effects of direct and indirect speech, the use of symbols and motifs and the use of deixis to reflect the changed centre of the narrative
- showed a perceptive understanding of the base text, the writer's choice of narrative and language techniques and the effects intended
- produced well organised and accurate writing, signposting commentaries helpfully for the reader.

Less successful responses:

- described their own writing with minimal reference to any language detail
- chose a quotation from the base text and then described the changes that they had made in adapting particular sentences or believed that the quotation itself was a sufficient connection to the base text
- suggested use of narrative devices such as stream of consciousness but confused this with thought presentation and misunderstood what it is and how it is used
- selected language levels/features on the basis of being able to identify them or without discussion of how these were shaped to construct meanings



- applied language labels inaccurately or imprecisely – for example, in misidentifying specific word classes or using words like ‘imagery’, ‘low register’
- made minimal reference to the base text, focusing solely on own writing
- made connections only about content, context or the narrative perspective adopted

## Section B – Dramatic Encounters

This section was handled with much greater success than last year. Most students showed confident knowledge of their set text and were able to call upon this to use both the extract given as a starting point and to make other selections from the text to address their choice of question.

Of all the Assessment Objectives, AO3 was the less well done this year. Students often did not engage with both strands of this AO – genre and contexts of production and reception. There are many possible approaches to this AO but for the contexts of production there was still a tendency to include much broad assertion about social attitudes of the time. For contexts of reception examiners noted that there was a tendency for students to make broad assertions around likely audience responses and on how various theatrical productions of the plays had interpreted lines and characters. Although audience response is a valid area to consider, there are other forums and mediums to gain audience responses. Much overlooked were critical responses, literary criticism, reviews etc. In terms of genre, some did not discuss any aspects of stagecraft, genre conventions or the specific types of genres the individual drama texts represented. Of note also, was the approach taken to including contextual points in responses. It was typical to see students trying to integrate, for example, biographical contextual factors with micro textual analysis and this was not always helpful. There is no requirement to always link in contextual factors to specific AO1 points. More important is the saliency of the contextual points made to the actual question and students can consider contextual influences at various stages of their response. It appeared much easier for students to weave the use and effects of certain genre conventions into the body of the essay but again an insightful discussion of tragic or melodramatic elements can be executed in a variety of ways within the students’ own essay.

For AO1, students were selecting more carefully from their own toolkit of knowledge and understanding to select language levels and features that they could apply to support the methods or concepts they were using to engage with the question. There was much more confident application of pragmatic aspects such as Grice’s maxims and exploring features associated with the discourse language level often proved fruitful for students. There appeared to be much more selection based on what was helpful to answer the question rather than identifying every small detail. Many students shaped their answers around the interpretations (AO2) using clear topic sentences to foreground the focus of each paragraph with AO1, and AO3 was used to support AO2 as a way to explore characters’ identities and relationships. This approach allowed students to signpost the use of the extract alongside the different points they selected to develop a line of argument, in addition to interpreting different forms of the questions and different characters. However, sometimes the signposting to different points in the play was vague and references were only made descriptively and in passing. This sometimes restricted students’ ability to gain reward for their interpretation of the question focus and showing that they could make careful selections from the texts.

The overwhelmingly most popular text choice was *A Streetcar Named Desire* with *Othello* the second most popular. Some had selected *All My Sons*, and it was encouraging to see that a number of centres had chosen *The Herd*.

Overall, more successful responses:

- explored conversational strategies that are given to characters to shape identity and relationships and to cause (or deflect) conflict, for example turn-taking, exchange structures, co-operation etc.
- carefully selected from the text (both the extract and elsewhere) and used precise, accurate terminology to identify features in support of the larger concepts discussed and methods applied
- explored stage directions and orthographical conventions to respond to the questions and to highlight tension/conflict
- evaluated how the language used by characters could link to the interpretation of the question, specifically to manipulate others or to reveal their own attitudes and motivations
- selected social, historical and biographical contextual points relevantly and integrated these into the interpretation – remembering that integration can mean into the argument presented in the whole essay
- explored the nature of tragedy etc. in the light of the play studied and the question focus
- included relevant references to specific literary critical and other theoretical stances such as psychology (non-academic readings were still seen infrequently but were evident in more responses than last year)
- recognised that these were examples of dramatic discourse and kept sight of the writer's crafting

Overall, less successful responses:

- applied spoken gender theory to the plays - these are rarely helpful and add little to an exploration of the plays, especially when students think that the writers are using these theories deliberately
- lost sight of the importance of a precise linguistic focus to support the interpretative elements and became descriptive
- used quotations without linguistic description
- struggled to sustain a focus on the question beyond the extract and did not choose wisely from other parts of the play
- overlooked discussion of genre conventions, relying on broader contexts of production and reception
- made sweeping judgements with social contexts, especially with regard to attitudes towards women and race.

## ***Othello*, William Shakespeare**

### **Question 9**

This was the least popular question on *Othello* but only by a small margin.

More successful responses:

- explored ideas about asserting power over women by considering its varying forms – such as physical, emotional or as part of a patriarchy
- examined women's role in accepting male power within the social context of the time – and issues of status, honour and reputation -, as well as from the perspective of different characters (Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca)

- used textual evidence well to support the ways that the male characters exerted power by focusing on a variety of language levels such as pragmatics (speech acts), grammar (sentence functions) and lexis/semantics (terms of address)
- highlighted the complexities of the assertion of power in, for example, Othello's conflicted feelings at this stage of the action – as evidenced by the ambiguity of 'put out the light' and the levels of success (Brabantio's attempts to coerce Desdemona in Act 1).

Less successful responses:

- placed male assertion of power within a broad understanding of contemporary attitudes and social structures to male and female family relationships and religion
- overlooked the soliloquy in the extract and the significance of these both in terms of genre and in exploring Othello
- were able to say something relevant about the extract but found it harder to illustrate assertion of power successfully elsewhere and beyond Othello/Desdemona.

### Question 10

This was marginally the most popular question and students were familiar with the extract and the theme. Students mainly paid close attention to the scene, before moving onto a wider discussion of the jealousy with regards to other characters and relationships.

More successful responses:

- understood Iago's manipulation of Othello's jealousy and how this was a key driver for the plot from the beginning of the play
- explored jealousy in thoughtful ways beyond just Othello and Iago, focusing on Roderigo and Bianca's feelings towards others and in the context of the ways that they are treated by others
- looked at the impact of jealousy on the changing behaviours of the characters throughout the play and the ways that Shakespeare presented these using genre conventions such as verse and prose.

Less successful responses:

- did not move much further than the extract and references to different points and other interpretations were brief and descriptive
- struggled to analyse the extract and relied on writing much about the meaning of Iago's metaphorical representation of jealousy as a 'green-eyed monster'.

### *All my Sons*, Arthur Miller

#### Question 11

This was the slightly less popular choice for *All My Sons* and well done overall.

More successful responses:

- recognised the complexities of Keller's speech and his desire to exert power as regained after his incarceration
- explored the monologue form as a means to exert power
- contrasted Keller's assertion of power with his later loss of power and discussed this in the tragic context, using terms from tragedy effectively to develop the analysis of the question.

Less successful responses:

- relied on identifying specific features that showed an exertion of power but without exploring larger patterns either within the extract or within the play.

### Question 12

This was the slightly more popular choice but responses tended to focus on small examples of characters' anger rather than contextualising this within the larger themes or reasons for these feelings.

More successful responses:

- commented on the links between characters' anger and larger themes of deceit, betrayal etc.
- explored the different types of anger shown – at others, at self, at the world – and the impact these had on relationships with other characters
- chose to look at Chris's anger at different points of the play and Chris' feelings as significant to the climax of the play and Keller's tragic downfall
- focused on Kate's anger and how this is displayed at times towards other characters and shapes her relationships.

Less successful responses:

- relied on discussing how the stage directions would affect the actor's method of delivery rather than the ways that these helped convey anger
- adopted a line-by-line approach to analysis of the anger demonstrated and therefore struggled to place these within the play as a whole.

### ***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams**

#### Question 13

This was the least popular question, perhaps as students found it harder to think immediately of other forms of bitterness beyond Blanche.

More successful responses:

- contrasted Blanche's bitterness with that of Stanley's more targeted bitterness towards Blanche, exploring the impact on the plot culminating in Scene 10 and Blanche's ejection from Elysian Fields in Scene 11
- identified other forms of bitterness in Mitch and analysed aspects of Scene 9
- interpreted the effects of characters' bitterness on Stella and her responses
- explored Blanche's monologue and dialogue with Stella in detail, offering some subtle interpretations of Williams' crafting of the monologue to illustrate how bitterness can be presented orthographically, rhetorically and metaphorically.

Less successful responses:

- highlighted individual features in Blanche's monologue that showed bitterness, but without further exploration of what these indicated about the cause of Blanche's feelings – being left at Belle Reve, the loss of a husband etc.
- feature spotted, not always accurately

- simplified Blanche's feelings and ignored her manipulation of Stella
- did not select carefully from elsewhere in the play and chose sections that left nothing to analyse.

### Question 14

This was the most popular question and students clearly enjoyed the open nature of the question, allowing them to interpret the 'contrasting personalities' in varied ways.

More successful responses:

- examined carefully the contrasts between Blanche and Mitch and how this is reflected in this interaction, aware of the subtleties of each character's hopes and desires and the effects of these on the ways that they present themselves
- used the extract thoughtfully to find examples of the characters' contrasts, looking at concepts of accommodation and politeness, in addition to focusing on Blanche's use of directives, the awkwardness of the conversational turn-taking and the importance in the stage directions in highlighting the contrasts
- made other convincing arguments based around gender, contrasting Blanche and Stella and Mitch and Stanley
- interpreted contrasting personalities as Williams' defining construct of the play with Blanche and Stanley as protagonist/antagonist.

Less successful responses:

- found it challenging to define the notion of contrast and used Blanche alone to focus on, interpreting it as meaning a change in behaviours throughout the play or the contrasting ways that she presents herself to different characters
- used concepts of hegemonic femininity and masculinity in rigid ways that demonstrated a lack of understanding
- did not make sensible text selections and used the extract for Question 13 as a different point in the play.

### *The Herd*, Rory Kinnear

#### Questions 15 and 16

Unfortunately, few responses were seen to this text. Those seen seemed to handle well the issues raised by exploring characters' placing blame on themselves and others and their awkwardness, linking these to specific aspects of Kinnear's crafting of dialogue and use of stage directions.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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