
A-LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE B

7717/1A Literary Genres: Aspects of tragedy
Report on the Examination

7717
2017

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Introductory Comments

This is the first year of the new A-level examinations for LITB and it is very pleasing to report that the papers were well received and some interesting and insightful responses were seen on all four papers. Students had clearly engaged well with their studies of texts which had been read through the lenses of both traditional and cultural genres. Most students seemed to have managed their time effectively in responding to the three required questions, though for some there were issues of time management; and some students seemed to think that they needed to write for the full three or two and a half hours that were allotted to the examinations regardless of whether they had anything new to say. Students need to think about the questions and what they are saying rather than just writing.

It is appropriate to focus on the four papers together at the start of this report since they are so closely connected and to an extent are interdependent (just as the four papers are in AS). They share the same philosophy, the same mark scheme and the same structure. The marks available for each question are also the same and all the assessment objectives (AOs) are tested in all questions in the same ways. In terms of marking, all answers are marked holistically with the AOs seen as fluid and interactive. The only difference is that Paper 1 is a two and a half hour examination and Paper 2 is three hours.

The texts on this specification are grouped together through aspects of genre, so when students write about the particular aspects of tragedy and comedy or elements of crime and political and social protest writing that are set up in the questions, they are automatically connecting with the wider genre. This means they do not need to compare texts. Given the interconnectedness of the papers, their identical philosophies and methods of assessment, the strengths and weaknesses in student performance across the four papers were, understandably, very similar.

The importance of students answering the questions set in all their details

In all AQA courses for Specification B, in all official communications and in all our support materials on the website, it is clearly stated that in order to be successful students must answer the questions set in all their details. Answering the question is our mantra and is the single most important thing that teachers need to tell their students. There are no hidden requirements that students have to try to guess. When they focus sharply, keep to the task and construct a relevant argument, they do well. They do less well when they try to shoehorn in extraneous material, unrelated context and unrelated comments about aspects of tragedy and comedy or elements of crime and political and social protest writing that are not required by the question. Although students are studying the genres of tragedy and comedy, the tasks do not require them to write everything or anything known about the genre including what Aristotle, Hegel and other theorists have said. They have to write about the specific aspects or elements of the genre that are set up in the questions or those which are evident in the passages in Section A. If students subvert questions they get into a muddle. What they need to do is construct meaningful and fresh arguments, thinking for themselves about the specific features of the genre they are writing about.

In the Section A questions of all four papers, students were asked to explore extracts and passages from texts in terms of the genre. This meant they had to read the passages and see what specific features emerged and which opened up meanings. In Section B and Section C the specific aspects and elements that should have been focused upon and debated were made clear

in the questions, for example Iago's villainy in *Othello*, marriage in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the process of detection in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The importance of students knowing their texts and then reading them through the lens of genre

Students need to know that they are looking at their texts *through* the lens of genre and not *at* the lens of genre itself. The text, its story and the narrative arc must have priority before other work can begin. Although Papers 1 are closed book exams and Papers 2 open book, there is an expectation on both papers that students have secure textual knowledge. Although this might seem obvious, they need to know what happens and how the story ends. They also need to be able to write relevantly about specific parts of the text and have ideas about what can be analysed in terms of the genre. Knowing texts is not the same as knowing quotations, though knowing quotations and using them judiciously always helps. Students who had a secure understanding of the chronology and characters of their stories could make good choices. They could focus on particular events, use appropriate details and write in an informed way. Making good choices is crucial.

The student's selection of material is often a good indicator to examiners of whether the question has been understood. Having secure textual knowledge gives students confidence; it is the base from which all else springs. Some students made poor choices that led them away from the task. These poor choices were often made because of inadequate textual knowledge and this resulted in students struggling with the tasks, often writing in a general, vague and inaccurate way. Several students tried to disguise their lack of knowledge by making things up, particularly quotations, and they then wrote about their invented words as if the words belonged to the authors. Inaccurate and made up quotations and textual details are often so glaring that they detract from students' arguments. If students do not know quotations then they would be best advised to simply explain their ideas using their own words and, providing that their explanation and discussion is relevant to the question, they will be credited.

Clearly it is imperative in this specification that students also have an understanding of how genre works in their set texts, both in terms of how the texts connect with a traditional pattern and how they may disconnect as seen when writers consciously play with and subvert genre. Several students seemed to think that there are generic absolutes or templates which writers are always trying to model. Genre is a loose set of conventions which are modified or reinforced with every text produced.

The importance of students understanding question format and understanding that all questions invite debate

In Section B, all four papers have the same kind of question format in that a debate is set up around key aspects of tragedy or comedy where students are invited to explore a view. This is also the case with Section C of Paper 1. The word 'significance' is used in the Shakespeare passage based question, the unseen questions and Section C of Paper 2 and is the trigger that tells students that they need to consider potential meanings.

All questions are framed around AO5 and AO4 so that students can engage with what is really interesting about literature – considering how different meanings arise, thinking and debating different interpretations of their literature texts, having views, expressing opinions, understanding that their own interpretations are valid. Those students who embraced this performed very well. Those who took ownership and argued independently and relevantly were particularly impressive.

Several students cited critical opinions or wrote about critical positions, often using the Critical Anthology, and this worked for students who understood the task and who used critical voices relevantly. For some, however, it did not. Some students used critical material that was not clearly understood and tacked it on to arguments. The message here is that unless critical ideas can be used to specifically further the student's argument, they are best left alone.

The passage based questions

All four papers have one question in which students are required to work with a passage from either their Shakespeare play or an unseen text. These passages have been carefully chosen and the reason for their being printed is that students are expected to explore them in some detail.

Passages in the Shakespeare questions are provided to enable students to demonstrate their skills of responding to a section of text in a tight and detailed way and then relate their observations about aspects of tragedy or comedy to the wider play. On Paper 2, students are given unseen extracts so that they can show their understanding of the crime writing or political and social protest writing genres, applying their knowledge to extracts that are new to them. In all cases students need to read – or reread - the extracts carefully ensuring that they see its narrative, dramatic and tragic or comedic trajectory. They need to see that it is telling a part of a story, which has its own mini narrative, while belonging at the same time to a much bigger whole, a known story on Paper 1 and an unknown story on Paper 2. Students need to engage with the narrative that is taking place. As they construct their arguments, they have to work with specific details that are in the passages. This is made clear in the questions.

In the Shakespeare passage based question, it is important that students establish an overview of the extract and that they see its shape and the dramatic and narrative development within it. Fundamentally they need to see it as drama – part of a story that is written to be performed on stage. They need to think about how the passage begins and ends, whether it contains a crisis or critical moment and how the extract contributes to the overall dramatic tragedy or dramatic comedy. Centres could profitably spend time helping students to develop the skills to construct overviews in brief and telling ways that will give them an anchor for their responses to the bullets. Clearly students need to know the play well so that they can see the structural relationship between the extract and the parts of the dramatic narrative that come before and after it. This is not to recommend a formulaic approach overall as students should engage naturally with the passages and be autonomous readers and writers. As long as the passage is the central focus of the writing there is no directive as to how much time and attention is given to other parts of the play though, of course, other parts of the play do need to be discussed.

When writing about the tragic or comedic aspects set up in the question, students have to be mindful of the playwright's dramatic construction. They have to think about the interplay between the actions that are taking place as audiences watch and, in its broadest sense, the speech that is being heard. This means the dialogue, the asides and soliloquies, the kinds of exchanges between characters; it does not mean a discussion of single words which is rarely productive and invariably take students away from tragic and comedic drama. All comments about dramatic method should be integrated seamlessly into the students' arguments.

In the unseen passages of Paper 2A and 2B, again students need to have a secure sense of what is actually happening in the extract and although they do not know what happens in the rest of the text, they do know the genre and they are given some information in the question which they can work with as they think about what is being revealed.

Authorial and dramatic methods

In all questions students have to incorporate comments on authorial methods. Again much has been said about AO2 in training sessions and in LITB resources. The strongest responses were seen by students who integrated relevant comments about method into their arguments and connected them to the aspects of genre set up in the question. The weakest responses were by students who ignored the part of the question about authorial method or who bolted on material – usually detached analysis of single words. A particular problem for some students is that they write about features that they do not understand. This was particularly true of iambic pentameter, blank verse and prose in questions where the text was a Shakespeare play. It was surprising how many students did not know what the terms mean and ended up writing inaccurately. Across all papers, the best responses included focused comments on structure, voices and settings and these were integrated into the students' arguments. Fortunately fewer students this year were writing about punctuation, but there were still some who tried to find meanings in commas, exclamation marks and full stops.

The significance and influence of contexts

The contexts that students need to write about are those which emerge from the texts and those which are set up in the questions. The students who understood this were able to respond to the questions crisply and in an unhampered way. Some students, unfortunately, thought they had to force in all sorts of information, ideas or assertions about historical and biographical contexts, much of which was sweeping and not well understood. In the weakest answers there were all sorts of claims and often these took up space that would have been better given to discussion of the text in relation to the argument.

'Shocking'!

Examiners across all papers reported the rather strange and prolific use by students of the word 'shocking' (or 'shocked') in relation to how students imagined audiences and readers of different times would have reacted to narrative events or language used by writers. 'Appalled' and 'horrified' were other popular words attributed gratuitously to audiences of former years. There are a number of issues to raise here. Firstly it is unwise for students to claim that audiences of any past time would have felt anything unless there is specific evidence to support the claim. Secondly, students need to think more about what they are actually saying. Would an audience (all the people in the theatre – or even any person) viewing *Othello*, for example, on any particular day – or all days – really have been 'shocked' when they heard the word 'devil' or when they heard Katherina or Gonerill speak out against men? Are students aware that literature (and particularly drama) across time has plenty of references to the diabolical, to religion, to sex and to feisty and outspoken women? Are they aware that audiences were and are different human beings with different ideas, thoughts and human appetites? Unfortunately the claim that audiences would have been 'shocked' was not just made about drama and the Elizabethans and Jacobean. There were also assertions about Victorian readers and audiences, 20th century readers and those 'enlightened' readers of today. The answer to this is simple. Students should avoid any sort of claim that cannot be evidenced and look more closely at the question to see what is being asked. At no point is there a requirement to guess what others thought or might have thought or felt. The personal pronoun in the tasks is 'you': 'To what extent do **you** agree with this view?'

Writing skills

The ability of students to construct logical and coherent arguments is of course essential in a specification which places so much emphasis on debate. Many students were able to shape their ideas and write about them impressively. Some students expressed themselves in sophisticated and accurate ways and they were duly rewarded. To write impressively does not mean to flood writing with critical, tragic and comedic terminology, often using that terminology for its own sake and not really understanding it anyway. Some students unfortunately wrote in a style that was awkward and cluttered, sometimes making little sense. Such writing was often marred by technical errors. It is important that students write in a clear, structured and accurate way and time needs to be spent working on writing skills since AO1 is tested in every question. It is also worth emphasising the importance of focusing on the task from the start and making a telling comment in the first sentence. Far too many students write introductions and conclusions which are vague, general or empty and which do not gain them marks.

Freeing students up and giving them ownership of their writing

Too often, some students were burdened with material they felt they had to include. The needless incorporation of contextual material was one such burden, but there was also the unnecessary insertion of all kinds of literary, tragic and comedic terminology which may not have been understood. This terminology often seemed to be included simply because students had learned the words and felt that they would gain marks if as many as possible appeared in their writing. It is very rare that words like anagnorisis, stichomythia, and zeugma, for example, have a place in answers, especially when their inclusion seems to be the main point of the sentence. Often English, rather than Greek or Latinate, expressions would make much more sense and be understood more by those who are using them.

Similarly some students seemed desperate to make comparisons with other texts, often at the expense of the question. Comparison is not required in this specification as the AO4 strand is met when students are connecting with the wider genre through focusing on the key tragic, comedic, crime and political and social protest writing aspects of the question. Too many students felt that they had to bolt on references to other texts and very rarely did the references add anything to the argument. A comparison only works when it highlights something specific about the text being discussed and the question itself, and although some students could use their wider knowledge of literature to make telling points, it is not a requirement to do so. For most students references to other texts got in the way.

It is important that students are told that they should only write about things they understand. Writing about what is not understood leads to very muddled writing.

The importance of clear and independent thinking

While content and skills clearly have to be taught, students need to be given the confidence to think and respond independently. Questions need to be looked at with fresh eyes and students need to know how to do this. They need to approach the paper and questions without any preconceptions, always taking the time to read carefully.

Those students who could think independently and creatively about questions were rewarded.

Specific comments about 1A: Aspects of Tragedy

Overall student performance on this paper was very pleasing and provided much that was encouraging for a new specification. There were plenty of excellent responses which showed what students could achieve after two years of studying and working with the genre of tragedy. Many students focused well on the questions and seem to have heeded the advice given in AQA support materials. Those who performed less well were those who had the wrong agendas and those who did not know their texts adequately – the significance of which is documented above in the introductory comments. Given that this paper is closed book, students need to be well armed with excellent textual knowledge so that they can draw from it effectively in the construction of their arguments. Another major issue with weaker responses was the flooding of writing with tragic terminology, like peripeteia, hubris, harmatia and anagnorisis. Many students constructed unreadable sentences, or even whole answers, around these words so desperate did they seem to get as many terms in as they could. The best writing was clear and succinct where students wrote carefully and relevantly about what they understood.

Section A

On the whole most students had good knowledge of their Shakespeare play. *Othello* was by far the most popular choice, though there were several centres offering *King Lear*. It is fair to say that the responses to *King Lear* were slightly stronger than those to *Othello* and on the whole there was less critical clutter in the *King Lear* responses and less obstructive cramming of irrelevant contextual material.

The extract from *Othello* was from Act 3 scene 4. The story being dramatised here is Othello's confrontation with Desdemona about her fidelity and her lost handkerchief. The story, however, is not clear cut since Othello's accusations are indirect and his tale of the handkerchief's origin is threatening and bizarre, mystical and romantic on the one hand but also extraordinary, evidenced by the accumulation of gothic detail (a handkerchief 'dyed in mummy' 'conserved of maidens' hearts, sewn in 'prophetic fury' by a 'two hundred' year old sibyl using silk bred from 'hallowed' worms). No wonder Desdemona is fearful, wishing to God she had never seen it. (Very few students, incidentally, paid any attention to this tale missing the opportunity to grapple with something really interesting in relation to tragedy). Throughout the extract Shakespeare reveals Othello's terrible confusion, Othello's trying to hold on to the love he feels for his wife while dreading the 'truth' of what Iago has told him about her unfaithfulness. Othello's taking Desdemona's hand at the start is an important dramatic action during which he practices some sort of strange palm reading. It is never made clear when he lets go of her hand and, even when he tells the story of his wedding gift, he could still be holding it. The extract comes directly after Desdemona's and Emilia's brief encounter with the Clown and Desdemona's anguished confession to Emilia that she has lost the handkerchief, unaware that Emilia has in fact stolen it. Emilia is on stage during the exchanges that take place between the married couple (though this is not signalled in the printed extract). However, Emilia hears everything that is said, and after Othello leaves she makes it clear to Desdemona that Othello is most certainly jealous.

There is obviously much in this extract that could have been discussed in terms of tragedy. For example: Othello's tragic fall, his changed behaviour and his reverting to a cultural stereotype, Desdemona as a victim, Desdemona's agency as she reminds Othello of his promise to talk to Cassio and the villainy of Iago, who despite his stage absence is very much present as the consequences of his poisoning of the tragic hero are in full motion. The best responses were seen by students who worked with some of these ideas, developing them by referring closely to the extract and to the wider play. These students also integrated relevant comments on Shakespeare's dramatic method which supported what was said about the tragic aspects. They reflected on the progression of the tragedy, the use of dramatic irony, the troubled and uneasy dialogue between Othello and Desdemona which causes dramatic tension, the closeness of the pair on stage as Othello holds his wife's hand.

The very best answers were aware of the puzzling ambiguities within the passage and questioned what is meant when Othello says he has 'a salt and sorry rheum' which offends him and when he speaks of our new heraldry being hands not hearts, whether he is calling Desdemona a 'young and sweating devil' or her hand, and what his handkerchief story is really supposed to mean. In the weakest responses there was generally no engagement with method at all, or lengthy discussion on the meaning of the single words like 'moist' and 'liberal', or inaccuracy about Othello's speaking in prose which mirrors Iago's speech. It was surprising how many students wrote about prose and verse and iambic pentameter without having any idea what the terms mean or how they are used in drama. Even more able students who could accurately identify prose and verse rarely said anything meaningful and specific about them.

There were also some students whose textual knowledge was so insecure that they seemed to have little sense of what the passage is about. Some claimed that the passage was from early in the play when Othello and Desdemona are expressing their deep love for each other, some said that Othello is showing how he hates Desdemona and has the same sentiments about women as Iago, some thought that Othello's mother was the Egyptian charmer, some even claimed that Desdemona had slept with Cassio.

The extract from *King Lear* was also from Act 3 scene 4, and, like *Othello*, is important in its revealing a critical turning point in the fortunes of the tragic hero. The scene is the second time Lear is seen on the heath with the storm still raging and it is a continuation (with only a brief interruption of the subplot) of Lear's miserable journey after he is evicted from Gloucester's castle by Regan and Gonerill. In the extract Lear, accompanied by his loyal followers Kent and the Fool, comes before a hovel. He is exhorted by Kent to seek shelter but chooses instead to suffer physical torment so that he doesn't have to think of the ingratitude of his daughters thereby hoping to ward off madness. Instead of entering the hovel, he tells Kent and the fool to 'go in'. The key moment of the passage is Lear's prayer to the poor naked wretches in which he shows some learning, acknowledging that as king he has taken too little care of the unfortunates in his kingdom. At the point where he seems to be realising his errors, the Fool runs out of the hovel, terrified at the mad utterances of Poor Tom who is within. After the extract, Lear seeing a visual representation of one of the naked wretches, loses his hold on his sanity.

In this extract there are many aspects of tragedy to write about though it was a bit disappointing that much of the discussion was on the first half of the passage rather than the second. In the strongest answers there was good focus on Lear's declining fortunes and his oncoming madness, his tragic fall from power, his indulging in self pity, his status as a victim, the loyalty of Kent, Lear's learning and the visual suffering of all characters enduring the ferocity of the storm and the barren setting of the heath. The best responses were by students who focused tightly on the relevant aspects they selected and then made meaningful connections to the wider play. The most able students also made telling comments on dramatic methods and there was some good work on

setting, the characters' entrances and exits, the contrast between Lear who says much and the Fool who is silent, the use of emotive language and Lear's prayer. In the weakest answers there was little engagement with the extract as part of a wider drama. Some students thought the extract was in prose and that Lear is completely mad and some thought that 'Storm still' meant that the storm was now still. Not many students – even the most able – addressed the almost unfathomable last line spoken by Edgar.

The key to success in the Section A questions, therefore, is to link together comments on story, significance, extract, dramatic method, tragedy and the play as a whole.

Section B

The Section B tasks require different skills from students. Here students have to debate a given critical view about their Shakespeare play. The views offered are challenging as students must expect given this is A-level. To succeed, they have to deal with the key terms in the task and not subvert or side step them. Students are reminded also to include relevant comments on Shakespeare's dramatic methods.

The initial part of Question 3 was as follows:

'Iago's villainy is fiendish and inexplicable.'

To what extent do you agree with this view?

The key tragic aspect here is Iago's 'villainy' though students also needed to think about whether this villainy is fiendish and inexplicable. The contexts set up in the question are literary, psychological and moral, though other contexts could easily have been incorporated if students had chosen to write about Iago as a villain in the revenge tradition or a villain who hates women. Most students who tackled this question and who had good knowledge of the play did quite well, and even if they did not understand inexplicable or fiendish, they could say something relevant about villainy. The best responses were by students who addressed all parts of the question writing about the villainous acts that Iago commits, his villainous mindset and whether or not his behaviour can be explained. These students knew what being fiendish meant. Several did not, however, and 'inexplicable' baffled some. Several students claimed that Iago is inexplicable and then found several motives for his behaviour which resulted in rather creaking arguments.

Question 4 was less well done than Question 3 – though strangely it was the more popular question. The key terms here were Othello's 'personal weakness' and his being 'caught in a society he doesn't understand'. Although there were some brilliant answers to this question where students really thought about Othello's misunderstanding (or his understanding) of his society, there were many responses which were unfocused. Several students thought that the task was about how society viewed Othello and many saw it as an opportunity to write about racism and the derogatory comments made by Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio in Act 1. Invariably there were many who simply wanted to quote – or misquote and misspell – the 'old black ram tugging' Brabantio's 'white ewe'. Such answers did not score very many marks because the point of the question was missed. Students needed to see that they were required to focus on Othello's perspective. Most students made more relevant comments about Othello's personal weakness and credit was given for this, but students could not drive a coherent argument if they misunderstood or subverted part of the question.

The key tragic aspects in Question 5 were 'cruel treatment', 'moral awakening' and 'uplifting and enduring'. The question was well done by those who knew the play well and could range around it

for detail. Clearly students needed to establish what Gloucester's moral awakening actually is and where it occurs. Some struggled with this and as a result they could not engage with uplifting and enduring either. Most could identify cruel treatment and could write about dramatic method in relation to it. The strongest answers were by students who clearly established the moment of Gloucester's moral awakening as his realisation after his blinding that he stumbled when he saw or his changed mindset after his attempted suicide when he concurs with Edgar that 'men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither'.

Question 6 was the more popular question on *King Lear* and on the whole it was done very well. Although students had two characters to consider here there was some really engaged work on whether Gonerill and Regan are victims rather than villains. In this question feminist theory was used by many students and it worked well. There was a range of ideas and viewpoints about the sisters, and although some students muddled them up, there were some interesting arguments.

SECTION C

Although students will have spent two years studying the two texts they deal with in Section C, realistically they will only write for 20 minutes about each one. This means that the knowledge that they have secured must be used wisely as they select material that is absolutely in line with the question. The choices they make will be crucial.

The tasks are set up around broad tragic concepts. In Question 7 it was 'suffering' and whether it 'always evokes pity'. In Question 8 it was 'moments of happiness' and whether their only purpose is to 'heighten the tragic outcome'. In Question 7 students needed to identify specific times when protagonists suffer and then write specifically about those times, making suffering the base on which they constructed their argument about the evocation (or otherwise) of pity. In all text there are plenty of examples of suffering to work with but students had to know their texts well to document details. When *Death of a Salesman* was used (and it was the most popular drama text), the best answers focused on Willy's anguish at being discarded by Howard, his misery at being a failed salesman, the torment he feels in his relationship with Biff and his mental breakdown that is dramatised through Miller's use of flashbacks. Students who offered *Richard II* were able to write about Richard's suffering when he realises he is about to be deposed, his misery in his realisation that he has wasted time, and his mental torment when he thinks about his life, his death, his country and his betrayal. The most popular pairing of texts was *Death of a Salesman* and Keats though there were several who offered *Death of a Salesman* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. When Keats was used, students really had to think about which poem(s) gave them the best opportunities to answer the question. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* worked well for those who focused on the knight's suffering, his mental despair and his physical emaciation. There was also good discussion of Isabella's suffering at the loss of first her lover and then her pot of basil. *Lamia* was also well used by those students who knew the text well and could remember the details of Lamia's or Lycius' suffering. *The Eve of St Agnes* was a less effective choice. Several students who wrote about this poem struggled to find suffering in either Madeline or Porphyro and instead wrote about the deaths of Angela and the Beadsman which was unhelpful since they are not protagonists.

When *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was the chosen text, good responses included details of Tess' misery both before and after her terrible encounter with Alec, her prolonged suffering after the death of her baby and her utter despair after her abandonment by Angel. When suffering was clearly identified, students found it very straightforward to argue whether the suffering 'always' evokes pity. Plenty of good explanations were given as to why pity might not be 'always' evoked and these arguments were amply rewarded.

Unfortunately though many students did not identify any suffering in the protagonists and just used the word itself as if it was self explanatory. Many chose not to write about suffering at all and just wrote about pity. Although some credit was given for comments on pity, students who did not focus on suffering could not score marks in the top bands. In the weakest answers, students struggled more with *Death of a Salesman* than the other texts, often because they did not know details of the play and often because they were unsure of the chronology. Many weaker students who used this text in either Question 7 and 8 just wrote generally about the play, the American Dream, 1950s society and ‘mobile concurrencies’ without much understanding of anything they were writing.

In Question 8, the best answers were produced by those who pinned down moments of happiness and then related them to the tragic outcomes. Some very good work was seen when Willy’s happy memories with his children were discussed, the garden scene in *Richard II*, Gatsby’s reunion with Daisy, Tess’ idyllic days at Talbothays and Isabella’s time of love with Lorenzo. The best responses engaged with ‘only’ and argued that while happiness might heighten the tragic outcome, it also had other functions. There was some really good thinking here. In weaker answers students struggled to identify any moments of happiness and there were some rather odd ideas about what happiness might be, for example Linda’s buying Willy cheese and Tess’ discovery that she has noble ancestors.

Overall, this was a good first year of the new specification and there is much to celebrate. Of course, there are also lessons to be learned and hopefully this report will give some guidance to support centres as they prepare for 2018.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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