
A-Level

ENGLISH LITERATURE

NEA Theory and Independence
Report on the Examination

7717
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General Comments

Summer 2018 saw a wide and varied submission of work for this unit and most teachers and students are to be praised for the way in which they tackled the requirements of 7717C with real enthusiasm and a spirit of independent investigation. Many moderators reported seeing interesting work on challenging texts and commented on how extensively some students had researched their pieces of work. The vast majority of students submitted two conventional essays for the NEA but there were some interesting and thought-provoking re-creative pieces. Moderators saw very few submissions of literary journalism but centres are reminded that it is permissible to submit work in this style if students wish to do so. There were fewer rubric infringements than last year, as would be expected, but there were still some. Centres must remember that in this unit it is not possible to study any of the texts on any of the A level examination papers for 7717, although it is possible to study other works by the same writers. There is little new to say this year that was not covered in last year's report but what follows is a summary of the key points gleaned from the moderating process this summer.

Choice of texts

Invariably students produced better work when the text they were working on was of interest to them, appropriate for their ability, worked well with the critical ideas they were exploring and provided enough challenge for A level work. There was interesting work seen on modern writers such as Stephen King, Kate Atkinson and AD Miller as well as more traditional, classical writers. When writing about the poetry text, where students should have studied a collection of shorter poems or a single longer poem, it was evident that most students had indeed studied a substantial amount of poetry and then were selecting which poems were most fruitful to explore given the focus of their task. In some cases however it appeared that students had only studied two short poems. Such a 'short cut' approach to A-level study is a real shame, and it often hampered the students and limited their work.

Tasks

As has been said many times across this specification the best tasks are those that require a line of argument or which set up a point of genuine debate as this ensures that the students' work has shape, focus and purpose. It can be helpful for centres to look at the examination units to see how questions on the exam papers are formed around AO5 and it is possible to use them as a guide for task setting. Tasks that essentially ask students to describe what is happening in a text invariably lack focus and students struggle to cover the assessment objectives.

Critical theory

Students do not have to directly quote from the critical anthology in their work, although many do, but they do need to show that critical ideas have been used to shape their work. There must be a sense that critical ideas have been read, understood and used as a lens through which the literary text has been read. It does not work well to choose a critical lens that limits the opportunity for debate and exploratory argument, so for example using a Marxist approach to an obviously 'Marxist text' or a feminist approach to an obviously 'feminist text'. In those instances students tend to just describe what the text is doing and so there is the same lack of focus and engagement with AO5 that has been mentioned above.

Independence

This unit is called *Theory and Independence* and we do expect to see independent work on the part of students. Many centres fully embrace this by encouraging students to select their own texts and their own areas of critical study. For some students this is not appropriate and it is within the rules of the unit for all students to do the same text but we would still expect to see a range of tasks and a range of critical approaches being used across the submission. All students doing the same text, with the same task and same area of critical study is not acceptable for this unit.

Marking and submission of work

Most work was well presented and helpfully annotated by centres, with useful summative comments that explained why the marks had been judged most appropriate. Where work was sparsely annotated or had very brief summative comments this disadvantaged the centre, as it was difficult for the moderators to understand and agree the marks. Evidence of internal moderation was very useful but where a mark was altered during that process an explanation as to why that happened was needed.

Next steps

There will be online courses offered in the Autumn term on the NEA unit for 7717 and also new teacher online standardising folders (TOLS). The TOLS folders are stored in the e-AQA section of the AQA website and provide useful reference points when marking and moderating work in centres.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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