



A-level
English Literature B

7717/C NEA: Theory and independence

Report on the Examination

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Introductory Comments

It was pleasing to see a slight rise in the entry numbers this year and good to see so many students and teachers enjoying and valuing the study of English Literature and Specification B.

Overall moderators saw lots of engaging and interesting work this summer. Many centres had fully embraced the notion of independence that is so central to this unit and the work that was submitted was often varied and showed a real sense of engagement and investment on the part of the students, which was wonderful to see.

Most tasks were centred on AO5, debate and argument, and the vast majority of students produced work that was within the word limit and had a clear and tightly structured line of argument. Those who significantly exceeded the word limit invariably self-penalised, as their work tended to lose focus and did not have such a clear and sharply focused debate.

Teachers and students had evidently worked hard on this unit and moderators reported that they were impressed by the breadth and range of texts that had been studied and the often impressive, wider critical reading. All those involved should be congratulated and, it is hoped, that the students have benefited from the opportunity to work more independently and take ownership of their work. These are useful skills they can take with them moving forward.

Texts and Tasks

There were some interesting and impressive text choices from all periods of literature including, Aphra Behn, Dostoevsky, Chapman's translation of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Chaucer. There was some very successful work on the poetry of Warsan Shire and Caleb Femi, two modern poets who students seemed to really engage with. There was such a huge range that it is impossible to refer to many texts in detail, but it was fantastic to see such breadth of literature being read and studied.

As has already been noted, most tasks did set up the requirement for genuine debate/argument or they asked a genuinely open question. This is essential if students are going to fully engage with all of the assessment objectives. It is worth remembering that tasks that require students to explain how something is represented or explore how a character acts, invariably result in description that does not have a clear focus. In such instances it is very difficult for the students to develop a line of argument, which is crucial for the success of their work.

Most students were able to produce well structured and sharply focused pieces of work that were within the word limits of the unit. However, a small number of moderators reported instances of whole centres producing folders where all the work was well over the word count. It was felt that these centres might be attempting to gain an unfair advantage, either by encouraging over-long work or at least doing nothing to stop it happening. Often, exceeding the word limit will not work to the advantage of the students but also it is not permitted within the rules of the unit. If this is happening across whole centre submissions it may be that action will need to be taken, beyond just a negative comment on the centre feedback form.

Theory and Independence

Several moderators reported that they were really impressed by the large number of centres allowing/encouraging independent reading. This related both to the selection of texts and also students reading literary theory beyond the critical anthology.

Virtually all folders that were sampled this summer included clear engagement with two different sets of critical ideas, which is a requirement of the unit, but there were some centres where this was not the case. There were a small number of centres effectively offering just one critical theory instead of two. In the most extreme cases this was a clear rubric infringement. For example, a small number of moderators reported that they had looked at work where the students wrote exclusively on feminist texts and the first essay was feminist theory; the second piece was supposed to use a different critical lens but was really just more feminist theory with a very loose 'nod' to a second set of critical ideas. In all cases it was felt that this approach did not help the students, all of whom would have benefited from having a wider choice of critical lens.

Another element of some folders that did not seem to work so well was using post-colonial theory with American texts as a way to talk about racism. This often got very muddled and produced unconvincing or confused lines of argument. This is clearly a potentially interesting area, but it does need some careful handling and perceptive exploration.

Marking

As might be expected, given how well established this unit is, most marking was judged to be fair and within tolerance. Teachers had clearly worked hard to arrive at an accurate mark for each piece of work and there was often evidence of internal debate and moderation. A point to note is that, should a mark be altered during the process of internal moderation then please explain why the new mark, rather than the original mark, was deemed to be most appropriate.

As was the case last year, there was a trend towards generosity in band 5 and the upper sections of band 4 of the mark scheme. Where centre marks were adjusted it was invariably because of over generous marking in those areas. There seemed to be some careless awarding of marks, for example the criteria only need be barely touched upon in order for a mark right at the top of a band to be given or, if a mark at the top of band 4 was deserved, then the piece was actually put at the bottom of band 5 as if that represents the same level of achievement, which it does not. Centres are advised to re-visit teacher online standardising material on Centre Services to familiarise themselves with the marking standard before future submissions.

The vast majority of sampled work contained helpful annotations from teachers, which evaluated its strengths and weaknesses and explained how the final mark had been arrived at. In a few cases however, the comments were entirely positive and yet a mark other than full marks was awarded. It is most helpful to the moderator, and more likely to support the marks given by the centre, if an honest evaluation of both positive and less strong points is provided. Please remember also that the audience of teacher comments should be the moderator, not the student.

Administration and presentation of work

Most work arrived on time, with folders secured and all relevant bits of paperwork completed. However, some centres sent in folders where the work was not secured or was attached in the wrong order. Please check that everything is present, correctly organised and secured with staples or treasury tags. Please do not include plastic wallets or other folders.

The completion of paperwork was more of an issue this year than it has been before, with many moderators reporting that often not all sections of the candidate record form were filled in or that the centre declaration sheet was missing. Centres are reminded that these bits of paperwork are an important part of the NEA submission, and it is important to check that they are included and completed correctly.

Overall

As has been the case in previous years, moderators this summer read a great deal of work, the vast majority of which was interesting and engaging and which showcased a great deal of wide reading and independent thinking on the part of students. Well done to all concerned.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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