

ASSESSMENT REPORT 2020

ENL315114 – ENGLISH LITERATURE

NN	PA	SA	CA	HA	EA
4 (1%)	28 (6%)	86 (20%)	160 (36%)	98 (22%)	63 (14%)

INDEPENDENT STUDIES

A successful study begins with a focused inquiry question. A “how” question is more likely to address the elements of Criterion 6 as well as a comprehensive analysis of the text. An inquiry question should include significant ideas, framed in a way that the critical response can analyse how these ideas have been presented. Students should be counselled to write themselves into the question as this allows them greater opportunities to address Criterion 6. Both the critical and the imaginative responses should reflect the depth of knowledge gained from multiple readings or viewings of the text a candidate has selected. The application of an ideological reading position or lens often results in a strong critical response. The student’s own ideas, as well as the ideas they research and include from the text creator and literary critics, can be further explored in the imaginative response.

It is in answering the inquiry question that compositional features of the selected text are analysed. Future candidates are directed to avoid including lists of compositional features in their inquiry question, rather the analysis of these features should be central to their critical response. In 2020 studies which had statements and complex paragraphs in the place of a clearly articulated question did not result in clearly articulated contentions. Students who chose broad statements to discuss, rather than questions, were less successful. Teachers are encouraged to guide students to develop questions which generate a cohesive analytical discussion of the text selected. This is the central purpose of the critical response; to analyse how the idea or ideas identified in the inquiry question are communicated throughout the text.

The folio guidelines must be carefully consulted by students and teachers as the folio is drafted and completed. It was unfortunate that in 2020 there were a number of studies which were below the total word count required. These were often heartbreakingly close to the minimum or maximum word counts, and with a concert effort could have been corrected. It is vital that students meet the total word count expectations and understand the penalty if not reached. The same penalty is applied (a grade on Criterion 7) when a folio is over the word count. Markers rely on the figures provided on the cover page and future candidates are advised to complete the cover page so that it accurately reflects the word count for each section as well as the total word count. Stylistic elements such as font size and line spacing must be adhered to – markers respond to the level of care invested. The font size and line spacing also allow for the ease of reading studies when marking on a screen. The folio is to be uploaded as a single pdf, with each section included in this PDF. It was unfortunate that this was not always the case in 2020. Files only need to be zipped when they are large media files.

A notable feature of many independent studies completed in 2020 was a focus on contemporary sociological or historical context over close analysis of the text. It is understood that not having a reflective statement, candidates took every opportunity to address Criterion 6 in their critical response. The removal of the reflective statement for the independent study was an adjustment made for the 2020 context. The reflective statement must be reinstated in 2021

and into the future. This section of the study provides students with further opportunities to address Criteria 6 and 7. While there is an expectation in Criterion 6 that students will consider the values and attitudes of their own context in their critique of the text, textual analysis is the first consideration in the subject of English Literature. The commentary on elements of the text which resonate with the reader's context must be directly connected with a discussion of literary devices or cinematic techniques. The way ideas are conveyed through the compositional and generic features of the text was often overlooked as was the judicious use of textual evidence. Strong responses made well explained connections between the contemporary responder's context and specific elements of the text. Candidates are advised to write about race, racial oppression and genocide with sensitivity. Texts in which these issues are critiqued and explored such as *Belle*, *The Color Purple*, *Sweet Country*, *New Boy* and *Black is the New White*, for example, necessitate a discussion and as such references to the Black Lives Matter movement are appropriate. Candidates are to avoid making sweeping statements or tenuous connections between characters and political figures, for example. Again, the study of Literature encourages the consideration of significant ideas and broad thematic concerns. In the context of experiences specific to 2020, it was reflections on concepts such as home, friendship or belonging in the text selected and how the candidates' own experiences had enhanced their understanding.

Well-proposed critical responses developed, expanded and supported the candidate's argument, which was strengthened through the use of critics' perspectives. It is crucial that the evidence for the candidate's view is developed with references to the composer's use of compositional features. The text composer is included in the "ideas of others" and analysis of the text's central ideas as communicated through the text's central features should be at the core of the critical response. Less successful critical responses often ignored structural elements altogether, with the candidate writing about plays failing to acknowledge Acts or Scenes or writing on films which did not consider cinematic techniques, the use of sound, music, lighting, framing or sequencing of scenes.

The Imaginative Component does not only have to relate to the Critical Component, but should also be engaging to read. In 2020 there were pieces that retold sections of the text in a different form, such as diary entries or letters, without offering any special insight or being particularly compelling in themselves. The form of diary entries or letters should be chosen if these are forms used in the text studied. Students are encouraged to consider the form and narrative perspective (where relevant) of the text when developing their imaginative response. A strong imaginative response is refined, original and distinctive. It is an engaging and mature narrative containing, for example, engaging conflict, strong characters - flawed or otherwise, a consistent tone and voice, as well as high level of skill and control over the form. Less successful imaginative responses have tenuous connections with the critical response and use a limited number of stylistic features. The issue of nuanced and precise language was an issue in some imaginative responses. While language use is assessed against Criterion 7, it meant that the students were not able to fully display the technical skills to achieve intent. Students in 2021 are advised to avoid retelling the plot points, and reminded to focus on imagining something that is original, without changing the events of the original text (such as the death of a character who does not die). With the removal of the reflective statement as a course adjustment for 2020, students did not have the opportunity to advocate the choices made in the imaginative response. This meant that these choices needed to be obvious. Candidates who used the ideas explored in their critical response as the point of connection with imaginative responses which were contextually outside the focus text were very successful. Future teachers and students are reminded that adaptations of key narrative events, set in a contemporary context, can make for very successful imaginative responses and are still considered to be within "the world of the text."

Criterion 7 was generally well-handled with solid use of MLA 8 referencing. This is the nominated system of citation for English Literature independent studies, and must be adhered to for students to be successful in Criterion 7. A consistent problem was the mixing of tenses in imaginative responses. There was also a tendency in some essays to prefer apparently "sophisticated" vocabulary and complex sentence structure that tended, at times, to obscure meaning

and clarity. Drafting and editing are an important part of completing an independent study. Several markers noted a lower level of care and meticulous editing within both sections of the folio. This is an area of focus for teachers and students in 2021.

In 2020 popular text choices included films. In particular *Lord of the Rings*, *Alien* and *Gallipoli*. Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* was also a popular choice although there were very few critical responses which dealt with the significance of the title. There were strong responses to contemporary novels including *Unsheltered*, *Boy Swallows Universe*, and *Dracula*.

WRITTEN EXAM

Candidates who sat the 2020 written exam are to be commended on their skilful handling of the exam paper. There were some excellent responses, considering the challenge of grappling a difficult question. The purpose of the Literature exam is to assess what students know about texts, and to assess how well they can think, plan and adapt what they know, under time constraints, to a specific question. Students who redraft a pre-prepared response or compose a general analysis of two poems and their contexts, for example, are demonstrating an ability to recall and reproduce rather than an ability to think and respond, and the former is not enough to secure a result in the A range for Criterion 4. Therefore students must respond to the question; that is, they should address it in their introduction, tailor each body paragraph to a specific element of the question, and reiterate their overall response to it in their conclusion. The complexity of the questions were taken into account when marking exam scripts in 2020.

SECTION A

Question 1a and 1b

For students of both Loss and Love poetry, it is imperative to discuss the structural form used by different poets from the outset in the introduction, and to connect this analysis to the cultural context of the particular poem. Stronger responses identified in the introduction the date published and literary period relevant to each poem to frame the discussion of historical and cultural contexts.

It is important to directly and specifically answer the essay question in the introduction. The examination context requires candidates to adapt their knowledge and apply their understanding in a way that suits the question. The information offered in demonstrating an understanding of the influence of context needs to be relevant. Sometimes there was not enough discussion of the poems' context, or it was more detailed towards one poet. Those that *evaluated* poet values and context were awarded with higher ratings. Many students wrote well on context but without connecting this information to the features of the poem. A better balance between context and the way love is represented in the poems would have improved these essays.

Weaker responses drew on previously learnt vocabulary rather than integrating key words from the essay topic into their arguments. Taking a dictionary into the exam can be helpful in giving students confidence to address the particular words on the exam paper, particularly when unfamiliar terms have not been defined by a glossary (such as 'wistful' in Question 1b).

Skilful responses stood out as having a balance between contextual information and analysis of poetic features; as well as demonstrating a perceptive understanding about how context, structure and literary language are connected and influence the view of love or loss represented in the poems. A less successful approach to analysing literary language was to launch into lists of poetic devices or analyse specific poetic features before commenting on the persona, subject

matter or view of loss or love in the poem. A sense of proportion is needed in explaining the influence of literary language; for example, asserting a direct causal connection between a single sound in a poem and a broad description of context or ideology is not a balanced approach. More successful responses explained how particular poetic techniques were selected by the poets to *reinforce* an idea or attitude located within a context.

Candidates in this section are expected to write the titles of the poems in quotation marks. Teachers and students are advised that the exam specifications allow for the setting examiner to nominate poems in Question 1. A good knowledge of all the poems in the module prevents panic, should this happen.

When assessing Section A, demonstrating an understanding of the influence of context and evidence to support this understanding are assessed in Criterion 2. The fluency, clarity and structure of the essay, as well as how successfully the response addresses the question, analysis of compositional features and the structured essay in Criterion 4 for all of Section A.

QUESTION 2

This question required students to think carefully before responding, due to their need to consider “the values underpinning institutions” and to consider the purposeful characterisation of two conflicting characters. Some students struggled with the meaning of “underpinning”, which hampered the effectiveness of their response. Strong responses specified an institution (or more), as well as the social values that underpin it, before linking these features to text and context. For example, marriage is a social institution and, in 19th century England, the values underpinning it were strongly divided along gender lines, prescribing certain roles for men and certain roles for women. Successful candidates outlined these roles and then evaluated how they were explored, through the use of two specific conflicting characters, in their chosen text. As social values and institutions must be embodied, authors dramatise this conflict by creating characters who question or challenge social norms, and others who accept and even represent them. Successful candidates were able to identify two such characters in their text, to connect them with the values of specific social institutions, and to evaluate what the composer was saying about these institutions by his/her use of characterisation and plot (what ultimately happens to the characters in the text).

Some students wrote about two characters, rather than two conflicting characters; others wrote about more than two characters in their response. Each of these approaches strays from the requirements of the question and this was considered when awarding a result for Criterion 4.

QUESTION 3

Very few candidates attempted Question 3 – which is understandable given the complex nature of this question. Those who did had to grapple with the complexity of the question as well as writing on the two texts from the paired text module. Students who attempted this question are to be commended.

SECTION B

Teachers and students are advised that when assessing Criterion 1 in Section B, examiners reward a discussion of the text’s central ideas and supported by accurate evidence. As in Section A, Criterion 4 assesses the control and fluency of the essay as well as the identifying and analysis of discussion of compositional features.

Reciting a critical perspective for the sake of ‘ticking a box’ is not meaningful engagement with texts, nor does it necessarily demonstrate an understanding of ideas explored in texts. When offering a critical reading, there needs to be a meaningful connection made between the offered reading position or critical claim, with relevant textual evidence

to support this. In the 2020 exam scripts, 'critical interpretations of others' were most successful when the critics were introduced as "Academic, Joe Bloggs" or "Reviewer, Jane Smith from Cinema Mag". Most important is the application of the critic's ideas. Name dropping such as: Justine Random says "... " is not a successful way to demonstrate an understanding of the critical ideas of others. Teachers and students are encouraged to flag the merits and qualifications of the critic. These critical ideas must enhance the student's own understanding of the text, rather than be rote learned. Direct quotations from the text studied must be privileged over critical ideas of others. The application of a 'lens' or theoretical reading position is a sophisticated way to meet this element of the criterion. However, this again needs to relate meaningfully to the idea central to the discussion.

It is strongly advised that students consider the end of their chosen text in their response. This allows for a more global view of the text and it inevitably makes for a more thorough and convincing response to the question. The ideas explored in a text should be most evident in the final pages or scenes.

Question 4

The nature of the question meant many students wrote Section A style responses, but again these often worked successfully as they examined social or cultural values. It did disadvantage students who weren't prepared with historical context. Candidates who did well to demonstrate an understanding of ideas were to be congratulated on how they dealt with this challenging set of questions.

Better candidates were able to explicitly identify the identity of each of the characters they were appraising and to suggest how this identity was reiterated or repressed by the conclusion of the text. Some exceptional students tackled the question to their advantage and explored how a repressed identity is challenged by a new, more humane and fair identity. Better answers also tackled the change of status in their identity but many struggled to explicitly categorise this change as affirming or a case of repression. Clearly, this is a case where the wording of the question dumfounded students who struggled to fit a perceptive understanding and appreciation of their text to such a narrow lens. Most students chose to write on more than one character from their text, which was advisable. The stipulation to use 'at least one other compositional feature' was not handled as successfully as characterisation. Better candidates chose genre, form, structure, setting, dialogue and narrative perspective. Many candidates answering on *Dracula* discussed symbolism.

Question 5

Very few students were able to answer the question in its entirety but were rewarded for looking at characterisation and another compositional feature or personal, social and cultural values.

Students did well to memorise so many 'others' and incorporate them into their essays. It is of some concern that using 'others' has made the exam a memory test. When we read the same quotes over several essays it does begin to feel a little formulaic. The study of Literature introduces and extends students' ability to think critically and originally. It must not become a recitation of the critical perspectives provided by the teacher, as then we fall into the trap of teaching to an exam.

QUESTION 6

Given the complex nature of this question, very few candidates attempted it. Most responses picked up on the idea of hope, and good essays addressed how protagonists moved from a place of despair to one of hope. Better responses were able to refer back to the quotation and suggest why hope is a necessary component of literature. Students who attempted this question and were able to deal with the complexity of the quotation while developing a structured,

developed essay are to be commended. Their engagement with the texts studied and the concerns of the course were evident.

QUESTION 7

This was a popular choice. Good responses used the journeys of the protagonists to investigate their moral behaviours. Better responses attributed the moral or immoral behaviours to the purpose and values of the composers. They also named and unpacked a particular moral behaviour, rather than just use this term as a catch all for generally being good. Responses that also stretched to the moral or immoral behaviours of secondary characters brought extra depth to their interpretations of the texts. The pairing of *The Lieutenant* and *Arrival* was the most popular. This is understandable, as several large schools taught these texts and the question about 'moral decisions' lent itself particularly well to the journeys of the respective protagonists in each text.

For both Questions 6 and 7, there were quite a few pre-prepared essays that included hope or moral behaviour as an addition to their set of arguments about the text, or wove these themes in as adjectives or synonyms for another idea that they wanted to talk about. There is a difference between funnelling one's interpretation of the text, and paragraph topics through the named idea: hope/despair, and using detailed knowledge of the text to clearly address the particular question.