

AS/A-level **ENGLISH LITERATURE A**

Preparing to teach

Session handout

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Contents

Contents	Page
AS specification at a glance	3
A-level specification at a glance	4
Love through the ages	
Love through the ages: specimen question commentary	6
Love through the ages: exemplar student response and commentary	10
Co-teaching	
How to co-teach our English Literature specifications	14
Co-teaching: a possible route through AS and A-level	15
Modern Times	
A-level Paper 2B: specimen insert	19
Creating your own questions: comparative text	21
Specimen question commentary: comparative text	22
Exemplar student response and commentary: comparative text	26
Non-exam assessment: Independent critical study: texts across time	
NEA: exemplar student response	32
Appendices	
Appendix A: NEA: exemplar student response: moderator commentary	37

AS specification at a glance

Paper 1: Love through the ages: Shakespeare and poetry	+	Paper 2: Love through the ages: prose
Study of two texts: one Shakespeare play and one AQA anthology of love poetry through the ages (pre-1900 or post-1900)		Study of two prose texts. Examination will include an unseen prose extract
Assessed Written exam: 1 hour 30 minutes Closed book 50 marks 50% of AS level		Assessed Written exam: 1 hour 30 minutes Open book 50 marks 50% of AS level
Questions Section A: Shakespeare. One passage-based question with linked essay(25 marks) Section B: Poetry. One question on printed poem (25 marks)		Questions Section A: Unseen prose. One compulsory question on unseen prose extract (25 marks) Section B: Comparing prose texts. One comparative question on two prose texts (25 marks)

A-level specification at a glance

<p>Paper 1: Love through the ages</p>	+	<p>Paper 2: Texts in shared contexts</p>	+	<p>Non-exam assessment: Independent critical study: texts across time</p>
<p>Study of three texts: one poetry and one prose text, of which one must be written pre-1900, and one Shakespeare play</p> <p>Examination will include two unseen poems</p>		<p>Choice of two options:</p> <p>Option 2A: WW1 and its aftermath</p> <p>Option 2B: Modern times: literature from 1945 to the present day</p> <p>Study of three texts: one prose, one poetry, and one drama, of which one must be written post-2000</p> <p>Examination will include an unseen extract</p>		<p>Comparative critical study of two texts, at least one of which must have been written pre-1900</p> <p>One extended essay (2500 words) and a bibliography</p>
<p>Assessed</p> <p>Written exam: 3 hours</p> <p>Open book in Section C only</p> <p>75 marks</p> <p>40% of A-level</p>		<p>Assessed</p> <p>Written exam: 2 hours 30 minutes</p> <p>Open book</p> <p>75 marks</p> <p>40% of A-level</p>		<p>Assessed</p> <p>50 marks</p> <p>20% of A-level</p> <p>Assessed by teachers</p> <p>Moderated by AQA</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: Shakespeare: one passage-based question with linked essay (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: Unseen poetry: compulsory essay question on two unseen poems (25 marks)</p> <p>Section C: Comparing texts: one essay question linking two texts (25 marks)</p>		<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: Set texts. One essay question on set text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: Contextual linking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one compulsory question on an unseen extract (25 marks) one essay question linking two texts (25 marks) 		

Love through the ages

Love through the ages: specimen question commentary

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every point that could be made but it gives teachers and students some guidance that will support their work on this paper.

A-level Paper 1, Section C

Sample question

Compare how the authors of two texts you have studied present barriers to love.

How the question meets the assessment objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. As a result, all the key words in the question should be addressed, indicating either focus (how authors present, barriers to love) or direction (compare, two texts).

AO1 is tested through the way the students organise their writing and express their ideas as they are comparing how barriers to love are presented. Students will need to use coherent, accurate written expression in their answer in order to compare efficiently and in doing so will use appropriate concepts and terminology.

AO2 is set up in the requirement for students to explore the writers' methods and their effects, signalled by the word 'present', and to show how the methods open up meanings about intense emotions and barriers to love. Students should illustrate their answers with relevant textual detail wherever possible – with quotations and other close reference – to support the points in their comparison and discussion.

AO3 is addressed when candidates demonstrate an understanding of the various contexts of barriers to love, for example class, racial, physical, religious, political, emotional, permanent and temporary. In exploring the nature of barriers to love as presented in their two texts, students will engage not only with the specific context of Love through the ages, but also with the contexts of when texts were written and of reader response.

To address **AO4** students will make comparisons between their two chosen texts, as directed in the question, and will connect to a wider awareness of barriers to love and the many forms its representation can take in literature of Love through the ages.

AO5 will be addressed when students grapple with meanings that arise about barriers to love in the texts and show an understanding that through comparison different meanings can be opened up. Critical viewpoints might be used to help advance the argument, or to offer alternatives.

Possible content

[The exemplar scripts here use Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* as the prose text and *AQA Anthology of Love Poetry through the Ages: Post-1900* as the poetry text. The specific guidance below gives examples only from those two texts.]

Students will address **AO2** if they focus on any of the following, according to which genre their chosen texts belong to. This is an Open Book examination, therefore candidates are expected to quote appropriately and accurately from those texts.

For the prose text (here *The Awakening*), attention could be paid to:

- narrative structure: how the sequence of events reflects Edna's process of 'awakening' and so her increasing attempt to overcome the barrier of social expectation to be with the man she loves (initial internal stirrings on meeting Robert; beginning to paint again; learning to swim; refusing to fulfil wifely duties; awareness of sexuality in relationship with Alcee Arobin; moving out of marital home; suicide as complete solitude and defeat or as ultimate freedom and independence)
- the delineation and presentation of character. A range of female characters are drawn against which Edna can be judged: Adele as the Victorian feminine ideal of the devoted wife and mother; the lady in black as representative of the socially acceptable widow; the two young lovers who symbolise acceptable (pre-motherhood) love; the Farival twins who are destined to join the nunnery; Mademoiselle Reisz whose independence is epitomised in her devotion to her passion of music
- the ironic narrative voice
- the use of dialogue and of indirect speech: as Edna learns to define things for herself and to express herself through female Creole frankness, through her painting and those around her
- the description of settings helps to mark Edna's process of 'awakening': Grand Isle and the marital home in New Orleans represent the social expectation of Edna as 'mother-woman' and perfect hostess; the Cheniere Caminada provides the initial, albeit temporary, glimpse at a romantic world and so of liberation; the pigeon house which is supposed to symbolise Edna's independence but in fact isolates her
- ways of influencing the reader's response to character and incident, for example the use of metaphor: the caged parrot which cannot make itself understood as representative of Edna; the winged bird at the seashore, initially in Edna's imagination flying away from a man as Edna wished to escape but at the end of the novel injured and crashing into the water; the sea as a symbol of Edna's rebirth where its vastness suggests freedom and escape from social expectation but also represents the loneliness of independence.

For the poetry text (here *AQA Anthology of Love Poetry through the Ages: Post-1900*), attention could be paid to:

- use of structural features to convey difficulty of communication e.g. enjambment and erratic rhyme scheme in '*Talking in Bed*'; conversely a steady rhyme scheme in '*One Flesh*' to suggest an ongoing bond in spite of separation
- use of irony eg a poem entitled '*Talking in Bed*' which is actually a poem about silence

- use of contrast in '*One Flesh*' to show the change in the couple's relationship from passion to separation or in '*For My Lover, Returning To His Wife*' to highlight the difference between the wife and the mistress; the silent inside contrasted with the active outside in '*Talking in Bed*'
- use of figurative language methods e.g. in '*One Flesh*' a metaphor to convey the fragility of marriage, a simile to show the wreckage of the relationship; in '*For My Lover, Returning To His Wife*' a metaphor to suggest the temporary nature of the mistress and a simile to convey the permanence of the wife
- use of symbolism such as the wedding ring in '*Timer*'.

To address **AO3** students will need to explore: the nature of barriers to love as it affects those who desire a relationship (Edna and Robert in *The Awakening*, the poet in '*After the Lunch*') or those already within a relationship (Edna and Leonce in *The Awakening*, the poet in '*For My Lover, Returning to His Wife*', the married couples in '*One Flesh*' and '*Talking in Bed*'); the nature and impact of social convention as a barrier to love on the one hand, and of mental and emotional separation and difficulty of communication within a relationship on the other; how the presentation of barriers to love is connected to other themes and subjects in the literature of Love through the ages. Students need to take account of the fact that *The Awakening* (1899) was written in a transitional phase for American women's writing which was challenging a literary tradition of the Victorian feminine ideal of devoted wife and mother; Louisiana at that time still saw women as their husband's legal property and, as a largely Catholic state, divorce was extremely rare. By 1964, whilst divorce was still unusual and people stayed together unhappily 'for the sake of the children', students might reflect on the changing attitudes towards marriage which emerged in the late 1960s/early 1970s when writing about '*Talking in Bed*'.

AO4 will be addressed when candidates compare the presentation of barriers to love in their two texts, thereby connecting with the representation of one of the central issues of the literature of Love through the ages. They could cite examples of changing ideas about the nature of love and about barriers to love which might be experienced. They should, however, concentrate on the differences and similarities noted between their two chosen texts and attempt to make valid comparisons at all significant stages of their answers, as directed in the question. Comparisons with *The Awakening* might include:

- '*One Flesh*' and '*Talking in Bed*' for social expectations of and within marriage; feelings of isolation and separation within marriage; difficulty of communication; how love within marriage changes over time
- '*For My Lover, Returning to His Wife*' for lover admitting defeat to the wife and so to the conventions of marriage; the inability to match up to the representation of the 'perfect' wife and mother; the temporary nature of the adulteress
- '*Timer*' where the symbolism of the wedding ring, which survives the cremation, is celebrated as a sign that love continues even after death; conversely Edna's inability to destroy her wedding ring and so social convention is portrayed as a barrier to love between Edna and Robert
- '*After the Lunch*' where the poet's heart is ruling her head and convincing the rational self that love can overcome any potential barriers, much as Edna does in *The Awakening*.

The criteria of **AO5** are met if students are able to show that they have fully 'compared the presentation of barriers to love' in their chosen texts. They should be ready to initiate and manage interpretations around the nature and possible forms of barriers to love as expressed in those texts

(social expectation, physical distance, difficulty of communication, mental and emotional separation, acceptance of defeat, the temporary nature of love) and to evaluate the extent to which the contrasting genres – here prose and poetry – affect the ways in which barriers to love are presented and meanings generally are understood by the reader.

Other aspects of love which can be explored in *The Awakening*

- The difference between society's expectations of men and of women in matters of love: men appear to have greater freedom but, whilst Robert's passion for Edna is strong, he will not break with social expectations and so refuses to enter into a permanent relationship with Edna.
- Jealousy: context of Creole husbands who are so sure of their woman's fidelity that they do not even entertain the idea that they would be unfaithful and so do not succumb to jealousy, hence Leonce's failure to understand that the change in Edna has anything to do with another man; outside marriage, however, both Edna and Robert feel jealousy of the other's attention towards other people.
- Robert's engagement in courtly love; acceptable in Creole society because of the husband's complete faith in his wife's fidelity.
- Passion: only portrayed outside marriage such as by the young lovers; Edna recollects her passionate infatuations before marriage; Edna, whose passions are aroused by music, now only feels passion with Robert and Alcee; the lady in black has to suppress passion out of respect for her dead husband.
- Familial love: Adele as the 'perfect mother' in opposition to Edna who feels enslaved by her children.
- Truth and deception: Edna does not set out to deceive her husband but ironically does not need to because of his own self-deception as to the absolute fidelity of married women.

Love through the ages: exemplar student response and commentary

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the sample assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

A-level Paper 1, Section B

It has been said that Rossetti's poem is conventional and celebratory, whereas Millay's poem offers a very different view of love.

Compare and contrast the presentation of love in the following poems in the light of this comment.

Student response

Both poems, although written some seventy years apart, can be regarded as Lyric poetry, which is usually written in the first person and which expresses personal emotions and feelings, some of which can be extreme. This type of poetry was popular in both the 19th and 20th centuries. Victorian lyric poetry was influenced by Romantic poets, such as Keats and Wordsworth, and so it can be argued that Rossetti's poem 'A Birthday' is conventional for the time in which it was written because of its reliance on natural and religious imagery and in its outpouring of happiness at thoughts of her love; this outpouring, together with the poem's title, suggest that the poem is indeed a celebration of love. Millay's poem appears to challenge this romantic view of love but it might be argued that, although Millay uses very different imagery to Rossetti, she does still celebrate the power of love.

Rossetti's outpouring of love is achieved in the first stanza by a series of similes which create images of happiness and celebration linked to the natural world. Firstly Rossetti's heart is likened to 'a singing bird', which is always a joyful sound. The poem itself could be seen as song-like in its alternating rhyme scheme and the refrain of 'My heart is...' The potential for love to grow is conveyed through the idea of it as a 'shoot' which is 'watered' and cared for within the security of a 'nest'. A nest is associated with the birth of a baby, a cause for celebration, and perhaps what the poet is hoping for from this relationship. The following simile, however, suggests that love has grown strong as the boughs of the apple tree 'are bent with thickset fruit', which would be a cause for celebration. The final simile is gentle and relates to a state of peace where her heart 'paddles in a halcyon sea.' It seems as if the poet is searching for the right words to express how her heart feels but, in spite of these increasingly romantic, celebratory images, Rossetti cannot find images strong enough and so ends by simply saying that her heart is 'gladder' than any of these images, which would effectively convey the strength of her love for a Victorian reader used to celebrating images of the natural world in Romantic poetry.

Millay also suggests what love is not but, unlike Rossetti, Millay does not use positive images to emphasise the power of love but instead uses negative images to provide a much more realistic view of what love is, or is not, capable of. The simple sentiment in the opening line, informs us that love cannot provide us with even the basic necessities of 'meat nor drink Nor/ slumber nor a roof against the rain.' As with Rossetti, the images intensify as the poem goes on but here with images of sickness and pain that love is not able to overcome. The alliterative 'breath', 'blood' and 'bone' help Millay to stress how love may be a disappointment because it cannot help us in times of need and hardship.

Where Rossetti introduces even stronger images of richness into stanza two of her poem, however, Millay seems to change her attitude a little in Line 7 and this is signalled by the word 'yet'. The negative images continue with the personification of 'death' and 'pain' but Millay does begin to suggest that she would endure this pain rather than trade her lover for 'release' from it. Before we begin to see her poem as celebrating love after all, however, Millay finishes it on a note of uncertainty as to whether she would make that trade: 'I do not think I would.' This ambiguity is also emphasised in Millay's use of the sonnet form, usually associated with a romantic outpouring of love, to convey a much more uncertain and perhaps realistic view of love. As Millay was writing in the 20th century, she would have had greater freedom than Rossetti to express unconventional ideas about love; it is interesting and effective, therefore, that she chooses a conventional love poetry form to convey such ideas and one that has more famously been used by men. Perhaps this is her way of showing that, even though she is not shouting about the joy of love as Rossetti does, Millay does believe that love should be celebrated.

Conversely, Rossetti's attitude towards love remains celebratory throughout her poem although there is a shift in tone between stanzas one and two. Having decided that none of the similes in stanza one adequately describe her heart, Rossetti uses a series of imperatives in stanza two to demand 'a dais' which can be decorated in a way that will reflect how important her love is. Rossetti uses rich imagery for this decoration of 'silk', 'vair' and 'purple dyes' and exotic carvings of 'doves', 'pomegranates', 'peacocks', 'gold and silver grapes' and 'silver fleur-de-lys', which remind the reader of robes and furnishings for royalty and Rossetti seems to be preparing for a celebration. The celebration could of course be the birthday but the religious imagery Rossetti includes, 'an apple-tree', 'a rainbow' and 'doves', suggests that the dais might be the altar in a church and the celebration her marriage to her love. Once again, the inclusion of this religious imagery can be seen as conventional for the period in which it was written.

There seems little doubt, therefore, that Rossetti's poem is conventional and celebratory. Rossetti's outpouring of joy at her love is achieved through the song-like structure of the poem and the natural and religious imagery, which is full of richness and happiness. Millay's poem does indeed use a conventional sonnet form but this only serves to emphasise the unconventional ideas about love it contains. Whether Millay celebrates love or not is uncertain; she does not express any joy about love but is prepared to endure pain rather than lose it. Her lack of joyful imagery might reflect the fact that she was writing in the 20th century when a more realistic view of love was possible in poetry but that does not mean that Millay does not think love is worth celebrating. She leaves this to the reader to decide.

Examiner commentary

AO1: The student has produced a confident and perceptive argument which is wholly relevant to the task. The use of literary critical concepts and terminology is assured and the response is maturely expressed.

AO2: There is a perceptive understanding of how meanings are shaped by the methods used by each of the poets. A range of methods are analysed and there is confident and integrated comparison of how these methods are presented.

AO3: The student shows an assured understanding of how the ideas conveyed by the poets and the methods used to convey these ideas are influenced by the time in which the poems were written.

AO4: There is perceptive exploration of the similarities and differences between the poems, both in their attitudes to love and in the ways in which love is presented. Through this assured comparison, the candidate is addressing the central issue of literary representations of how lovers express their feelings in two texts separated by a substantial period of time.

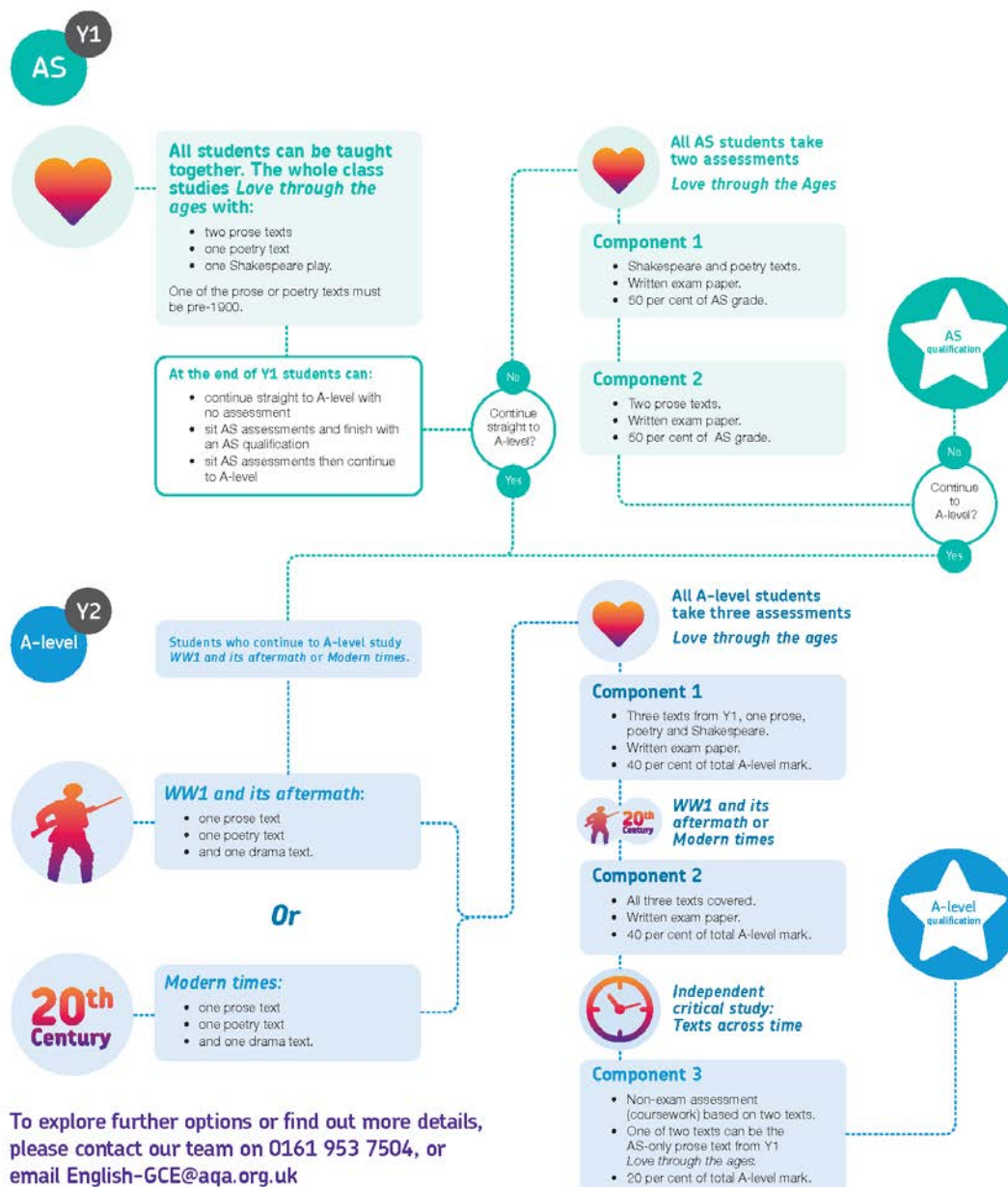
AO5: Through a perceptive and confident discussion about the proposition set up in the task, the student engages intelligently with different interpretations which arise.

Overall: Perceptive and assured. This response seems to fit the band 5 descriptors.

Co-teaching opportunities

How to co-teach our English Literature specifications

English Literature A: a thematic, historicist approach



Co-teaching: a possible route through AS and A-Level

AS and A-level English Literature A

This suggested programme of study assumes that all students will sit the AS examination at the end of Year One.

It is written in the knowledge that a range of different factors, for example timetabling structures, may affect a teacher's ability to follow this programme without some adaptation. For example, if two teachers are sharing one class, each teacher will take a half-term's text focus and spread that over a whole term (in the Autumn term, Teacher One would take the Unseen Prose and Prose Text 1 and Teacher Two the Prose Text 2 and mock exam practice).

Year One (Co-teaching AS and A-Level)			
Timeline	Text Focus	Skills Focus	Notes
Autumn Term 1	Prose Text 1 Unseen Prose	Prose study Response to unseen prose essay skills (AS Paper 2, section A and A-level Paper 2, section B)	Choose range of engaging prose extracts from different time periods and which cover different aspects of love as an introduction to the theme. Extracts from any of the prose set texts offer a good starting point (See specification pages 11/12 for possible aspects and set texts).
Autumn Term 2	Prose Text 2 Mock exam practice (optional)	Prose study Comparative essay writing skills (AS Paper 2, Section B, A-level Paper 1, Section B and Section C, and A-level Paper 2, Section B)	If teaching the pre-1900 poetry anthology, teachers have choice of any prose text from the set text list. If teaching the post-1900 poetry anthology, one of the prose texts MUST have been written pre-1900 to satisfy the A-level date requirements. At least one prose text must be taken from the A-level text list.
Optional: Mock exam in Week 1, Spring Term 1: AS Paper 2			
Spring Term 1	Poetry Anthology	Poetry study Response to poetry essay skills (AS Paper 1, Section B and A- level Paper 1, Section B)	All poems in the chosen poetry anthology (Pre or Post 1900) should be studied as the poem set for examination is not predictable.
Spring Term 2	Shakespeare	Drama study response to passage-based question essay skills (AS Paper 1, Section A and A- level Paper 1, Section A)	The chosen Shakespeare text should be studied in its entirety as students are required to refer to the text as a whole in the examination. A range of passages should be studied as the passage, and the accompanying view, set for examination are not predictable.

Summer Term 1	Revision of: Prose: Unseen and two set texts Poetry anthology Shakespeare text	Revision of exam writing skills: Response to unseen prose Comparative response to set text prose Response to poetry Response to passage-based Shakespeare	
AS exams Paper 1: Shakespeare and Poetry Paper 2: Prose Study			
Summer Term 2	A-level study begins – see Year Two below		

Year One (A-level)			
Timeline	Text Focus	Skills Focus	Notes
Summer Term 2	Unseen poetry NEA Text 1	Response to comparative unseen poetry essay skills (A-level Paper 1, Section B) Study of chosen genre for NEA	Students will have already learnt the skills of response to poetry and comparative essay writing at AS. Choose a range of poems from different time periods, by different poets and on different aspects of love which can be compared for similarity and difference. Poems from the anthology which has not been studied for examination offer a useful resource. Preparation for NEA will differ dependent upon whether: one text is taught to the whole class and the second is independently chosen; both texts are independently chosen by the student; students have already studied an AS only text (<i>The Rotters' Club/The Mill on the Floss</i>) at AS and are using this for NEA.
Summer holidays	NEA Text 2	Independent study	One of the two texts studied must have been written pre-1900.
Year Two (A-level)			
Autumn Term 1	NEA Texts 1 and 2 and Critical Theory	Application and evaluation of critical views Extended comparative essay writing skills Academic referencing Construction of an academic bibliography	See pages 20-22 for guidance.

Autumn Term 2	Unseen prose Comparative set text 1	Response to unseen prose essay skills (A-level Paper 2, Section B)	Choose range of engaging prose extracts from the chosen period of study, which cover different aspects of the period as an introduction to it. Extracts from any of the relevant set texts offer a good starting point (See specification pages 16-19 for possible aspects and set texts).
Spring Term 1	Comparative set text 2 Mock exam practice (optional)	Comparative essay writing skills (A-level Paper 2, Section B)	
Optional: Mock exam end Spring Term 1/beginning Spring Term 2: Paper 2, Section B			
Spring Term 2	Core set text	Response to single text essay writing skills (A-level Paper 2, Section A)	Across Sections A and B of Paper 2, students need to study one prose, one poetry and one drama text, one of which must have been written post-2000.
Summer Term 1	Revision Paper 1: Shakespeare Unseen poetry Paper 2: Unseen prose Core set text Comparative set texts	Revision of exam writing skills Response to passage-based drama Comparative response to unseen poetry Response to unseen prose Response to single text and comparative texts	Shakespeare preparation will need to reflect the increased demand in assessment between AS and A-level. Preparation for Paper 1, Section C should reflect that the poetry and prose texts were used for different assessments at AS. If both prose texts studied at AS come from the A-level list, both could be revised to give students choice in the A-level examination. Students may go into the exam knowing which text they will use in Section A; alternatively, if they have studied more than one core set text, they may decide once they have read the exam paper. Preparation for the exam will need to reflect the preferred approach.
A-level exams Paper 1: Love through the ages Paper 2: Texts in shared contexts			

Modern times: literature from 1945 to the present times

A-level Paper 2B: specimen insert

This is from our **Paper 2B (A-level): Specimen question paper** on aqa.org.uk/7712. Navigate to 'assess'.

Specimen insert

Six months now since she'd been sent away to London. Every morning before she opened her eyes she thought, if I were the wishing type, I know what I would wish. And then she opened her eyes and saw Chanu's puffy face on the pillow next to her, his lips parted indignantly even as he slept. She saw the pink dressing table with the curly-sided mirror, and the monstrous black wardrobe that claimed most of the room. Was it c heating? To think, I know what I would wish? Was it not the same as making the wish? If she knew what the wish would be, then somewhere in her heart she had already made it.

The tattoo lady waved back at Nazneen. She scratched her arms, her shoulders, the accessible portions of her buttocks. She yawned and lit a cigarette. At least two thirds of the flesh on show was covered in ink. Nazneen had never been close enough (never closer than this, never further) to decipher the designs. Chanu said the tattoo lady was Hell's Angel, which upset Nazneen. She thought the tattoos might be flowers, or birds. They were ugly and they made the tattoo lady more ugly than was necessary, but the tattoo lady clearly did not care. Every time Nazneen saw her she wore the same look of boredom and detachment. Such a state was sought by the sadhus who walked in rags through the Muslim villages, indifferent to the kindness of strangers, the unkind sun.

Nazneen thought sometimes of going downstairs, crossing the yard and climbing the Rosemead stairwell to the fourth floor. She might have to knock on a few doors before the tattoo lady answered. She would take something, an offering of samosas or bhajis, and the tattoo lady would smile and Nazneen would smile and perhaps they would sit together by the window and let the time pass more easily. She thought of it but she would not go. Strangers would answer if she knocked on the wrong door. The tattoo lady might be angry at an unwanted interruption. It was clear she did not like to leave her chair. And even if she wasn't angry, what would be the point? Nazneen could say two things in English: sorry and thank you. She could spend another day alone. It was only another day.

She should be getting on with the evening meal. The lamb curry was prepared. She had made it last night with tomatoes and new potatoes. There was chicken saved in the freezer from the last time Dr Azad had been invited but had cancelled at the last minute. There was still the dal to make, and the vegetable dishes, the spices to grind, the rice to wash, and the sauce to prepare for the fish that Chanu would bring this evening. She would rinse the glasses and rub them with newspaper to make them shine. The tablecloth had some spots to be scrubbed out. What if it went wrong? The rice might stick. She might over-salt the dal. Chanu might forget the fish.

It was only dinner. One dinner. One guest.

She left the window open. Standing on the sofa to reach, she picked up the Holy Qur'an from the high shelf that Chanu, under duress, had specially built. She made her intention as fervently as possible, seeking refuge from Satan with fists clenched and fingernails digging into her palms. Then she selected a page at random and began to read.

To God belongs all that the heavens and the earth contain. We exhort you, as we have exhorted those to whom the Book was given before you, to fear God. If you deny Him, know that to God belongs all that the heavens and earth contain. God is self-sufficient and worthy of praise.

The words calmed her stomach and she was pleased. Even Dr Azad was nothing as to God. To God belongs all that the heavens and the earth contain. She said it over a few times, aloud. She was composed. Nothing could bother her.

Creating your own questions: comparative text

Below you will find instructions on how to use the accompanying resources to create your own exam practice questions. This example shows you how to use the Modern times resource package to set questions for Paper 2B, Section B.

Paper 2B, Section B, unseen text

If you have used the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials or want to set a question on a different aspect of Modern times, you can use these documents in the following way:

1. Look at how the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials are constructed, for example:

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied. Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

The question wording (Compare the significance of...you are comparing.) can remain unchanged, with the exception of the area to be explored (here 'isolated characters as being profoundly damaged'). You will need, however, to construct a different 'view' depending upon the aspect of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day you want the students to explore.

2. Read the examiner commentary to help you construct a different 'view' to debate. Look for aspects of Modern times which occur in both texts but don't forget that the absence of aspects in a text is equally valid for debate. Other sources can be used to construct a view:
 - look at the list of aspects of Modern times in the specification and make up a critical view around one of these
 - research critical views on these texts around which to structure a debate
 - research critical views on another text about 'Modern times' (non-set texts included) and adapt the quote in a more general sense so that students can consider how far this can be said to be true of the texts they have studied.

Specimen question commentary: comparative text

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every point that could be made but it gives teachers and students some guidance that will support their work on this paper.

Paper 2B, Section B: Drama and prose contextual linking (Option 1)

Comparative text

Sample question

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied. Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

You must use one drama text and one prose text in your response.

[The exemplar scripts here use Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as the drama text and Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road* as the prose text. The specific guidance below gives examples only from those two texts and assumes that the requirement for students to study a poetry text and to include one text written post-2000 has been satisfied in Section A of this paper.]

How the question meets the assessment Objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. As a result, all the key words in the question should be addressed, indicating either focus (significance, isolated characters, profoundly damaged, how meanings are shaped) or direction (compare, drama text, prose text).

AO1 is tested through the way the students organise their writing and express their ideas as they analyse the significance of isolation. Value is placed on technical accuracy, appropriate terminology and the quality of the discussion.

AO2 requires reference to the ways that meanings are shaped. Students should illustrate their answers with relevant textual detail wherever possible – with quotations and other close reference – to support the points in their comparison and discussion.

Picking up from their study of the unseen, **AO3** is addressed when candidates demonstrate an understanding of the various contexts of isolation, including the physical and psychological. In exploring the nature of isolation as presented in their two texts, students will engage not only with the specific context of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day, but also with the contexts of when texts were written and of reader response to the representation of isolation.

To address **AO4** students will make comparisons between their two chosen texts, as directed in the question, and will connect to a wider awareness of the significance of isolation and the many

forms its representation can take in literature of Modern times: Literature from 1945 to the present day. Different forms of isolation might be considered, eg gender, culture, language, religion, belief, attitude or age.

AO5 tests students' skill in engaging with different ways in which significance can be found in their chosen texts and in showing an understanding that through comparison different meanings can be opened up.

Possible content

This is an Open Book examination, therefore students are expected to quote appropriately and accurately from those texts. Students will address **AO2** if they focus on any of the following, according to the genre of the text:

For a prose text, attention could be paid to narrative structure (the division into three parts which each show a different stage in the marriage and in April's mental decline, the use of flashback to add context to character, the anti-climactic ending); the delineation and presentation of character (most notably of Frank and April but also of figures such as John Givings); point-of-view and narrator's 'voice' (the use of an ironic omniscient narrator who heightens tension by switching between characters, his thoughts on loneliness in suburban middle America, the absence of April's point-of-view until immediately before her suicide); the use of dialogue and of indirect speech (the imaginary dialogue in Frank's head which lets us see the breakdown of the marriage from his point of view and the better life that Frank imagines, the ordinary conversation between Frank and April which reveals cracks in the marriage); the sequence or chronology of events; the description of settings (New York City where Frank works and from which April is now excluded, *Revolutionary Road* which now ironically represents a failed attempt at independence and freedom, Paris as an imagined escape from the isolation of middle-class suburban life); ways of influencing the reader's response to character and incident, which includes figurative language features.

For a drama text, students could write about aspects of overall structure and the placing of scenes in time and place (the whole play takes place in one time and one room; the scenes move from a focus on Maggie and Brick to a focus on Big Daddy and Brick to an unsatisfactory resolution: none of the isolated characters find peace); dramatic irony (the impending isolating revelations of Brick's homosexuality and Big Daddy's cancer); the importance of stage directions; direct and indirect ways of communicating ideas and 'messages' (the symbolism of the bed, which acts as the ghost of an unnatural homosexual love which haunts Maggie and Brick, and of Brick's crutch, a phallic symbol, which is removed by both Maggie and Big Daddy as a symbol of Brick's castration); ways of presenting character and the interaction between characters (Maggie is presented as dispossessed in her childlessness in contrast with Mae as 'monster of fertility'); key points in dialogue are punctuated by interruptions by other characters and the off stage telephone so that the height of tension is frozen).

To address **AO3** students will need to explore: the nature of isolation as it affects the key characters of Frank and April, and Maggie and Brick; the nature and impact of physical isolation on the one hand, and of psychological isolation on the other; other forms of isolation due to for example: gender (the stereotypical expectations of women in 1950s American society that April and Maggie cannot meet), sexuality (Brick is living in a time when America did not tolerate deviation from the heterosexual norm); comparison with others who are theoretically less isolated (the contrast between Brick and Maggie and Gooper and Mae); how the presentation of isolation is connected to other themes and subjects in the literature of Modern times.

AO4 will be addressed when candidates explore the ‘significance’ of isolation in their two texts, thereby connecting with the representation of one of the central issues of the literature of Modern times: 1945 to the present day. They could cite examples of changing ideas (particularly between the 1950s and today) about the nature of isolation and of the profound damage experienced by those involved, whether directly or indirectly. They should, however, concentrate on the differences and similarities noted between their two chosen texts and attempt to make valid comparisons at all significant stages of their answers, as directed in the question.

The criteria of **AO5** are met if students are able to show that they have fully ‘explored the significance of isolation’ in their chosen texts. They should be ready to initiate and manage a debate around the nature and possible forms of isolation as expressed in those texts and to evaluate the extent to which the contrasting genres – here prose and drama – affect the ways in which isolation in particular is presented and meanings generally are understood by the reader.

Other aspects of Modern times which can be explored in *Revolutionary road*

- the corrosive impact of alcohol dependency on addicts and their families
- the destructive nature of dysfunctional family life: Frank blames April's emotional instability on her rejection by her parents and her subsequent unhappy childhood; April's inability to connect with her own children; how children are shown in the novel to ruin the Wheelers' plans; the disconnection and lack of understanding between Frank and April
- the fallacy of the American Dream; the myth of post-war hope for a better life: neither Frank nor April can escape what they were born into. April's attempts to escape the solitude of her existence lead her to suicide.
- the role of women in the 1950s: a struggle between independence and societal expectation. April's self-deluded attempts to escape her containment through amateur dramatics and a move to Paris; the futility of April's rebellious behaviour; her reflection on her past mistakes and blaming herself for her unhappy situation; her eventual suicide
- the attitude of the middle classes; a focus on the emptiness of American suburban life which renders everything and everyone insincere. Frank's denunciation of the shallowness of suburbia, and pretence at non- conformity, itself becomes insincere
- the concept of history repeating itself even when characters try to escape it (Frank and his father; April and her father)
- personal and social identity: Frank and April act out the roles of the people they want to become; the move to Paris is supposed to enable Frank 'to find himself'; April admits to Shep that she does not know who she is
- the function of the tragi-comic novel: the tragedy of the inescapable loneliness of individuals in modern society is told in an absurdly comic fashion, which culminates in the anti-climactic final sentence.

Other aspects of Modern times which can be explored in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- the corrosive impact of alcohol dependency on addicts and their families: Brick has withdrawn from the world at large and his loved ones in particular into an alcohol-infused haze; Brick's dependency on drinking to the point of 'the click' to achieve oblivion; Maggie uses Brick's dependency on alcohol as a bargaining tool
- dysfunctional family life: Big Mama believes the fantasy of family unity; the greed and avarice of Mae and Gooper who try to manipulate their inheritance; the irony of Brick as the rightful heir who cannot continue the family line; the portrayal of the children as grotesque in their constant interruption of the adults
- dreams, hopes and plans: all of the main characters realise that their dreams cannot be achieved
- the role of women in the 1950s: Maggie's childlessness contrasted with Mae's fertility; ideas around femininity and feminine desire (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*); Maggie's position in the love triangle with Brick and Skipper as a trophy wife
- Manliness and homosexuality: Brick's repression of his true self because of society's expectations
- the destructive concept of living a lie: Brick blames disgust at his own mendacity as a reason for not admitting his homosexuality; Brick blames mendacity for Skipper's death; Big Daddy also feels disgust at living his life with a woman he detests; Maggie's fabrication of a pregnancy.

Exemplar student response and commentary: comparative text

Below you will find two exemplar student responses to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on each response.

Paper 2B, Section B

Comparative texts

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in two other texts you have studied.

Remember to include in your answer reference to how meanings are shaped in the texts you are comparing.

Band 2 response

Both *Revolutionary Road* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* have characters in them who are damaged by being isolated. In *Revolutionary Road* April is really lonely because she is married to Frank who she does not love and she is bored and wants to escape to Paris. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Maggie is lonely because she is married to Brick who does not love her and so she can't have children. In this essay I will show how the writers have written about this type of isolation.

Yates tells us that April has always been lonely because she was abandoned by her parents as a baby:

'I think my mother must've taken me straight from the hospital to Aunt Mary's,' she told him. 'At any rate I don't think I ever lived with anyone but Aunt Mary until I was five, and then there were a couple of other aunts, or friends of hers or something, before I went to Aunt Claire, in Rye.'

He then tells us that April married Frank just because she was lonely and so it is sad that she is so unhappy in her marriage. They have lots of arguments in the book but mostly April is just bored with being Frank's wife. One example is where Frank has told April that he has had an affair and April doesn't seem to care:

'In other words you don't care what I do or who I go to bed with or anything. Right?'

'No; I guess that's right; I don't,'

April does have two children and some friends called the Campbells so the writer does not really explain why April feels so lonely but we can guess that if she was abandoned by her parents as a baby and she does not love Frank she is still going to feel really alone. She does, however, try to make her life happier by suggesting to Frank that they move to Paris. At first Frank agrees to go but when April gets pregnant again he says they can't go. April tries to persuade Frank that they should abort the baby so that they can go to Paris but Frank won't agree and so April feels stuck in her lonely life.

April's behaviour shows that she has been damaged by her loneliness and Frank says that she should go to see a psychiatrist. In the end, April does go a bit mad and decides to get rid of the baby herself at home which leads to her losing a lot of blood and then dying. This shows that loneliness can make a person profoundly damaged.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* all of the scenes are in Maggie and Brick's bedroom where we see Maggie and Brick arguing, like April and Frank do. At the beginning Maggie is getting dressed so that she looks attractive but Brick is not taking any notice of her because he does not love her: 'Living with someone you love can be lonelier – than living entirely alone!' The stage directions show how lonely Maggie is:

'Margaret is alone, completely alone, and she feels it. She draws in, hunches her shoulders, raises her arms with fists clenched, shuts her eyes tight as a child about to be stabbed with a vaccination needle.'

Brick doesn't love Maggie because he is really a homosexual and loves a man who is now dead. He won't sleep with Maggie and so she can't have a baby and that makes her feel useless especially as Mae has had lots of babies: 'You're jealous! You're just jealous because you can't have babies!' Maggie doesn't have any friends in the play and so she is just stuck with Brick who doesn't love her. His family who all want to know why she isn't having a baby and blame her for Brick being unhappy and drinking too much: 'Something's not right! You're childless and my son drinks.' Brick tells Maggie that he won't give her a baby: 'But how in hell on earth do you imagine – that you're going to have a child by a man who can't stand you?'

Maggie is damaged by being lonely and she does something mad at the end of the play like April does and pretends that she is pregnant. The family are all pleased to hear the news but of course Brick knows that it isn't true. Maggie bribes him into sleeping with her by locking away his alcohol and only letting him have some if he agrees.

Both of these books were written in the 1950s when women didn't go to work and so would be lonely if they didn't have good marriages. April and Maggie have bad marriages for different reasons and that's what makes them lonely and damaged.

Examiner commentary

AO1: There is a simple sense of comparison – both female characters are lonely within an unhappy marriage – and the ideas around this are simply structured.

Appropriate concepts and terminology are scarce; expressions like 'feels stuck in', 'get rid of', and 'go a bit mad' reflect the candidate's simple expression. Spelling and (most) punctuation are correct.

AO2: The answer consists mainly of generalised descriptions of events although the student evidences characters' feelings through a limited number of quotations, at times over-long, and reference to stage directions.

AO3: Examples are given of the reasons for the characters' isolation, but there is little analysis of the true nature of that isolation or of its consequences beyond the immediate. There is simple awareness of the context of women in the 1950s.

AO4: Comparisons between the characters in the texts are made in a generalised manner.

AO5: As required, the candidate has written about examples of two genres, but no overt or meaningful comparisons are made between them, and in this respect the question has not been properly answered.

Overall: Simple and generalised. 'This response seems to fit the descriptors in Band 2'.

Band 5 response

Modern literature often deals with the search of individuals for an identity within a world where the boundaries of social acceptability are becoming blurred. Their struggle to be accepted as the people they believe they are is often portrayed as an isolating experience and writers can emphasise this isolation by placing these characters within a seemingly stable family situation. This is true of both Yates in *Revolutionary Road* and Williams in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* where the characters of April and Brick respectively are shown to feel a disconnection from the roles society in general, and their spouses in particular, expect of them to the point at which both characters are profoundly damaged. Both written in the 1950s, these texts enable Yates and Williams to comment on the isolating nature of post-war American society.

Yates focuses his critique of this period on anaesthetised middle-class suburbia and the futile attempts of April to escape the mundane role of wife and mother. Yates makes it clear from the outset that April will not be able to escape this role. The novel opens with April's failure to succeed in an amateur acting role designed to help her settle into the ironically named *Revolutionary Road* community. April's initially promising performance deteriorates until 'she was working alone, and visibly weakening with every line.' In this description Yates sums up April's decline over the course of the novel until her suicide when, as on stage, 'she'd lost her grip.' The removal of her stage make-up when 'she was alone' is symbolic of the situation April finds herself in: she feels that she is playing the part of dutiful wife and mother but when she removes that mask to be true to herself this isolates her from her socially acceptable self. Yates confirms that this is the key message about isolation in this society when, immediately before her suicide, April concludes that 'if you wanted to do something absolutely honest, something true, it always turned out to be a thing that had to be done alone.'

Yates shows this internal struggle through April's disconnection with people around her, especially with Frank, and extends this disconnection to the reader through the use of a third-person narrator who does not present events from April's point of view until the end of the novel when her suicide signals the futility of her voice. Instead, at various points of the novel, Yates includes Frank's imagined dialogues with April before their actual conversations, so that April's viewpoint is marginalised and Frank's view of what he expects from a wife is foregrounded. In one example, Frank imagines April 'devoting whole hours to the bedroom mirror' and then doing the housework 'in time for his homecoming' only to discover in 'a startling disclosure' that April has spent her day organising their move to Paris.

Ironically, the only person with whom April feels a connection is John Givings, a certified insane man; he proves to be the only character who sees the disconnection between April and Frank and understands that it is caused by her desire to escape the role of dutiful wife and mother that Frank wants her to play: 'I wouldn't be surprised if you had knocked her up on purpose, just so you could spend the rest of your life hiding behind that maternity dress.'

April does try to play the role that society has given her: 'Everything about her seemed determined to prove...that a sensible middle-class housewife was all she had ever wanted to be' but the frequent references to April's boredom and Yates' effective description of her mechanical reaction to Frank show how she is living a lie:

'there was a certain stiffness in the way she was holding him, a suggestion of effort to achieve the effect of spontaneity, as though she knew that a nestling of the shoulder blade was in order and was doing her best to meet the specifications.'

The effect of April's isolation manifests itself in her increasingly unstable behaviour. We might not like Frank's dishonesty and shallowness but our distance from April makes it difficult to understand her manipulative and 'hysterical' behaviour and to feel sympathetic towards her. Yates does, however, offer, through Frank's thoughts and through a late flashback, the possibility that April's instability is due to her unhappy childhood. As Frank observes, 'it's always been a wonder to me that you could survive a childhood like that...let alone come out of it without any damage' but at times this feels like an easy excuse.

In the end, April's failure to persuade Frank to escape the anaesthetised middle-class 'toyland of white and pastel houses' for a life in Paris leads her to take the lonely decision to commit suicide. Whilst it would be easy to blame Frank's lack of understanding of April's needs, Yates' portrayal of the stifling boredom of a middle-class suburban housewife in the 1950s suggests readers should think otherwise. Indeed, his inclusion of April's suicide note confirms this: 'Dear Frank, Whatever happens please don't blame yourself.'

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams presents Brick as another tragic figure who is profoundly damaged because he is living a lie. Like April, he finds himself unable to conform to the role society hands him out here because of his repressed homosexuality at a time when America did not tolerate relationships outside the heterosexual norm.

The dramatic form is able to visually convey key messages in a way that novels cannot and Williams symbolises the root of Brick's isolation through the marital bed and through Brick's crutch. All of the scenes take place in Maggie and Brick's bedroom, a constant reminder of what society expects of them. Big Mama confirms this when she 'points at the bed' and declares that 'When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!' Brick's crutch emphasises that he is a broken man and his injury resulted from his attempt to re-live past times with Skipper. The crutch, like the bed, is ever present and acts as a phallic symbol; it is frequently taken from Brick to emphasise his inability to fulfil the role that society believes he should. We see Brick 'fighting for possession' of the crutch and 'he utters a cry of anguish' when it is removed, which perhaps suggests that he desperately wants to conform.

Unlike the remoteness of April, Williams lays Brick bare for the audience so that we clearly see how society's expectations are isolating him. His dialogue with Big Daddy reveals his knowledge that his homosexuality is unacceptable: 'Don't you know how people feel about things like that?' and a fear of being called 'A couple of ducking sissies', 'Queers' or 'Fairies.' He questions resignedly 'Why can't exceptional friendship, real, real, deep, deep friendship! between two men be respected as something clean and decent?' Like April, he concludes that to be true to yourself is isolating: 'friendship with Skipper was that one great true thing' but 'any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal.' Brick's way of coping with living a lie is to withdraw from society into an alcoholic haze, which means drinking until 'a click that I get in my head...makes me peaceful.' Interestingly, like April, being true to yourself for Brick 'don't happen except when I'm alone.'

Like Yates, Williams is commenting on the profound damage that can occur to individuals within an intolerant society and concludes that, as a result, 'mendacity is a system we live in.' Through Brick, he shows how repressing your true self is 'malignant and it's terminal' and, whilst Brick does not take the drastic step of suicide that April does, by the end of the play there is no resolution, only a further lie that Maggie is pregnant. Whilst readers and audiences today will recognise that attitudes to women and homosexuality specifically have become more tolerant since the 1950s, these texts still effectively convey the damaging nature of isolation which may occur as a result of intolerances in today's society.

Examiner commentary

AO1: This is an assured response which offers a perceptive argument in relation to the task. The level of technical accuracy is mature and impressive; ideas are organised confidently with appropriate use of concepts and terminology.

AO2: The student's perceptive analysis and discussion throughout are supported by close reference to the text. The candidate shows an assured engagement with a range of ways in which meanings are shaped and discusses them with a clear personal 'voice'.

AO3: The topic of isolation is thoroughly explored in both texts. The student takes a central focus of isolation as a result of deviance from society's norms and discusses the resultant consequences with well-chosen examples.

AO4: The student makes perceptive connections between the texts and shows an awareness of isolation as a central issue in modern literature. The lack of comparison in substantial stretches of the first part of the response, however, precludes it from achieving full marks.

AO5: The student perceptively engages with a range of interpretations and shows an awareness of how the respective genres of prose and drama affect the ways in which isolation is presented.

Overall: 'Perceptive and assured'. This response seems to fit the Band 5 descriptors.

Non-exam assessment: Independent critical study: texts across time

NEA: exemplar response

Compare and contrast the ways in which Elizabeth Gaskell and Henrik Ibsen present the relationships between Margaret Hale and John Thornton in *North and South* (1854-55) and Nora and Torvald Helmer in *A Doll's House* (1879).

Examine the view that, in both texts, 'the personal is political'.

Student response*

Both *North and South* (1854-55) and *A Doll's House* (1879) present women living in patriarchal eras. In comparing Gaskell's novel about a woman who saves her husband-to-be from bankruptcy and ruin and Ibsen's 'well-made play' about a woman who once saved her husband's life but abandons him after he betrays her, I will look at how various readers and audiences might interpret them and how far they can be seen as having a wider political relevance from a feminist point of view.

Both Gaskell's '*Condition of England*' novel and Ibsen's '*Woman Question*' melodrama are set against a contemporary backdrop of massive social change. One interesting similarity between the texts is the way that the heroines' relationships with their fathers affect their marriages – which is what might be expected in a patriarchal society. In *North and South* Gaskell presents this as very positive; Mr Hale admires John Thornton and tells Margaret how he 'absolutely lived upon water-porridge for years' to support his mother and sister after 'his father speculated wildly, failed, and then killed himself' (p129). At this early stage in the novel, however, while Margaret admits this 'really is fine', she still argues it is 'a pity such a nature should be tainted by his position as a Milton manufacturer' (p129). Much later, when she gives Thornton her late father's books as a peace offering, the gift symbolises that the female southerner now understands the male northerner and therefore I interpret Gaskell's positive link here as being both personal and political. Towards the end of *A Doll's House*, however, Nora Helmer sees a negative link between her husband Torvald and her dead father when she has an epiphany about her past and present.

When Nora realises 'I was simply transferred from Papa's hands to yours ... You and Papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life' (p66), it is a key moment in the play. Although Torvald accuses Nora of being like her father in having 'no religion, no morality, and no sense of duty' (p62) Nora turns this around and says that actually it is Torvald who resembles him. Stephanie Forward interprets this moment of anagnorisis from a feminist perspective, as the moment Nora finally 'comes to see herself as an object moulded by her father and then by her husband' (1) and I agree with this; I think Nora's realisation that she has lived in a home that 'has been nothing but a playroom', treated as a 'doll wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll child' is both personally and politically the most important moment in the play (p67). But while Nora seems to reach an awareness of the power of men at the climax of the drama, walking out of her home to the famous stage sound effect of the slamming door, previously she showed a rather stereotypical naïve innocence about this which is very similar to Margaret's behaviour when she fails to realise the implications of her behaviour during the riot in *North and South*.

To a modern audience, Nora's comments about Torvald seem more like a crush or hero worship; by the time she insists to Kristine Linde that Torvald will want 'to take all the responsibility, all the blame' (p46) if he finds out about Krogstad in the middle of Act Two, from what we've already seen of him, this already seems very unlikely. Yet I think Gaskell presents Margaret's behaviour as even more deluded in the riot scene; 'She only thought how she could save him. She threw her arms

around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond ... Then he unfolded his arms, and held her encircled in one for an instant' (p234-235). Such a public display of affection in the Victorian era would have risked Margaret's reputation, so she puts the safety of the man she loves over certain scandal. Gaskell presents this act as instinctive and spontaneous, led by subconscious desire; when Thornton honourably proposes afterwards, Margaret denies her love for him, claiming that 'It was only a natural instinct; any woman would have done just the same (p252).' But as she speaks, her body language reveals another story; 'In spite of herself — in defiance of her anger — the thick blushes came all over her face, and burnt into her very eyes' (p252). From a twenty-first century reader's point of view it looks like the narrator knows more than Margaret does, and Gaskell uses blushing to symbolise the heroine feeling forced to act like a perfect Victorian lady and deny her true feelings. This scene makes the personal context very political in terms of the wider context of the subjugation of women in the nineteenth century. In contrast to Margaret, however, underneath her public praise of her husband's honesty, talent and bravery, Nora Helmer understands him very well after eight years of marriage and has secretly protected him from knowing she saved his life. 'How painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now' (p12). In spite of her surface lack of status as a middle-class woman, however, throughout *A Doll's House* Ibsen shows Nora running rings around Torvald, even using his patriarchal attitude to flatter him into giving Kristina Linde a job by saying she took 'a long journey in order to see you ... she is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man, so as to perfect herself' (p17). Furthermore, in terms of structure, Ibsen allows the audience to see Nora partaking in low-level deception from the very beginning of the play, secretly buying macaroons when Torvald has specifically banned them. The stage directions describe her taking 'a packet ... from her pocket' and eating one or two while going 'cautiously to her husband's door' (p1). The fact Torvald has forbidden them as they will 'ruin [her] teeth' shows how the 'doll-wife' role she has in their marriage follows directly on from her life with her father, as Torvald also treats her like a child. Perhaps Ibsen was challenging married couples in his original audience to compare their own relationship to the Helmers', to start a wider debate about the role of women in society as a whole. The treatment of women as simply men's possessions is a dominant theme in *A Doll's House* and Ibsen dramatises Nora's increasing fears for the survival of her marriage if Torvald ever finds out the truth about her ability to manage perfectly well without him.

In *North and South*, I find it very interesting that the context of production itself can be seen as both personal and political from a feminist point of view. Gaskell herself wanted to call the novel Margaret Hale, to stress the importance of the heroine, but she was overruled by Charles Dickens, the editor of the weekly magazine *Household Words* in which it was first published from September 1854 to January 1855. Dickens argued that *North and South* 'encompasses more and emphasises the opposition between people who are forced by circumstances to meet face to face', potentially seeing it as a sequel to his own industrial novel *Hard times*, which preceded it in the magazine (2). The episodic serial structure meant Gaskell had to include regular cliff-hangers like the mystery sub-plot of Margaret's brother Frederick, whose secret presence in Milton makes Thornton 'indulge[e] himself in the torture' of imagining Margaret with another man, and suffer 'savage, distrustful jealousy' (p351) until the union leader Nicholas Higgins tells him the truth. Gaskell's chosen form allows her to engineer a classic romantic 'happy ending', with Margaret taking control of her future. Because Thornton fears Henry Lennox is the 'right' man for Margaret even after the Frederick mistake is cleared up, Margaret has to negotiate her way through a patriarchal society by approaching the man she loves as if purely to strike a business deal, which then prompts him to propose a second time and bring about a classic romantic 'happy ending' entirely opposite to the climax of *A Doll's House*, in which Nora has to abandon her life as a wife and mother in order to be free.

Comparing the way these texts have been received from a feminist point of view, I think Gaskell faced criticism Ibsen never encountered. In 1934 Lord David Cecil claimed 'it would have been impossible for her ... to have found a subject less suited to her talents' than the industrial conflict in *North and south* (3). Unlike Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, who Cecil calls 'ugly, dynamic, childless, independent ... eagles' within the 'placid dovecootes of Victorian womanhood', he stereotypes Gaskell as a ladylike domestic novelist; 'we only have to look at a portrait of [her], soft-eyed, beneath her charming veil, to see that she was a dove' (4). To me Cecil's stance seems dated and sexist; to call Gaskell a 'dove' reflects his belief that she is the wrong kind of female writer to tackle a 'masculine' subject based more on her personality than the actual text. Ironically, however, as Patsy Stoneman points out, while Cecil criticises Gaskell for not being domestic enough, male Marxist critics who see *North and South* as only worthwhile because it's about industrialisation and class conflict tend to write off the love story as basic 'feminine incompetence' (5). Gaskell gets unfairly slated from both sides, in my view. Coming from a feminist standpoint, I see the love story here – as with *A doll's house* - as just as important as the text's wider social issues and it is impossible to pick them apart. Although the political side of *North and south* has often been dismissed, with one critic patronisingly saying 'Gaskell's remedy for discontent ... is a good long talk, preferably round a tea-table' (6), I see Margaret and Thornton's marriage as relevant not just to the 'separate spheres' Victorian gender debate but also to the gulf between what Victorian Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli called 'The Two Nations'.

Moreover although Ibsen himself claimed that *A doll's house* was a humanist as opposed to a feminist text (7), I would argue that as with *North and south*, the central relationship raises big questions about how Victorian society was structured. From the time the play was first performed, women have always seen it as dramatising their experience; the suffragette Louie Bennett declared that 'more than any other modern writer [Ibsen] has proved himself a prophet and an apostle of the cause of women; no other ... has shown more sympathetic comprehension of her nature and its latent powers' (8). In the end, what makes Nora so interesting is that she can be interpreted in many ways; as Ian Johnston notes, 'Nora is both triumphantly right and horribly wrong. She is free, brave, strong, and uncompromisingly herself and, at the same time, socially irresponsible, naïve, self-destructive, and destructive of others' (9). As Torvald cries, 'Before all else you are a wife and a mother' (p68); from a feminist point of view, Nora's personal rebellion against Torvald symbolises the oppression of all women within a patriarchal society.

In both texts, while the heroines act bravely to protect those they care about, they constantly make mistakes because they are working within a patriarchal context where rules are made by men, for men. In *North and south* Margaret refuses Thornton's Milton handshake because she is unaware of the Northern tradition; 'It was the frank familiar custom of the place; but Margaret was not prepared for it. She simply bowed her farewell; although the instant she saw the hand, half put out, quickly drawn back, she was sorry she had not been aware of the intention' (p127). This social error symbolises not just their personal differences but just how much of a fish out of water Margaret is in the North. The fact that a handshake can mean both a sign of peace and that a business deal has been settled shows how Margaret's rejection is not just of John Thornton, but the whole culture of Milton. This crisis can be linked to Nora's complete misreading of Torvald's likely reaction to discovering her links to Nils Krogstad. When Krogstad tells her Torvald will back down and give him back his job at the bank, Nora argues 'That he will never do!' (p44) Krogstad knows better, though; 'He will; I know him; he dare not protest' and this line of dialogue, structured into three definite short sections, makes him much more convincing (p44). Nora's mistake about Torvald's character foreshadows the end of her marriage when she finds out the truth.

Ibsen stated in his Notes for the Modern Tragedy that 'a woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a

judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view' (10). For me the most important link between John Thornton and Torvald Helmer is the way they represent public aspects of a patriarchal culture: business and the law. Following on from this, while Nora follows all the rules for a conventional 'Angel in the House', under the stress of being blackmailed she is driven to contemplate suicide; this shows how slim a woman's chances of survival could be in a male-dominated world. Even Margaret's marriage to Thornton can be interpreted by a feminist reader as an unhappy ending; since the novel was published before the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, the only solution to Margaret's independence is to have her enter a legal contract that gives Thornton total control over her body, money and property. Finally I would like to argue that whereas Margaret saves Thornton from both lynching and bankruptcy and Nora willingly sacrifices everything 'to save [her] husband's life' (p23), their male counterparts struggle to compete with this bravery. Given Thornton's bankruptcy and Torvald's collapse, maybe it is not only women who struggle to survive in a patriarchal society where the personal is always political.

Bibliography and references

A) Primary texts

Elizabeth Gaskell *North and South*, Penguin, 1970
Henrik Ibsen *A Doll's House*, Dover 1992

B) Secondary sources: books and articles

Stephanie Forward, 'A New World for Women?' in *English Review*, April 2009, pp25-27
Patsy Stoneman, 'Will the real Mrs Gaskell please stand up?' in *English Review*, February 1991, p36-40 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_and_South (Gaskell_novel)

C) Secondary sources: film and stage versions

Brian Percival (director) *North and South* (2004) BBC DVD
David Thacker (director) *A Doll's House* (1992) BBC DVD
Carrie Cracknell (director) *A Doll's House* (2013) Young Vic stage production

References

1. Stephanie Forward 'A New World for Women' p26
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_and_South (Gaskell_novel)
3. Patsy Stoneman 'The Real Mrs Gaskell' p36
4. Patsy Stoneman 'The Real Mrs Gaskell' p36
5. Patsy Stoneman 'The Real Mrs Gaskell' p37
6. Patsy Stoneman 'The Real Mrs Gaskell' p40
7. Stephanie Forward 'A New World for Women' p25
8. Stephanie Forward 'A New World for Women' p25
9. Stephanie Forward 'A New World for Women' p27
10. Stephanie Forward 'A New World for Women' p25

*See Appendix A for moderator commentary for this response.

Appendices

Appendix A:

NEA: Independent critical study: texts across time: exemplar response

Moderator commentary

Text and task

The 'role of women' theme common to both chosen texts signals some contextual awareness around the opportunities for women in the nineteenth century. The comparison is framed around the key word present which explicitly invites the student to write about the different genres of her chosen texts and the authorial methods involved (AO2). The inclusion of a clear viewpoint - that 'the personal is political' - implies an awareness of the need to debate and engage with multiple readings and interpretations. The directive 'examine the view' should be familiar to the student from the wording of several component 2 examination questions, so should be taken as a clear invitation to debate this given opinion. These texts and this task should lead the student into some promising areas of study.

Assessment objectives

As with all examined questions in components 1 and 2, component 3 assesses all assessment objectives.

AO1: This is an assured, well written academic essay which uses sophisticated terminology at times but remains clear and cohesive. Appropriate discourse markers help create the sense of an overarching argument and the texts are systematically and equally treated. The student rightly avoids cramming references to both into every paragraph in order to develop their argument, yet effective and original connections are clearly established as she moves fluently, consistently and relevantly between them. This is a confident and engaging essay which has a distinctive personal voice and never sacrifices clarity for a stylistic flourish.

AO2: A notable strength of this essay is that in applying AO2 to her chosen texts, the student does not work only on a lexical level. The student shows perceptive awareness that certain texts lend themselves to illustrating specific ways in which meanings are shaped particularly well, and makes the most of having chosen two texts which offer contrasting forms: a well-made play and a serially published novel. The student discusses symbolism with regard to the 'blushing' in *North and South* and references are well chosen and interesting. Among other structural issues discussed with close attention is the interpolated story of Frederick Hale. The student focuses astutely upon aspects of Ibsen's dramaturgy, such as the structural foreshadowing of Nora's hiding the macaroons from Torvald and, of course, the final door slam, but she also looks closely at Krogstad's dialogue and Nora's speeches. This is assured and impressive work.

AO3: This student chooses their contexts carefully, showing detailed knowledge and a perceptive understanding of the significance of contexts of production, reception, culture, society, history and genre. The student threads these aspects through their essay with verve and confidence, assessing their impact thoughtfully; nothing here seems artificially 'bolted-on'. The student looks at unusual and worthwhile issues such as Dickens's editorial interventions with regard to *North and South* and the extent to which Ibsen's denial of having taken a 'feminist' approach stands up to scrutiny, as well as more mainstream – but still very valuable - contextual matters such as the

‘separate spheres’ Victorian gender debate and the social issues encapsulated in Disraeli’s idea of the ‘Two Nations’.

AO4: The student perceptively explores several connections between the texts around narrative, genre and critical reception as she selectively interweaves their chosen texts in an even-handed and well-balanced manner.

AO5: The student confidently engages with the views of some named critics (Forward, Johnston, Stoneman and, very engagingly, Lord David Cecil) to push forward their own argument. It is this keen ability to perceptively engage with other ways of reading texts – from a Marxist, feminist, dominant and/or oppositional point of view – which perhaps most impresses here. This student shows an ambitious and conceptualised alertness to the idea of different possible readings over time with regard to each of her chosen texts, evaluates these interpretations in detail and with obvious relish, and uses them as a steppingstone into the development of an interesting and persuasive personal overview.

Summary

We have the following evidence with which to assess this student’s performance:

- a clear introduction which successfully orientates the reader and explains the choice of texts
- an argument built around key words identified in task
- a coherent, consistent, conceptualised and comparative argument about two vivid and interesting female characters, the men they marry and the societies in which they live
- confident and fluent movement around both texts to support the argument, with well-selected connections not based on a simplistic chronological, descriptive or narrative approach
- apposite quotations embedded and adapted to the student’s own syntax and required meaning
- a wide range of effective comparisons and contrasts built around the methods used by Gaskell and Ibsen, with explicit attention paid to the ways that meanings are shaped in each text
- a keen awareness of the possibility of reading texts in different ways and a willingness to engage in debate and venture strong personal opinions and counter-arguments (eg Margaret’s marriage to Thornton being a potentially unhappy ending)
- close and perceptive engagement with an impressive range of critical views and theoretical perspectives
- a conclusion which effectively summarises and consolidates the student’s overview of their chosen texts, expressed with a confident sense of personal engagement
- a deftly structured argument well within the permitted 2,500 words
- a wholly appropriate reference and bibliography section which shows the student’s genuine commitment to exploring a range of different interpretations of their chosen texts.

This essay demonstrates all the qualities typical of a strong Band 5 response.

Notes

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