**WJEC Eduqas A level English Literature**

## **A level Component 2 Shakespeare and Drama**

**Section A: Shakespeare**

Points to note:

Part (i) task

1. 15 marks only: AO1 (5) AO2 (10)
2. Timing advice is 20 minutes only – three tasks on this paper, 2 in Section A and one in Section B
3. Question will only require focus on the specified point of the play
4. No reward for context and other views

Part (ii) task

1. 45 marks: AO1 (5) AO2 (10) AO3 (20) AO5 (10)
2. **20 marks for AO3 (*context*)**
3. Timing advice is 40 minutes
4. Context related material must be **integrated** and not added in randomly
5. AO5 (***different interpretations***) must similarly be embedded into the argument

**Section B: Drama**

Points to note re task:

1. 60 marks: AO1 (10 marks) AO2 (10 marks) AO3 (10 marks) AO4 (20 marks) AO5 (10 marks)
2. Timing advice is 60 minutes
3. This task carries more marks for AO4 **(*connections*)** than any other AO but connections must be **relevant to the question focus**
4. Context related material and different interpretations must be integrated into the argument as in Section A part (ii) and must be relevant to the question focus

Examples of how to address some of the relevant assessment objectives are shown on the following pages. They have been taken from two sources: candidate responses to the WJEC legacy specification paper *LT4 Poetry and Drama 2*, and some trialled responses to the specimen paper for *Eduqas A level Component 2 Drama*. We are indebted to those centres which have provided us with trialled responses.

Integrating context and different interpretations into extended writing tasks for Eduqas Component 2 Drama

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| **AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received** |

Although these responses in section (i) are taken from the WJEC legacy specification unit *LT4 Poetry and Drama 2*, they are useful in illustrating how candidates approach context. The skills required are the same in the new specification, as integration of context is a crucial skill in responding to drama texts. It is important to remember that in the legacy specification this unit stipulated ‘core’ and ‘partner’ texts for study, with the main textual study that of a Shakespeare play, with the ‘partner’ text read to illuminate the candidate’s understanding of the Shakespeare play.

In the new Eduqas Drama component Shakespeare is studied as a single text in Section A, with the two play study featuring in Section B, where both texts are of equal weight and status.

1. **Integrating context in examination responses to legacy specification LT4 Section B**

Example A: responding to legacy question 8 *Hamlet* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*

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| “It is Hamlet’s indecision and delay which make him a convincing character.” Consider Shakespeare’s presentation of Prince Hamlet in the light of this remark. In the course of your writing, show how your reading of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* has illuminated your ideas. |

Extract from candidate’s response:

Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’ detaches itself from other revenge tragedies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age like the early ‘Titus Andronicus’ and later ‘The Revenger’s Tragedy’ for the protagonist’s lack of action. Hamlet has doubts of the accused and conviction in the immorality of his father’s murder and yet his role as a thinker mars his ability to carry out, or even plot the revenge tasked upon him. His indecision in the fields of religion, morality, life and death starkly contrast the conviction of Vindice, who stops at nothing to get his revenge. While Hamlet is not the typical revenger, his questioning nature and lack of barbaric nature make him a more relatable character for audiences at all times.

Later in this response:

Shakespeare presents doubts in religion throughout the play. With a Protestant queen on the throne but a ruthless Catholic one not long before her, Shakespeare’s time was one of great religious uncertainty. We see this in ‘Hamlet’. Laertes studies in Paris, typically Catholic and Horatio in Wittenberg, home of Luther’s Reformation…. Hamlet’s uncertainty whether to trust the Catholic Ghost or distrust the Protestant devil is reason for his inaction until The Mousetrap.

**Comment:**

We see in this response a clear use of literary and cultural contexts: revenge tragedies, religion, history. At all times the candidate has **integrated** them purposefully into a focused discussion of Hamlet’s indecision/delay/’convincing character’ as presented in the question

Example B: responding to legacy question 8:

Extract from candidate’s response:

First performed in 1603, Hamlet is set in Denmark and in fact Shakespeare took his inspiration for the writing of this play from true events, although he incorporated a more modern spin into this dated occurrence. Shakespeare portrays Hamlet as an ideological character and perhaps more feminine in terms of physical capability and mental attributes. He is not the ‘warlike figure’ that his father, Old Hamlet, once was and his cunning actions are more intellectual rather than brutish and upfront….

Shakespeare was commissioned to produce Hamlet by the monarchy..

**Comment:**

Historical/cultural contexts are offered as detached statements which are not integrated into discussion pertinent to the question. The focus on Hamlet’s characterisation is approached as a separate component to the response, and there is little attempt to link the text to contexts.

Example C: responding to legacy question 9 *Hamlet* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*

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| Examine Shakespeare’s presentation of royalty and court life in *Hamlet.* In the course of your writing, make comparative reference to the presentation of the ruling classes in *The Revenger’s Tragedy.* |

Extract from candidate’s response:

Claudius’ corruption and arrogance are exaggerated further when he maintains that “there’s such divinity doth hedge a King”. Whilst the contemporary audience would have accepted Claudius’ statement, as they firmly believed in ‘the divine right of kings’, his statement is highly ironic, as Claudius himself is guilty of regicide, but it is the irony that enables Shakespeare to expose Claudius’ corruption.

Later in the response:

Shakespeare also presents royalty and court life as corrupt in ‘Hamlet’ as spying and manipulation are rife throughout the play. In particular, Shakespeare presents court as a location of bitter rivalry and the need for advancement, as was similar in the Elizabethan court, where faction was likewise rife.

**Comment:**

In a discussion of Claudius’ role in ‘royalty and court life’, this candidate integrates the contemporary historical context and the audience reception context to show an appreciation and understanding of Shakespeare’s techniques. The focus on the question is neatly maintained.

1. **Integrating context in trialled responses to Component 2 Drama specimen paper Section B**

Extracts only are offered from these trialled responses, and it is important to remember that they are intended to be useful as snapshots of a particular approach to the question. In some cases the response is developed further by purposeful textual analysis, discussion of contexts and different interpretations. In others there is an overdependence on the AS set text, in this case *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with extensive separate discussion of this text. However, we should bear in mind that these responses were completed at the start of the A level course and under timed conditions.

Q. 8 *How far would you agree that Webster and Williams are alike in “creating settings and locations which speak volumes about social attitudes” in The Duchess of Malfi and A Streetcar Named Desire?*

Extract from trialled response (1):

In both plays, the playwrights set the action in confined places with a lack of privacy. In ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’, the whole play is set and performed in one location, Stanley and Stella’s apartment…in scene 10, ‘the back wall of the set becomes transparent.’ This reflects how Blanche’s private life is completely laid bare within the play, which causes her destruction. In this way, the setting also reflects Tennessee Williams’ social attitudes in regard to the ‘New America’ he saw emerging in the Northern States. Tennessee Williams saw their way of life as coarse and brutal, with a focus on money instead of sensitivity; the ‘New America’ destroyed the weak members of society in the same way Stanley destroys Blanche.

Comment:

We see a clear grasp of the question and a strong attempt to link texts to social historical contexts, at least in respect of one of the paired texts in this short extract. Themes and characterisation are considered in discussing setting, locations and social attitudes and so context is integrated into the argument.

Extract from trialled response (2):

*‘A Streetcar Named Desire’ is set in post-war New Orleans and is a typical cosmopolitan city. The people are integrated, and live more carefree lives; this is one of the few cities in America that became more accepting of the African Americans after the second World War. This is shown by Williams through the use of the negro woman at the beginning of the play, as it suggests that she is a common figure in life in this city…However, she also provides a point of contrast in her interactions with Blanche, who lived in the south of the USA, where racism was generally more prevalent…. In general, Blanche’s unease in this setting implies the different attitudes to class and race that were evident in America at Williams’ time of writing.*

Comment:

Although ‘setting’/ ‘location’ are tackled here, the approach at the start of the extract is descriptive/narrative. Once dramatic technique (‘point of contrast’) is considered, there is a better attempt to try to link texts to contexts in the final sentence.

***Common pitfalls in approaching AO3 context***

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| * *Narrating or describing context* * *Context not linked to text* * *Context not linked to question focus* * *Context dealt separately from discussion addressing AO1/AO2/AO4/AO5* |

**Indicators of good integration of context**

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| * Clear grasp of contextual focus in question * Purposeful use of relevant contexts in relation to question focus * Contexts discussed closely in conjunction with dramatic technique, characterisation, setting, themes, different interpretations * Contexts applied thoughtfully in exploring connections between the two plays * Clear grasp of significance/influence of contexts |

***Integrating different interpretations* in SectionB Drama**

1. **Examination responses to legacy specification LT4**

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| **AO5: Explore how literary texts are informed by different interpretations** |

Example A: responding to legacy question 6 *King Lear* and *Oedipus Rex*

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| Some critics have argued that Shakespeare has presented Goneril, Regan and Edmund as victims rather than villains. With comparative reference to Sophocles’ presentation of Oedipus’ family circumstances, show how far you sympathise with this view. |

Extract from candidate’s response:

Feminist schools of thought have been known to argue that “Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them as unequal.” Personally, I would challenge this comment because although some aspects of Goneril and Regan are presented as those of victims, the two women are demonised and portrayed as extremely villainous in comparison with their sister Cordelia, whom John Danby described as ‘virtue’ in Shakespeare’s eyes. ..The pair are Elizabethan/Jacobean England’s worst nightmare – outspoken, violent women, contrasting to the pure Cordelia whose only act of rebellion is to “love, and be silent.”

**Comment:**

The question is addressed confidently, balancing personal response with different interpretations from other critics. The focus on victims/villains is sustained and deftly handled

throughout, so that the whole paragraph presents an integrated response to the assessment objectives and the question.

Example B: responding to legacy question 7 *King Lear* and *Oedipus Rex*

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| “A study of selfishness.” Consider some of the ways this remark might be applied to the play *King Lear* and show how your reading of *Oedipus Rex* has illuminated your ideas. |

Extract from candidate’s response:

Critics argue that Edgar is essential to the theme of division and is a device that provokes Lear to question whether “is man no more than this?”, a realization which arguably comes too late. Hence, a study into Lear’s treatment of the poor reveals his neglectful and selfish nature...

Felicity Currie describes the Fool as “the most effective truth teller in the play” which can be seen in how his witty insults and aphorisms both mock and reassure Lear – guiding him throughout the play and only appearing when needed. This is mirrored in how the Chorus is “the only one left” with Oedipus and are significantly referred to as “friend”…Hence the Chorus’ selfless nature and the Fool’s loyalty help to ground, rationalize and reform their selfish kings.

**Comment:**

This response uses both general and specific critical viewpoints to explore the two plays. The critical perspectives enrich the candidate’s approach to the question focus – selfishness – and help to clarify thinking on connections between the plays and on authorial technique.

1. **Integrating different interpretations in trialled responses to specimen question 8**

Extract from trialled response (1):

It is through her imprisonment, later on in the play, that Webster illustrates how even a noblewoman who rejects these social attitudes is herself doomed to become restricted and silenced, so long as the rest of society disagrees. In this sense, the ‘dangerous glamour’ as said in ‘The Trail of the Duchess of Malfi’ is truly brought to light. While the beautiful Italian backdrop may have provided a sense of fantasy and escapism to 17th century audiences, it is clearly not without its own societal dangers.

Comment:

A critical source is used briefly but deftly here to enrich the focus on the question and to show how different interpretations have ‘informed’ the learner’s understanding of *The Duchess of Malfi.* In addition, we see a confident personal viewpoint expressed in the last sentence, evidence of the learner forming her own interpretations of the text.

Extract from trialled response (2):

Throughout the play, Williams presents Stanley as being brash, animalistic, and has the ability to induce people’s discomfort. The ‘wind’ setting and ‘out of place’ setting help to support this idea of Stanley.

Arguably, Webster does this also. He describes Ferdinand and the Cardinal as being “like crooked plum trees that grow over/standing pools”. Both characters have very little respect for women, and hold their masculine power over their sister. Critics describe Ferdinand as being “incestuous minded and insidiously mad”, which supports the notion of him having ‘crooked’ morals. The use of setting in terms of referring to them as the court’s “crooked’ trees signifies that their morality, a major social issue in the courts, could be seriously questioned.

**Comment:**

From a discussion of the poker game setting in ‘*Streetcar*’, this response goes on to explore connections with ‘*The Duchess of Malfi’*. Setting, the question focus, is consistently addressed and different interpretations are offered sensibly to develop the argument further and to enrich the learner’s reading and understanding of how meanings are shaped in the text.

**Making effective use of different interpretations**

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| Different interpretations/critical views:   * must be integrated into the argument * should be used to inform/enrich/explore the texts * should not be referred to or quoted in isolation/described/narrated * should not be quoted extensively at the expense of textual discussion * should be used only in relation to the question * may include alternative ideas/independent viewpoints/multiple readings |

1. **Making effective connections in Section B trialled responses to specimen question 8**

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| **AO4: Explore connections across different literary texts** |

**Extract from trialled response (1):**

**Both Webster and Williams write female protagonists who exist in male-dominated societies, something entirely damaging for them both, and which makes the sexist social attitudes of the time particularly poigniant to a modern reader. The Duchess is presented w**ith **apricots, with the aim of her brothers to cut ‘capers in her belly’, and reveal her to have been behaving in a socially unacceptable way – marrying a man of lower status and then becoming pregnant with his child.**

**Blanche experiences a much more brutal and inhumane exertion of the male power dynamic, when Stanley ‘picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed’ and she is raped by him. This, while clearly not reflecting social attitudes in a broad sense, is a powerful mechanism through which the setting in a house frequently occupied by lower class (and in Blanche’s opinion brutish) men is able to communicate the extent to which at this time, there was certainly a stronger gender divide between men and women.**

**Both the Duchess and Blanche experience men controlling their bodies as a means of gaining power, and while Webster arguably does so and makes a valid criticism of corruption among nobles and the rich it is debateable whether or not the same could be said for Williams.**

**Comment:**

**There is a clear attempt here to explore connections between the two plays, rather than discussing them in separate sections of the response. It is encouraging to see a clear engagement with the question focus at the forefront of this exploration of connections.**

**Connections are made between protagonists, social context, dramatic technique and different interpretations, where the last paragraph enters into debate regarding differences as well as similarities.**

Extract from trialled response (2):

*Both ‘Streetcar’ and ‘Duchess’ show positive attitudes to class systems being renewed and improved: the courts in ‘Duchess’ and the divide of wealth and race in ‘Streetcar’. However, the two playwrites do it in different ways. While Webster is keen to point out the flaws in the current political system, Williams uses positivity to praise the modern ideas of less segregation. For example, Webster uses ‘Why should we not adopt such a trend?’ to question society about why the civilisation has not become more modern, and through the Duchess’ liberal and open-minded views a negative light is shone on the current state of affairs in England. In contrast, Williams uses ‘I pulled you down off them columns and you loved it’ to show how the mixing of class high and low is good as it is portrayed in a fun and exciting way…*

Comment:

This response attempts to explore 'social attitudes' in both plays further and does this through contrast as well as comparison. There are errors in expression: playwrite' and some awkwardness : 'Webster uses'; 'Williams uses', however there is a clear attempt to discuss the plays, playwrights and topic as an integrated exploration rather than consider the plays separately.

Extract from trialled response (3*):*

*Both writers comment on the questionable morals of men using setting. Williams uses the ‘lurid’ nature of the poker game to signify Stanley’s cruel, overbearing nature. It creates a tense atmosphere, and the audience worries for Stanley’s safety. This was the situation with a lot of households in 1947. Men were dominant, possessive and arrogant, thinking themselves to be above anything or anyone else. Stanley’s poker game setting sets the audience on edge, which is an effective way of commenting on the social issue of the male/female dynamic in the late 1940s.*

*Webster also comments on the immorality of men. The brothers’ ‘crooked’ nature leads them to horribly mistreat their sister, and they become murderous.*

Comment:

Although there is an attempt to explore both plays together within the question framework, this response relies too much on generalisation, especially in respect of contexts. There is only general comment on The Duchess of Malfi text, and the response could have benefited from closer textual analysis to illuminate the connections.

Making Connections Count

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| Candidates must:   * first consider the **focus of connections** in the question framework * avoid discussing the plays separately while discussing connections * explore connections where **relevant to the question** between characters, contexts, language and dramatic techniques and different interpretations * show engagement with any **relevant** differences as well as similarities * key positive descriptors for A04 in the assessment grid re **connections**: *valid, clear, appropriate, sound, secure, purposeful, productive, illuminating*. |