

Cambridge IGCSE / IGCSE (9-1) / O Level Literature in English

The aim of this video is to give you and your learners a breakdown of Assessment Objective 4 and how it is assessed. However, remember that for each candidate answer, all four assessment objectives are considered by the examiner. The best candidate responses will consider all four when answering a question.

Drama Assessment Objective 4

AO4: Communicate a sensitive and informed personal response to literary texts.

Notes

Creating a sensitive and informed response to a Shakespeare play can seem daunting. The language is complex. Shakespeare was a poet and he loved to play with language and to create new words (neologisms) whenever he found the word he wanted did not exist. And the meanings in his texts are multiple and deep, and his characters are crafted with care and attention to detail.

Romeo and Juliet and *Macbeth* are two of the most studied and performed of Shakespeare's plays.

So how do you manage to create a response that is personal as well as sensitive and informed?

The **informed** element can be seen as the easiest element for candidates. An informed response will use the Assessment Objective 1 knowledge of the text in parallel with the Assessment Objective 3 understanding of language, form and structure, to relate the text to itself and its themes as we saw in the Assessment Objective 1 video example from *Macbeth*.

A **sensitive** response requires candidates to then link their informed response with their Assessment Objective 2 knowledge of context. A personal response is more difficult to achieve at a higher level.

Candidates will have to demonstrate a personal response sometimes directly (answering questions such as '**What do you think?**', 'What are your feelings about...?') and sometimes by implication (answering questions such as '**Explore the ways** in which...')

Act 1 Scene 4

Macbeth

[*Aside*] The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires:
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

One mistake candidates often make is losing an academic writing style to demonstrate their personal response: 'I don't like Macbeth because he is ambitious as we can see from the quote, "**black and deep desires**".

Notes

Every time you perform a critical analysis you are giving a personal response. You have selected which quotes you believe are important to make your case. You have chosen which elements of the texts combine to further enhance your answer.

'Macbeth is presented as an unlikable character because of his ambition. His "black and deep desires" create an image of a dark and ingrained evil that hungers for power.'

Although this response is a personal response it is not yet informed or sensitive. Now we need to add our understanding of Assessment Objective 3 language, form and structure.

'The adjectives "black" and "deep" connote a malevolence that goes to the core of Macbeth's being. This combined with the plural abstract noun "desires" reflects his emotional hunger for power.'

To develop this further, we add our Assessment Objective 1 knowledge of the text...

Act 3 Scene 2

Macbeth

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale! Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood:
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marvell'st at my words: but hold thee still;
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
So, prithee, go with me.

'...The connection between darkness, evil and ambition is also seen in Act 3 Scene 2 when Macbeth refers to "night's black agents".'

Act 1 Scene 5

Lady Macbeth

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

Notes

The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

'...This connection is further emphasised by Lady Macbeth in Act 1 Scene 5 as she calls for "**thick night**" to create a "**blanket of the dark**".'

Now we have a response that is personal and fairly well informed. All we need to do now is make it sensitive by adding some of our Assessment Objective 2 knowledge of context.

'The connections between dark deeds and ambition could be seen to represent the political situation at the time *Macbeth* was written. King James I, for whom the play was written, had personal experience of the dangers of political ambition as both his parents were killed for political motives and he was the intended victim of the Gunpowder Plot. The fact that lexis such as "black" and "dark" is used by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, could be considered as associating them with witchcraft. Witchcraft, besides being a key theme of the play, was an area studied by James I and it is unsurprising that Shakespeare presented his main evil characters as in league with witches both literally and linguistically.'

'Although the modern western audience would not necessarily connect words such as black and dark with witchcraft, and the idea of witchcraft in the traditional sense is no longer accepted as real, the semantic association to bad deeds is still evident and the idea of malevolent beings is still scary'.

Now we shall run through an example without breaking down the assessment objectives.

Let's imagine we have been asked who we think is the most important character in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Before we start, ask yourself who you think is most important.

Act 5 Scene 3

Capulet

O brother Montague, give me thy hand:
This is my daughter's jointure, for no more
Can I demand.

Montague

But I can give thee more:
For I will raise her statue in pure gold;
That while Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set
As that of true and faithful Juliet.

Notes

Capulet

As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie;
Poor sacrifices of our enmity!

Prince

A glooming peace this morning with it brings;
The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head:
Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;
Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished:
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

Exeunt

'The title of the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, suggests to the audience that Romeo is more important as his name comes first. However, when we look at the final moments of the final scene we learn that our story of woe was of "**Juliet and her Romeo**". This combination of Juliet being named first and the use of the possessive pronoun "**her**" to refer to Romeo demonstrates her greater importance in the story. This is further highlighted by Montague's offer to build a statue to "**true and faithful Juliet**" which emphasises her positive qualities, and Capulet's offer to build one for Romeo which will "**by his lady's lie**" implying possession and giving Juliet the higher-status title. The building of a sonnet structure during the final 15 lines creates a sense of coming together which ends with Juliet as the higher-status character and is a counterpoint to the prologue's "Two households. Both alike in dignity".

Furthermore, this is echoed in their death scenes.

Act 4 Scene 3

Juliet

Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again.
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life:
I'll call them back again to comfort me:
Nurse! What should she do here?
My dismal scene I needs must act alone.
Come, vial.
What if this mixture do not work at all?
Shall I be married then to-morrow morning?
No, no: this shall forbid it: lie thou there.

Laying down her dagger

What if it be a poison, which the friar
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead,
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,
Because he married me before to Romeo?

Notes

I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not,
 For he hath still been tried a holy man.
 How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
 I wake before the time that Romeo
 Come to redeem me? there's a fearful point!
 Shall I not, then, be stifled in the vault,
 To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,
 And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?
 Or, if I live, is it not very like,
 The horrible conceit of death and night,
 Together with the terror of the place,--
 As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,
 Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
 Of all my buried ancestors are packed:
 Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
 Lies festered in his shroud; where, as they say,
 At some hours in the night spirits resort;--
 Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
 So early waking, what with loathsome smells,
 And shrieks like mandrakes' torn out of the earth,
 That living mortals, hearing them, run mad:--
 O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
 Environed with all these hideous fears?
 And madly play with my forefathers' joints?
 And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
 And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
 As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?
 O, look! methinks I see my cousin's ghost
 Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
 Upon a rapier's point: stay, Tybalt, stay!
 Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.

She falls upon her bed, within the curtains

Act 5 Scene 3**Romeo**

In faith, I will. Let me peruse this face.
 Mercutio's kinsman, noble County Paris!
 What said my man, when my betossed soul
 Did not attend him as we rode? I think
 He told me Paris should have married Juliet:

Notes

Said he not so? or did I dream it so?
 Or am I mad, hearing him talk of Juliet,
 To think it was so? O, give me thy hand,
 One writ with me in sour misfortune's book!
 I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave;
 A grave? O no! a lantern, slaughter'd youth,
 For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
 This vault a feasting presence full of light.
 Death, lie thou there, by a dead man interr'd.

Laying PARIS in the tomb

How oft when men are at the point of death
 Have they been merry! which their keepers call
 A lightning before death: O, how may I
 Call this a lightning? O my love! my wife!
 Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
 Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
 Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there.
 Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?
 O, what more favour can I do to thee,
 Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain
 To sunder his that was thine enemy?
 Forgive me, cousin! Ah, dear Juliet,
 Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
 That unsubstantial death is amorous,
 And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
 Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
 For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
 And never from this palace of dim night
 Depart again: here, here will I remain
 With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
 Will I set up my everlasting rest,
 And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
 From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!
 Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
 The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
 A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
 Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!
 Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on

Notes

The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
Here's to my love!

Drinks

O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.

Dies

Although Juliet's death scene is less involved than Romeo's, the fact that she dies by the blade implies that she is brave and determined, unlike Romeo who chooses the more simple and feminine method of poison. The parallel between Romeo's drinking of the apothecary's "**quick**" feminine poison in Act 5 Scene 3 despite having a masculine dagger, and Juliet's pretend death by a non-fatal poison whilst prepared to use the masculine dagger in Act 4 Scene 3 also demonstrate Juliet as the braver and more grounded character. The contrast found within the series of rhetorical questions each character asks is also a stark one. While Romeo is focused on how Juliet can remain so "**fair**", Juliet is considering the realities of her situation as she faces waking surrounded by "**mangled Tybalt**" and her "**great kinsman's bones**".

We have looked at how writing an informed, sensitive and personal response (AO4) combines understanding language, structure and form (AO3) to help us open up and understand the text (AO1) more deeply (AO2).