

## Revision guidelines for A Level English Literature

The notes which follow are taken from the overhead projector transparencies used during a revision day for A Level students in 2001 organised by A-Grades Conferences. They are not the complete text of the talks but are intended to highlight the key points which were made. We hope that they are helpful. The main focus for these notes is AQA/AEB 0660 English Literature Paper 2, the set texts paper.

All students were given a sheet summarising some of the points most frequently made by examiners in reports. This is provided separately; the sections which follow concentrate on a few key points.

In addition, we provide separate notes on two of the set texts covered during the day: *The Rivals* and *Mansfield Park*.

### Interrogating the literary text

Interrogating the text to make meaning — and to address the assessment grid — could be expressed (in a simplified way) as answering these questions:

- ? What does it say?      *Level 1*      (*narrative: the story*)
- ? What does it mean?      *Level 2*      (*'implicit meaning'*)
- ? How is it written?      *Level 3*      (*style: looking at language*)
- ? What is my response?      *Level 4*      (*a well-informed personal response*)

### Key words that appear in questions

These include:

- ? importance
- ? effect on your thoughts and feelings
- ? how do your thoughts and feelings develop
- ? explore
- ? ways (something) is presented
- ? how do you respond to ...
- ? what do you consider to be ...
- ? what do you find interesting
- ? how far do you feel
- ? do you think
- ? how (does the writer present)
- ? what do you find significant

### Good candidates concentrate on

- ? presentation
- ? effect (eg 'dramatic effect')
- ? characterisation
- ? how characters react to each other
- ? how effects are created
- ? writers' use of language

- ? using evidence — apt and succinct extracts
- ? an *informed* personal response
- ? close reading
- ? making connections
- ? the multi-layered nature of text
- ? writing a coherent, structured answer
- ? aware of background

### **Examiners write...**

Examiners often write these or similar words in the margins of answers because the script fails to provide the information they want:

- ? Show me!
- ? How?

This is because, in each case, the candidate is not demonstrating how a point can be demonstrated in the text. This is what is referred to in the marking grid as 'unsupported assertion'. See how the second example below uses neatly integrated quotations to provide evidence; this kind of support will lead to a tick or a 'good' in the margin instead!

### **Two examples**

#### **An illustration of how not to begin an answer**

*An extract from an essay on a play:*

The first scene is very important to a play as it is the opening to the rest of the story. I am going to identify how successful the first scene in this play prepares the audience for the rest of the play.

The stage directions at the beginning of this scene are very descriptive. The writer is helping the audience to create a picture of the town in their minds. The descriptions of the buildings are very effective as well as the people...

*Already the examiner is writing the very common remark — 'Show me!' — in the margin!*

*The candidate does not given any evidence to support the claims made.*

#### **A well focused opening**

*This is from an answer on a novel:*

McEwan presents many significant events in Chapter 5 which are symbolic of Stephen's recognition of the redemption process.

The *Authorised Childcare Handbook* opens the chapter with the authoritarian view of childcare. 'Childhood is an invention' is later reinforced by Charles' artificial and idealised view of childhood. When Stephen studied Charles' recreation of childhood later in the chapter, he noted that 'it was too correct to be convincing....'

*Here the candidate conveys a sense of the whole chapter and is indicating that the answer will convey an overview of the novel. The answer is already using neatly integrated quotations.*