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GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE



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SAMPLE

Example Response for Section A: Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'

Read the following extract from Act 1, Scene 5 of 'Romeo and Juliet' and then answer the questions. At this point in the play Romeo and Juliet have just met.

ROMEO

If I profane with my unworhiest hand,
This holy shrine; the gentle fine is this;
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

Explore how Shakespeare presents attitudes towards love:

a) In this extract

b) In the play as a whole.

[30 marks] A04 [4 marks]

EXTRACT FROM A 'GOOD' SAMPLE ANSWER

In this extract, Shakespeare uses language to suggest that love is a spiritual and Godly emotion. We see this through his use of language when Romeo continually uses religious imagery when explaining his feelings to Juliet. He calls Juliet a 'holy shrine', which suggests that Juliet is a deity. Romeo also professes that he himself is a 'pilgrim'—someone on a religious journey to visit a sacred site. This extended metaphor continues throughout the extract and is used by Shakespeare to suggest that the love felt by Romeo and Juliet is pure, holy and sacred.

Shakespeare uses form to convey the importance of the love between Romeo and Juliet. The combined conversation between the two joins together to complete a perfect sonnet. A sonnet is a form of love poetry, which has fourteen lines of iambic

pentameter, with the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Shakespeare's employment of form is here used to symbolise that the couple are perfect for each other and they complete each other. Only when united together do their words create a sonnet, symbolising how they can only find true love when joined together. The audience would feel delighted that these two, both so clearly unhappy with the way their lives are heading, have found perfect happiness.

In the wider context of the play, Shakespeare presents love as a very sexual experience. We see this in Act 1 when Romeo laments that Rosaline would not 'ope her lap to saint seducing gold'. Romeo is here explaining that Rosaline would not have sex with him, even when offered money. This suggests that love is a very sexual experience.

Whilst this answer is quite sophisticated (particularly the points concerning form), it fails to come across as a well-constructed argument. There is no link between the three paragraphs; it reads as three totally different ideas: love as religious, love as perfect, love as sexual. To hit the top marks, you need to create a thread of argument that fits these points together. Rephrasing the answer in this way would then allow us to present a well-structured argument.

The example response on the next page illustrates a clear thread of discussion. It is, however, longer than anything a student would be able to write under timed exam conditions. It's been included as a teaching tool, particularly so that you can see examples of language, form, structure and context woven together in a thread of argument.

As you read, consider which bits you would use in an exam.

EXTRACT FROM A 'BETTER' SAMPLE ANSWER

Both in this extract and the wider play, Shakespeare presents love as all-encompassing, filling every aspect of life. To begin with, the extract is the inciting incident of the play when Romeo and Juliet first meet. This is important because it causes the conflict that leads to the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Perhaps Shakespeare is showing the audience how love is not all positive, and the choices we make have clear consequences not just for ourselves, but for others as well.

Despite this, Shakespeare suggests that love is a spiritual and Godly emotion. We see this through Shakespeare's use of language where Romeo continually uses religious imagery; he calls Juliet a 'holy shrine', which suggests that Juliet is a deity. Romeo also professes that he is a 'pilgrim'—someone on a religious journey to visit a sacred site. This extended metaphor continues throughout the extract and is used by Shakespeare to suggest that Romeo and Juliet's love is pure, holy and sacred. This is the first time the audience has seen Romeo use such religious language and, as result, we are inclined to believe that he is genuinely in love. As the play is set in Italy, a very religious city, the use of religious language seems appropriate for the historical period.

Furthermore, we have the structural feature of mirroring when Juliet repeats Romeo's words (for example 'pilgrim'). Perhaps this shows us that she is naïve and following his lead, or it might show that her feelings for Romeo match his for her.

Interestingly, when we consider male-female relationships of the time, this could also reflect how men were dominant and took the lead.

If the spiritual aspect of love is one side, the other side of love is the physical and sexual aspect, which is presented as being just as important by Shakespeare. Earlier in the play, Romeo laments how Rosaline will not 'ope her lap for saint seducing gold'. This line is ambiguous, but seems to suggest that Romeo had offered Rosaline payment in return for sexual gratification. Here, Shakespeare is presenting a different side to love—not only is it spiritual, but also physical. The message is clear: love is all-encompassing and all-consuming. The audience would note that two seemingly contrasting topics are used to discuss the theme of love, suggesting that in true love there is no contrast: all is united. At the time in which the play was written, arranged marriages were the norm between the middle and upper classes. An Elizabethan audience would therefore understand Shakespeare's message that true love transcends the conventions of society.

Finally, Shakespeare uses form to convey this all-encompassing nature of love. The combined conversation between the two in the extract joins together to complete a perfect sonnet. Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnets are a form of love poetry that have fourteen lines of iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Shakespeare's employment of form is here used to symbolise that the couple are perfect for each other, and that they complete each other. Only when united together do their words create a sonnet, symbolising how they can only find true love when joined together. The audience would feel delighted that these two, both so clearly unhappy with the way their lives are heading, have found perfect happiness. Perfect love, it seems clear, is the joined combination of spiritual and physical romance.

As you can see, I didn't have to do much to join my points together into one well-constructed argument. It just required a little thought. Throughout both literature papers, this is something you need to do to achieve the highest marks available. When we get to the poetry, there are some poems that compare better than others simply because they have a strong line of argument between them.

Many students fail to realise that every exam question can elicit a conceptualised, well-argued response. When writing exam questions, examiners have to spend a lot of time thinking about the possible responses. You too must give yourself at least a few minutes of planning time to think about a line of argument in the exam.

RELATING YOUR POINTS TO THE TEXT AS A WHOLE

The above response is an example of a top-band response, which not only has a thread of discussion but also analyses language, structure and form in detail.

Remember, this is a closed book exam. Because of this, the bulk of your answer should focus on the given extract.

The exam question will also ask you to write about the theme's presentation in the text as a whole. There is no requirement to write an equal amount to your response to the extract. In fact, it is fine to write more about the extract and perhaps one good paragraph about the rest of the text. If you are inspired to write in more detail, here's an example response about the rest of the text:

THE REST OF THE TEXT

In Act 3, Scene 5, Shakespeare presents two contrasting views of love. To begin, Juliet and Romeo have had their first night together in bed. Shakespeare uses overexaggerated language to show just how in love they are. Juliet argues that the sun is not the sun but is, in fact 'some meteor that the sun exhales, to be to thee this night a torch-bearer'. She argues that the sun has fired out a meteor, which will be a light to guide Romeo on his way home to Mantua. This kind of passionate exaggeration is one of the conventions of courtly love. Courtly love is a historical concept that centres on two members of the nobility who secretly love each other. In literature, tales of courtly love always include examples of passionate exaggeration as well as imagery related to nature. As we can see in this quotation, Juliet includes both in her comments to Romeo. Shakespeare is here using the well-known conventions of courtly love to highlight just how much the couple love each other.

This loving relationship with Romeo is juxtaposed with the relationship Juliet has with Lord Capulet. Shakespeare uses structure, putting both relationships next to each other in one scene, to heighten the difference between the two.

The relationship between Juliet and her father is one in which he is possessive and controlling. In Act 3 Scene 5 Juliet refuses to do as her father orders, which is to marry Paris. He then insults her by calling her 'baggage'. This suggests that, just like a bag, she is a burden to him—a weight that weighs him down and an accessory. It suggests that she is his possession to do with as he pleases. Just like a bag, she is unimportant to him. Juliet would have been heartbroken to be called this, but an Elizabethan audience would have sided with her father. This is because in the 1500s, arranged marriages were normal for middle-class families. It was acceptable for parents to choose marriage partners, so the audience would have agreed that Juliet should follow her father's instruction. A modern audience would be outraged, as women's rights have moved on, and a modern viewer would believe that Juliet should be able to do as she pleases.

Note that context is assessed in the Shakespeare question, and so this response weaves in knowledge of context as a secondary factor to support other points. You can do this with section A or Section B or both. Be aware, however, that your analysis of language, form and structure and your knowledge of the texts are worth more marks, so these AOs should be your main focus. Buy 'Mr Bruff's Guide to 'Romeo and Juliet'' at www.mrbruff.com

Example Response for Section A: Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'

Read the following extract from Act 1, Scene 1 of 'Macbeth' and then answer the questions.

Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches.

FIRST WITCH

When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH

When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH

That will be ere the set of sun.

FIRST WITCH

Where the place?

SECOND WITCH

Upon the heath.

Third Witch

There to meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH

I come, Graymalkin!

SECOND WITCH

Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH

Anon!

ALL

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air.
Exeunt

Explore how Shakespeare presents the witches:

- a) In this extract**
- b) In the play as a whole**

[30 marks] A04 [4

marks]

EXAMPLE ANSWER

Because the extract is at the beginning of the play, it is part of the exposition (Freytag's pyramid), and Shakespeare's decision to introduce us to the witches from the outset shows that they are significant to the plot. The witches introduce the theme of the supernatural and, in Jacobean times, the witches would have been a big draw for audiences because there was a huge amount of interest (and belief) in witchcraft and the supernatural. King James I, Shakespeare's patron, was particularly interested in witches, having written a book on the subject

(‘Daemonologie’). It was also illegal to practise witchcraft—King James I of England was also King James VI of Scotland. He is estimated to be responsible for the burning of 4,000 alleged witches in Scotland. Believing in witches, he once took, according to contemporary accounts, ‘great delight’ in torturing a suspect. Beginning the play with this scene is therefore not only a good way to grab the interest of the audience but also of the king, an important source of revenue.

The curiosity of the audience is also aroused because we meet the witches when they have just finished doing something. The first lines of the play are: ‘When shall we three meet again/In thunder, lightning, or in rain?’ This prompts the curiosity of the audience. The interrogative with the reference to the weather also introduces a dark world full of confusion, and we associate the witches with evil, as they align themselves with bad weather.

The form used by the witches is trochaic tetrameter with stressed syllables followed by unstressed syllables. For example:

Fair is foul and foul is fair

The last stressed syllable ‘fair’ is not followed by a stressed syllable, which creates a frightening sense of finality: they are turning the world upside down, and we cannot stop it. The witches are the only characters in the play to speak in trochaic tetrameter (the other characters speak in either blank verse or prose); this heightens a sense of their otherworldliness and makes them stand out from the rest of the characters, emphasising their wickedness.

The witches also use alliteration with ‘Fair is foul and foul is fair’ to create a sinister mood to the play. This is because it draws the attention of the audience to the juxtaposition of the words themselves: everything that is good (‘fair’) is now bad (‘foul’) and everything that is bad is now good. This is emphasised through the use of rhyming couplets to create a fast pace. For example: ‘Fair is foul and foul is fair/hover through the fog and the filthy air’. The rhyme continues the alliteration and develops the idea that this is a frightening, mysterious world where everything is turned upside down and the supernatural holds some power. The overall impression is that of a nursery rhyme but one that is much darker and evil. This would have been particularly frightening to the Jacobean audience although less frightening to a more cynical modern audience.

The witches’ use of paradox also develops an atmosphere of confusion and tension. They talk about meeting again when a battle is both ‘lost and won’. These contrasting adjectives create a sense of things being not what they seem: of appearance versus reality. This is very important for the rest of the play, as we see that many of the most important moments are based on this contrast. For example, in Act 1, Scene 5, the theme of appearance versus reality or confusion and opposites develops when Lady Macbeth scorns her husband’s good qualities (he has too much ‘human kindness’) before calling on the spirits to ‘unsex’ her so that she can do a man’s work and kill King Duncan. To her, just as to the witches, goodness is a bad thing. In this scene, we see evidence of ‘Fair is foul and foul is fair’, as the rest of this scene involves the fair Lady Macbeth foully invoking evil spirits to help her to achieve her goals. This ‘foul’ behaviour is attractive (‘fair’) to the witches. For Shakespeare’s audience, dedicating oneself to evil and calling on

demonic spirits would have been very powerful. Lady Macbeth crosses over to the dark side and there is evidence to suggest that she has, in fact, become possessed. Later in the play we see her sleepwalking, unable to sleep properly and talking to herself. These are all symptoms that Shakespeare's audience would have understood as being possessed by demons.

The animal imagery in Act 1, Scene 1 with 'Graymalkin' and 'Paddock', the witches' familiars, confirms to the audience that the witches are evil. This use of animal imagery to represent evil is extended to develop the theme of appearance versus reality at the end of the Act 1, Scene 5. Lady Macbeth has decided that Duncan is to be murdered and she tells Macbeth him to 'look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't'. Here we have the metaphor of concealment, confusion and hidden identity. The serpent connotes the serpent in the story of Adam and Eve, and this develops the idea of cunning and evil, especially as, like Eve, Lady Macbeth influences her husband for the worse.

Note that there is no introduction and conclusion, because you are not asked to write an essay. Buy 'Mr Bruff's Guide to 'Macbeth'' at www.mrbruff.com

Example Response for Section A: Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 2 of 'The Tempest' where we meet Caliban for the first time. Then answer the questions.

PROSPERO

Abhorred slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with. Therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock,
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

CALIBAN

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

PROSPERO

Hag-seed, hence!
Fetch us in fuel. And be quick, thou'rt best,
To answer other business. Shrug'st thou, malice?
If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,

Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar
That beasts shall tremble at thy din.

Explore how Shakespeare presents Prospero ability to control others:

a) In this extract

b) In the play as a whole

marks]

[30 marks] A04 [4

EXAMPLE ANSWER

If we analyse the extract using Freytag's pyramid, this moment is used as part of the rising action of the play to present Prospero's relationship with Caliban. It provides the audience with the opportunity to meet Caliban and form their own judgements about Prospero's relationship with him.

The two characters represent the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Prospero, the coloniser, insults Caliban with a range of terms of address, calling him '[a]bhorred slave', 'hag-seed' and 'malice'. Prospero is full of contempt for Caliban, and the strength of these insults implies that his opinion will not change. His attitude appears to be rather unfair, considering that Caliban cannot help being the offspring of the witch Sycorax.

Prospero also positions himself as the one who has been betrayed. He implies that Caliban, the colonised, should be grateful to him, stating that when he first arrived on the island, he 'pitied' Caliban and '[t]ook pains' to teach him to 'speak' English as Caliban 'wouldst gabble like/A thing most brutish'. We have the colonial attitude that it was not worth learning Caliban's language, but it was acceptable to impose English on Caliban. The length of Prospero's speech also reflects his absolute power, and this might symbolise contemporary attitudes in which no-one questioned the right of colonisers to take land and impose their values on the indigenous populations of America and Ireland.

Caliban's response shows his defiance and ironic insight:

*You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse.*

Caliban uses language as a weapon to 'curse' Prospero. The noun 'profit' reminds the reader of Stephano and Trinculo thinking about how they can exhibit Caliban in a freak show and make money out of him. In this instance, however, Caliban is the person who, through language, gains the profit or advantage of being able to fight back. Like Prospero, Caliban speaks in blank verse, which is often used by high-status characters. This implies that he sees himself as the true owner of the island and that he will not allow himself to be oppressed.

Prospero is only able to control Caliban through magic which, with 'cramps' and 'aches' utilises physical torture. The 'cramps' are 'old', implying that this has happened before. This makes the audience appreciate the strength of Caliban's personality, as he can be made to do what Prospero wants, but Prospero cannot break his spirit.

Prospero also uses a lot of imperatives (direct orders) such as 'Hag-seed, hence! /Fetch us in fuel', which emphasises his higher status and Caliban's position of 'slave'.

Elsewhere in the play, Prospero uses magic to terrify the 'three men of sin', Alonso, Ferdinand and Antonio, when he has Ariel appears in the guise of a harpy. The educated courtiers, who will have studied Greek mythology, will know that a harpy torments evil people and carries their souls away to be punished by the gods. The courtiers would have been terrified by the sight of the avenging supernatural creature (as we would, today!), and the audience would have been thrilled.

Prospero uses Ariel's magic powers to make the men repent, telling them that they are 'unfit to live'. In his monologue, Ariel uses the idea of 'Destiny' against the courtiers, stating 'I and my fellows/Are ministers of fate'. Elizabethans and Jacobeans believed that fate controlled people's lives and that their destiny was pre-determined. Because of the contemporary belief in fate, the impact of Ariel's speech on the courtiers is terrifying, because they believe that they are doomed to divine retribution and that therefore there can be no hope for them in the afterlife.

Once Prospero has confronted the men with their crimes, he continues to use the disguised Ariel's magic to introduce the theme of repentance and forgiveness. He tells Alonso that his fate can only be averted through 'heart's sorrow' (repentance) and 'a clear life ensuing' (an unblemished life from here on). This contrasts with the 'monstrous, monstrous' realisation by Alonso of the enormity of his crime against Prospero and successfully makes him repent.

Elsewhere in the play, magic appears to be used to celebrate the hand-fasting of Ferdinand and Miranda when Prospero uses his spirits to create a masque. However, Prospero is attempting to control Ferdinand by showing him what can be achieved through magic. The expectations of the time were that a hand-fasting must be solemnised with a church wedding before consummation could take place. Prospero therefore threatens Ferdinand with curses to make him comply, warning him that if he breaks Miranda's 'virgin-knot' before their church wedding, nothing 'sweet' will follow. Part of the purpose of the masque in this scene is to show off Prospero's powers when he conjures up the goddesses. This in turn is more likely to make Ferdinand obey him.

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