

Closed book examinations in GCSE English Literature - some observations

Implications for examination papers

There will inevitably be some slight adjustment necessary to certain types of question. For example, it will no longer be possible to set the "Remind yourself of..." sort of question, nor those that refer to a very specific part of the text. Otherwise, questions will look very similar to those we use now, and the opening extract question will, of course, be unchanged.

Implications for marking

Examiners are currently instructed to credit direct reference, which may take the form of direct quotation, or the use of other types of evidence. This direct reference and detailed knowledge (required for Grade C and above) is, and will in the future be, shown through confident use of names, specific details, paraphrase, and very short, embedded quotations (a word or two, a phrase at the most)

Extensive quotation is already discouraged, of course: candidates, particularly those in the middle range of achievement, can get trapped into quoting at great length, and not always entirely relevantly, when they have the text in front of them. Similarly, such candidates can be prone to simply copying out annotation or editorial notes, for which credit cannot be given.

The mark scheme is not, and will not become, prescriptive, and we foresee no difficulty in crediting candidates' detailed knowledge.

It is important to stress also that candidates will be being assessed under exactly the same conditions, which might not necessarily have been the case had the clean text option been adopted, with its consequent iniquitous implications for funding within departments and centres.

Some tried and tested strategies...

Whilst in no way wanting to stray into the tuition of egg sucking, colleagues may want to try some of the following ideas, which are neither all-inclusive nor prescriptive. Most are of the interactive type:

- quizzes (with pupils setting questions, too);
- Blockbusters and similar games (these are on the interactive whiteboards, but can easily be set up on OHPs);
- "who said" rounds;
- group activities where pupils choose short, apt quotations to fit characters / key moments (possibly utilising photos, particularly with plays);
- simple question and answer sessions at the beginning/end of lessons (these can be a useful and simple way of reinforcing detailed knowledge of texts);
- mindmapping;
- storyboarding with key quotations.

This issue will be discussed further during this autumn's Inset sessions, where colleagues will be able to share other ideas and strategies.

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