FACTFILE:
GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

STARTING POINTS – SHAKESPEAREAN GENRES

Shakespearean Genres

In this Unit there are 5 Assessment Objectives involved – AO1, AO2, AO3, A04 and AO5.

AO1: Textual Knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of the selected play.

This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently in a form appropriate to literary studies. Specialist vocabulary should be used where necessary and appropriate. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

AO2: Dramatic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse Shakespeare's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in drama. This means identifying dramatic methods and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing dramatic methods - advice to teachers and students:
In this unit, equal marks are available for the candidate's treatment of the extract and other relevant parts of the text. As the unit is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail from the wider text which can be provided in the time available. Every play has its memorable phrases which come to mind when writing, but it is anticipated that the larger-scale features of characterisation, structure, language and staging will be useful in constructing a relevant response in the time available. The student will, however, be expected to respond in a more detailed fashion to the use of language and dramatic methods within the given extract. A reminder of the process of identification (of methods), illustration, analysis, and relation to the question may be timely.

Shakespearean Genres

AO3: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received.

Contextual information offered should be relevant to the question. Contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

AO4: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections within a Shakespeare play, and between the extract accompanying the question and the wider text.

The student should explore similarities and differences between characters, plot lines, themes, staging, and other dramatic techniques within the play. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded.

AO5: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the text, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument. This AO is the driver of Unit A2 1 and is of primary importance.

AO5 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be:
• used with understanding
• incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion
• not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion
• properly acknowledged.

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.

Othello

AO2: Dramatic methods

A few general features:
- Staging: stage movement and positioning in several scenes of hiding or concealment - *Othello* hides in order to eavesdrop on Cassio, Iago hides to observe Roderigo's attack on Cassio and the scenes dealing with Desdemona's death and the discovery of her body are presented through the stage-like imagery of Desdemona's bed, whose curtains open and shut at different points to hide and reveal information to the characters and audience.
- Use of imagery of light and darkness throughout *Othello* – what are the various implications of this for race, knowledge, virtue and vice?
- Use of the aside. This device allows the audience to access information that the characters onstage are ignorant of, helping to create dramatic irony.
- Use of props: Desdemona's handkerchief, initially seen as unimportant, becomes as the play progresses a key symbol of loyalty and fidelity, and is invested, for Othello, with magical properties.

AO3: Context

This information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some generic features which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text and context in a response.

The nature of Shakespearean Tragedy
- Hero of high status
- Tragic hero a flawed character, put in a situation where his flaw becomes his downfall
- Both inner and outer forces combine to effect the hero's downfall
- Basis in Greek Tragedy as described by Aristotle
- Also influenced by Senecan Tragedy – a more bloodthirsty, less restrained genre
- Some indication of a return to normality at conclusion of the action

King Lear

AO2: Dramatic methods

A few general features:
- Use of parallel plots to enforce and enrich themes
- Staging: use of "pathetic fallacy" of storm to represent psychological turbulence of the main character
- Patterns of imagery e.g. animalistic imagery to represent Lear's loathing of his daughters' inhumanity
- Marked use of contrast in staging and language used to convey Lear in his pomp, in his suffering, and at his end

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The nature of Shakespearean Tragedy
- Hero of high status
- Tragic hero a flawed character, put in a situation where his flaw becomes his downfall
- Both inner and outer forces combine to effect the hero's downfall
- Basis in Greek Tragedy as described by Aristotle, but Aristotle's injunctions are sometimes ignored e.g. sub-plot contravenes unity of action
- Also influenced by Senecan Tragedy – a more bloodthirsty, less restrained genre
- Some indication of a return to normality at conclusion of the action

The Taming of the Shrew

AO2: Dramatic methods

A few general features:
- Staging: use of disguise plays a crucial role throughout both the Induction and the main story of the play (types of disguise – assumption of different clothes, assumption of a different personality)
- Structure: the use of the 'play within a play' technique
- Use of fast-paced and witty dialogue, especially in the exchanges between Katharina and Petruchio
- Use of animal imagery in the play

AO3: Context

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The nature of Shakespearean Comedy
- Mainly genial and tolerant rather than acerbic in tone though social criticism or satire may be present
- May contain scenes based on the comic trope of `the battle of the sexes`
- Plot centred on love and how the obstacles to a happy resolution to love's problems are overcome – these obstacles may be external or internal
- Plot sometimes multi-stranded with several contrasting pairs of lovers
- Plot may feature disguise and mistaken identity
- There may be an opposition between the worlds of the court and the country
- May feature various types of comedy – verbal, slap-stick, caricature, satire

As You Like It

AO2: Dramatic methods

A few general features:
- Staging: use of cross-gender disguise, popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre
- Presentation of contrasting views of the central theme: love (Jacques, Rosalind, Touchstone etc.)
- Contrasts between the Court and the Forest
- Use of fast-paced and witty dialogue, particularly when Rosalind is involved
- Occasional use of songs, music and dance

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Measure for Measure

AO2: Dramatic methods

A few general features:
- Development of Isabella's character from her early vigour to her silence at the end of the play
- Use of disguise (the Duke) as a central staging device
- Repetition of plot element as Duke acts twice to deceive Angelo
- Prevalent use of contrasts, between characters, modes of speech, social milieux
- Structure: resolution of the plot leaves unanswered questions

AO3: Context

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The nature of Shakespeare's Problem Plays
- Usually listed as *All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* but definition and inclusion are disputed
- The group sometimes referred to as the 'dark comedies'
- Psychological dramas dealing with the dark side of personality and behaviour
- There is an admixture of comic material
- Resolution of issues may be imposed, or merely outward, or otherwise unsatisfactory

The Winter's Tale

AO2: Dramatic methods

A few general features:
- Structure: significant division of the play as regards time and place, indicated by use of Time as Chorus
- Use of contrast e.g. younger and older generations, the world of the court and the world of Autolycus
- Uses of language e.g. the spider image which crystallizes Leontes' jealousy and his self-tormenting imagery generally, Perdita's flower catalogue, Autolycus' mixture of prose and song
- Staging: the statue scene and its significance for the themes of reconciliation and restitution

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The nature of Shakespeare's Last Plays
- Inclusion in this group, and characteristics of the Last Plays are sometimes disputed, but generally held to include *Cymbeline, Pericles, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*
- Written after the tragedies, featuring mixed elements – comedy, music, spectacle, features of the fashionable masque form, tragi-comedy, romance
- Probably responding to a change in popular taste in early years of seventeenth century
- Themes: redemption and reconciliation (forming a contrast to the themes of the tragedies); final harmony sometimes achieved through the actions or influence of young lovers which puts the world of their elders to rights
- Feature a mixture of characters both noble and rustic