

# Specimen question commentary

**How a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached.**

Different combinations of text will be considered.

This explanation does not include all possible combinations, neither are the suggested ideas that might be included exhaustive, but the explanation will provide a workable way into the question and the intention is to offer some support for teachers preparing students for the examination.

## Paper 2B, Section C

This type of question from Section C of Paper 2 Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing invites students to write about the significance of an element of political and social protest writing across two texts. As with the Section C questions on Paper 1, the two texts do not need to be written about equally but each must receive substantial coverage in terms of depth. One hour is recommended for this question. There does not need to be explicit comparison but there will be connection through the element of political and social protest writing set up in the question (here that element is 'rebellion against those in power'). This is an Open Book paper and so students will need to know their texts well and be able to refer to them in detail in the examination.

## Sample Question

'Political and social protest writing often focuses on rebellion against those in power.'

Explore the significance of rebellion as it is presented in two political and social protest texts you have studied.

## How the question meets the Assessment Objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. The application of the AOs in relation to the task is similar to the way it works in Section C questions on Paper 1, though here **AO2** is signalled by 'as it is presented' and the invitation to debate and explore meanings and to consider relevant contextual factors (**AO5** and **AO3**) is signalled by 'significance'. In terms of **AO3**, as students engage with significance, different relevant contextual material will emerge in relation to the political and social protest genre depending on the chosen texts, when they were produced, how they have been received and whether they are prose, poetry or drama. As with Paper 1, **AO4** is explicit in that two texts must be connected in the exploration of the significance of the political and social protest writing element of 'rebellion'.

## Possible content

The possible content of the mark scheme provides some ideas that students might write about. However, there are clearly many others and if students are reading their texts through a political and social protest writing lens they will be able to identify many ideas themselves. The texts the students use could well be different types and, almost certainly, the writers will not have approached rebellion in the same ways. Therefore, students do not have to treat the discussion of rebellion in the same way in relation to their two texts. If students were using, for example, the post-modern text *The Kite Runner* and *Henry IV Part 1*, they might be writing about how rebellion operates differently in a bildungsroman novel, where rebellion is on a personal and individual level, and how it operates in a drama, where the main action centres on the gathering of armies who rebel against a king who is himself a rebel. In Section C questions, students will need to think carefully about exactly how the given element operates in their two texts.

Students will also have to understand how to effectively use their Open Book texts. To do this they will need to have been specifically taught how to respond to Open Book examinations. They need to know that it means more than

looking up quotations. Selecting key passages for detailed focus is essential and clearly students need to be able to navigate their way around their texts in an efficient way so that they are not wasting valuable examination time looking for those passages. It is expected that students will choose relevant sections of their texts on which to base their discussion and use specific details as they construct their answers.

The possible content from the mark scheme, outlined below, offers some ideas related to all the texts. Depending on their specific pair of texts, centres can build up further relevant details.

- Blake – the narrator of the poems (perhaps Blake himself) rebelling against authority by writing poetry, the call for rebellion by the earth, the little boy lost who dares to question the institutional wisdom of the priest, etc
- Harrison – the rebellion of the skin in 'v.' who desecrates the grave stones, Harrison's rebellion against the conventional language of poetry, etc
- Hosseini – the rebellion of Amir against the Taliban as represented by Assef, the rebellion of Hassan's mother, the rebellion of Baba against Soviet oppression, etc
- Crace – the rebellion of the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs in the taking of magic mushrooms and setting fire to the barn, the rebellion of the three outsiders, etc
- Dickens – Louisa's rebellion against her upbringing and marriage, the workers' rebellion against the mill owners, etc
- Atwood – Offred's rebellion against the rules, Moira, Offred's mother, etc
- Ibsen – Nora's rebellion against her husband's rules both in the early stages of the play and at the end, etc
- Shakespeare – the rebellion of Hotspur, Northumberland, Glendower against the king, Hal's rebellion against his father's rules, Falstaff's rebellion against authority, etc

Students might address significance in terms of meanings and/or significance to the narratives or sequence of ideas and/or significance of the contextual factors connected to rebellion.

**AO2:** Arguments above should be linked to some of the following writers' methods: dramatic method (eg - exits and entrances, dialogue, soliloquy, use of crisis and climax, action, settings, etc), poetic method (eg - structural issues: stanzas, patterns, rhythm, beginning and end, settings; language issues: the title, sentences, diction, imagery etc) , narrative method, (eg – structure, sequencing, voices, titles, settings, language, characterisation and role, etc)

## Text combinations

Clearly there are many combinations of texts which centres can choose, all of which can be justified and lead to interesting investigations by students. Schools and colleges have the responsibility though of satisfying the rubric so it must be realised that not all combinations are possible. Students have to study three texts. One must be a poetry text, one must be a post 2000 novel and there must be one further text. One of the texts chosen must have been written pre 1900. If Blake is chosen as the poetry text, therefore, both the poetry and pre 1900 considerations have been satisfied and so there is free choice of the third text, once a post 2000 novel has been selected. If Harrison is selected for the poetry text, the third text must be the Blake poetry, *Henry IV Part 1*, *A Dolls House* or *Hard Times*, in order to satisfy the pre-1900 requirement. If Blake is chosen as the poetry text, then both post 2000 novels could be studied if students and teachers wish to do so.

It might be helpful here to look at two exemplar routes and what these combinations of texts can offer to students. It needs to be said though that these suggestions are in no way recommended models; others might be equally as good or better.

### Example 1

Let us imagine that this student has been prepared for the following three texts for Paper 2B: *Harvest*, Harrison's poetry and *Henry IV Part 1*. Let us also imagine that the student, having considered all the questions in Sections B and C has made the choice to write about *Harvest* in Section B. The student will now be using Harrison's poetry selection and *Henry IV Part 1* to answer Question 10. With these two texts in mind, this question would be a good choice as both texts have rebellion at their heart and yet the types of rebellion are very different. The student would therefore be able to explore this political element in interesting ways. The student could show knowledge of the different ways drama and poetry work whilst focusing on civil war as a form of rebellion in Shakespeare's representation of fifteenth century England and class war as a form of rebellion in, for example, Harrison's 1980s 'v.', 'National Trust' and 'Them and [uz]. (It should be noted that students do not need to write about all of Harrison's poems and might here only write about 'v.'). There might also be discussion of the fact that despite the differences

in time between the texts, they both focus on male rebellion and anger and women are very much in the background.

In *Henry IV Part 1*, the student could focus on the rebellion of the Percys and how this is played out in the structure of the play – in the council chamber, in the plotting that follows between Northumberland, Worcester and Hotspur, in the scenes with Glendower, Hotspur and Mortimer and in the climactic Battle of Shrewsbury where rebellion, championed and seen as honourable by Hotspur, is crushed by the Prince of Wales. Students might also focus on the rebellion of Hal against his father's authority, on the comic rebellions of Falstaff against the King's law and dignity, and also on Henry's own rebellion in the backstory which led to his taking the crown and to his feeling of guilt in the story dramatised on stage. In the discussion of Harrison, discussion might centre on 'v.' only which would be perfectly legitimate for this question. Comment there might be on the rebellion of the yobs who spray the grave stones with graffiti, on the rebellion of Harrison who uses language to challenge orthodoxy, the rebellion of the specific yob who sets himself up against the ruling classes and the rebellion of the miners against the Thatcher government, Ian MacGregor and the National Coal Board. Students might also refer to any of the other Harrison poems and comment on Harrison's rebellion through poetry and language choices against the establishment and privileged Standard English, for example in 'Them and Uz' and 'Divisions'. Students could also write about Harrison's rebellion with himself in 'v.'

## Example 2

Let us imagine that this student has a different combination of texts. This student has studied *The Kite Runner*, Blake's poetry and *The Handmaid's Tale*. The student has also thought carefully about the questions in Sections B and C and has decided to answer on Blake in Section B, leaving two modern novels for Section C. Given the task, this would also be a good combination for Question 10. Rebellion is clearly of central importance to Atwood's text and although it is less foregrounded in *The Kite Runner* there is still much that can be said. The nature of rebellion in the two novels is very different. The texts are both novels but Hosseini's is a bildungsroman and Atwood's a dystopian fiction. *The Handmaid's Tale*, written by a female novelist has a female protagonist and narrator and *The Kite Runner*, written by a male writer has a male protagonist and narrator. The similarities and differences between the two texts will provide the student with some interesting avenues to explore and although the question does not require comparison, it may be that the student will choose to do so.

Rebellion in *The Handmaid's Tale* takes many forms. In the internal workings of the Gilead regime, Offred rebels by thinking about the time before, by fantasising about attacking the Commander, by having a forbidden sexual relationship with Nick and finally by recording her experiences. Moira rebels against male authority and male sexuality and Offred tells the story of her mother who was a feminist rebel in the time before; the telling of these stories is another form of rebellion.

In *The Kite Runner* the focus of the first part of the story is the friendship between Amir and Hassan, which could be seen as a rebellion of sorts given their different ethnic backgrounds. Later when Afghanistan suffers political upheaval with the occupation of the Soviets and then the Taliban, there are all kinds of rebellious acts – Baba's against the Russian soldier, Amir's attack on Assef and that of Rahim Khan who encourages Amir to return to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab. Interestingly, although women in this text are not central figures they commit significant acts of rebellion. Sanaubar rebels against her husband and the patriarchal authority of her society by running away from her family and joining some travellers five days after Hassan's birth; Soraya, although virtuous in the novel's present, tells Amir of her past when at eighteen she rebels against her domineering father and runs away with her boyfriend.

The significance of all acts of rebellion, in both examples given, can be teased out in a variety of ways in terms of how the rebellions can be interpreted and open up meanings and how those acts of rebellion are significant to the design of the stories.

This resource is part of the [Elements of political and social protest writing resource package](https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-b/teach/elements-of-political-and-social-protest-writing) (<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-b/teach/elements-of-political-and-social-protest-writing>).

## Specifications that use this resource:

› [AS and A-level English](#)

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