

AQA English Literature GCSE

A Guide to AQA English Literature GCSE: Paper One



Introduction to Paper 1

The written exam takes **1 hour 45 minutes** in total and is worth **40%** of your entire English Literature GCSE. It is worth a total of **80 marks**.

Section A

Shakespeare Play



Section A of paper 1 is worth **34 marks**, whereby **4 of these marks account for accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar** **AQ4**.

You will be given an **extract** from your chosen **Shakespearean play** which you must talk about within your answer, as well as including points from **another section of the play** that relates to the question.

The written exam takes **1 hour 45 minutes** in total.

Therefore, it is recommended that you spend around **55 minutes** on this section, including **5 - 10 minutes spent planning**. This leaves up to 50 minutes to **write your essay**.

Remember that **planning is essential** as **examiners** found that a plan frequently led to a well-constructed answer, and **lack of planning proved an issue**.

Section B

19th Century Novel



Section B of paper 1 is worth **30 marks**, as **AQ4** is not assessed in this section of the exam.

You will be required to answer **one question on the novel of your choice**, again basing your response on the **given extract** and writing about the **novel as a whole** as well.

In this case, as there are less marks to be gained here, we would recommend that you spend **50 minutes on this section**, including **5 to 10 minutes spent planning**.

Assessment Objectives 4.2

Assessment objectives (AOs) are the **same across all GCSE English Literature exam boards**, they are used by the examiner to mark and **evaluate** how well you have constructed your essay.

Paper 1 will measure **how you have achieved the following AO's** in order to give you your final mark:

AO1 (15% of marks)

This will measure how you **read, understand and respond to texts** and includes your use of **quotations** to support and illustrate your interpretations.

Tip – to score highly in this AO students are expected to **maintain a critical and judicious writing style** throughout their whole essay. **DO NOT** just employ loads of quotes just because you have memorised them all, make sure that it is **relevant** and that you **analyse** it instead of just simply placing it there.

AO2 (15% of marks)

This will measure how well you **analyse language, form and structure** to create **meanings** and **effects** using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

Tip - For top grades, examiners are looking for students to **avoid** identifying nouns or verbs used by the writer in an attempt to demonstrate an appreciation of their work but rather the top students are expected to demonstrate a **fluent and confident** discussion of the writer's methods.

AO3 (7.5% of marks)

This will measure how students understand the **relationships between the texts and the contexts** in which they were written. This includes relevant **historical, social and biographical** information. Note that the key word here is **RELEVANT**.

AO4 (2.5% of marks)

This will only be assessed in **Section A** of Paper 1. AO4 will measure how accurately you are able to **spell and use punctuation**. To reach the top marks in this AO students are expected to use a **range of vocabulary and sentence structures**.

Grade Boosters!

To reach the **top marks** for the most important AO's here are a few tips that will come in handy for Paper 1:

AO1 GRADE BOOSTER

DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS

If you are looking to get a **grade 7 or above**, examiners are looking for you to show a **development in your ideas** as you write each paragraph.

You can **show this development through your argument**. For example, if the question you are given is about the theme **love**, you could state at the beginning of your second paragraph that the theme of love **develops** and becomes **increasingly potent** at a later stage in the text, and then in your final paragraph you could state that this particular section of the text is where love is **arguably the most potent**.

This clearly shows that you are writing about how the particular character or theme **develops** within the play by simply changing a few words at the beginning of each of your paragraphs!

AO1 GRADE BOOSTER

RELEVANT QUOTES

Try to avoid remembering **large chunks of text** because not only does this **waste time**, but it also makes your writing look messy and decreases the fluidity of your essay.

Instead, examiners are looking for you to **employ relevant quotes** that are not **too lengthy** to increase the effectiveness of your response.

AO2 GRADE BOOSTER

AVOID IRRELEVANT TERMS

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to **AVOID** simply identifying Shakespeare's nouns or verbs, as this may limit the effectiveness of your analysis. For example, the 2017 **examiner's report** urges students to compare:

*"Shakespeare **uses the verb** 'bite' in 'bite my thumb' to..."*

with

*"Shakespeare creates an **aggressive tone** through the insult 'bite my thumb' to..."*

The report states that it is the **quality of your explanation** which determines your level, rather than the inclusion of a 'term'.

AO3 GRADE BOOSTER

RELEVANT CONTEXT

The contextual factors that you employ must be **relevant!** Therefore, you must try to avoid bolting on **irrelevant contextual information** that does not correlate with your **argument** or the **question**, as this will decrease your essay's level of **sophistication**.

AO3 GRADE BOOSTER

AVOID GENERALISATION

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to **AVOID** making sweeping generalisations such as **"all Elizabethan women** were controlled by men".

Instead, examiners are seeking for students to make **sophisticated links** between **relevant contextual factors and the question**. For example, if you were speaking about Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet' you could say instead that **"it perhaps** wouldn't be surprising for Shakespeare's audience to see that Juliet's father attempts to gain control over her, as **usually** within Elizabethan England most women were seen as properties of their husbands and fathers".

Types of questions and how to approach them

The **types of questions** that you could get asked in the exam are:



CHARACTER



Example **character** question -
*'Explore how Priestley presents **Sheila Birling**'*



RELATIONSHIP



Example **relationship** question -
*'Explore how Priestley presents the **relationship between Mr Birling and the Inspector**'*



THEME



Example **theme** question -
*'Explore how Priestley presents the **theme of responsibility**'*



CONTEXT



Example **contextual** question -
*'Explore Priestley's attitudes towards **class and social hierarchy**'*

Alternative Interpretations



For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to be able to write their responses in a **sophisticated manner**, showing the examiner that they have **understood the text thoroughly** and that they are able to write about **multiple, alternative interpretations** in regard to expressing their thoughts about the writer's craft.

Alternative interpretations show the examiner that you are a top student who has really **engaged with the text** at hand as it shows that you have a **sophisticated and broad understanding** of the writer's **purpose**.

Some **example sentence starters** that you could use to show the examiner that you are engaging with multiple interpretations are:

"Alternatively..."

"In one way this could show... In another way this could also show..."

"On one level the writer could be revealing that...Yet, on another level it could be that the writer is trying to show the audience that..."

"Explicitly, the writer is trying to show us that...however implicitly the writer could be showing us that..."

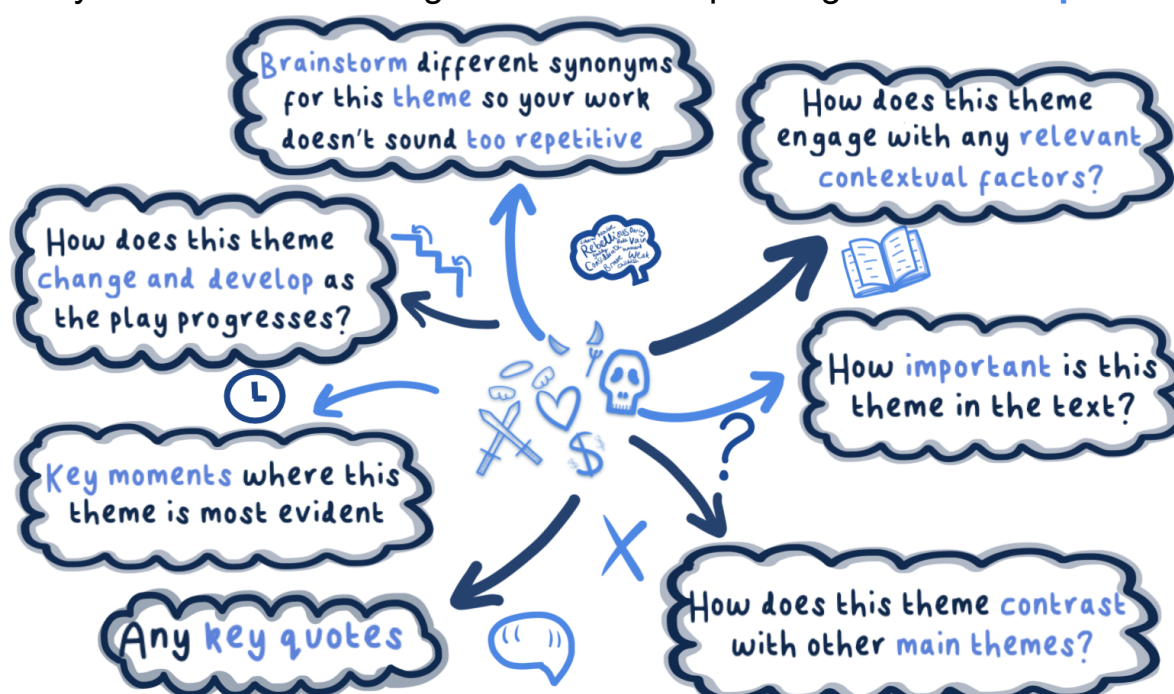
Example of a character question - Sheila Birling



Main Argument

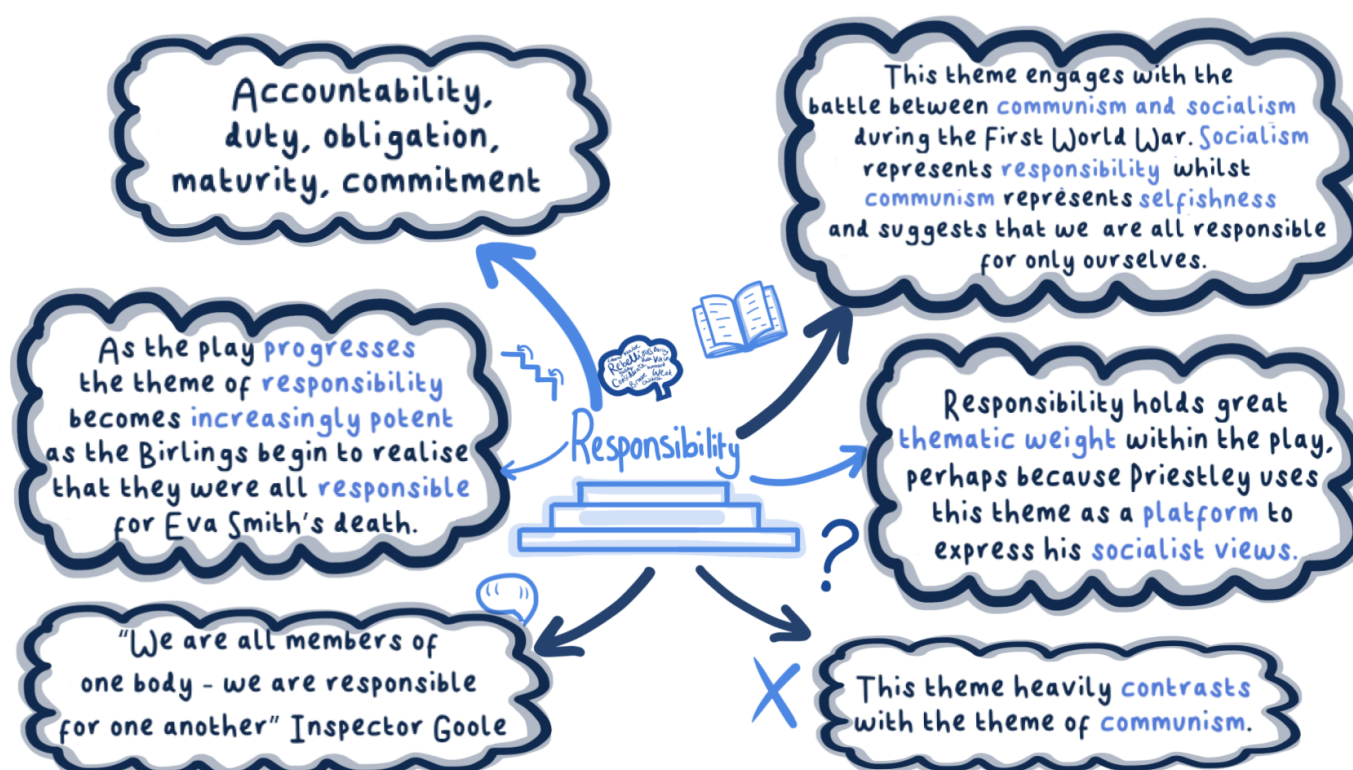
Priestley presents Sheila Birling as an individual who undergoes a catharsis; as the play progresses, she begins to understand the consequences of her actions.

What you should be thinking about when responding to a **theme question**:



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this theme.

Example of a **theme question** - Responsibility



Main Argument

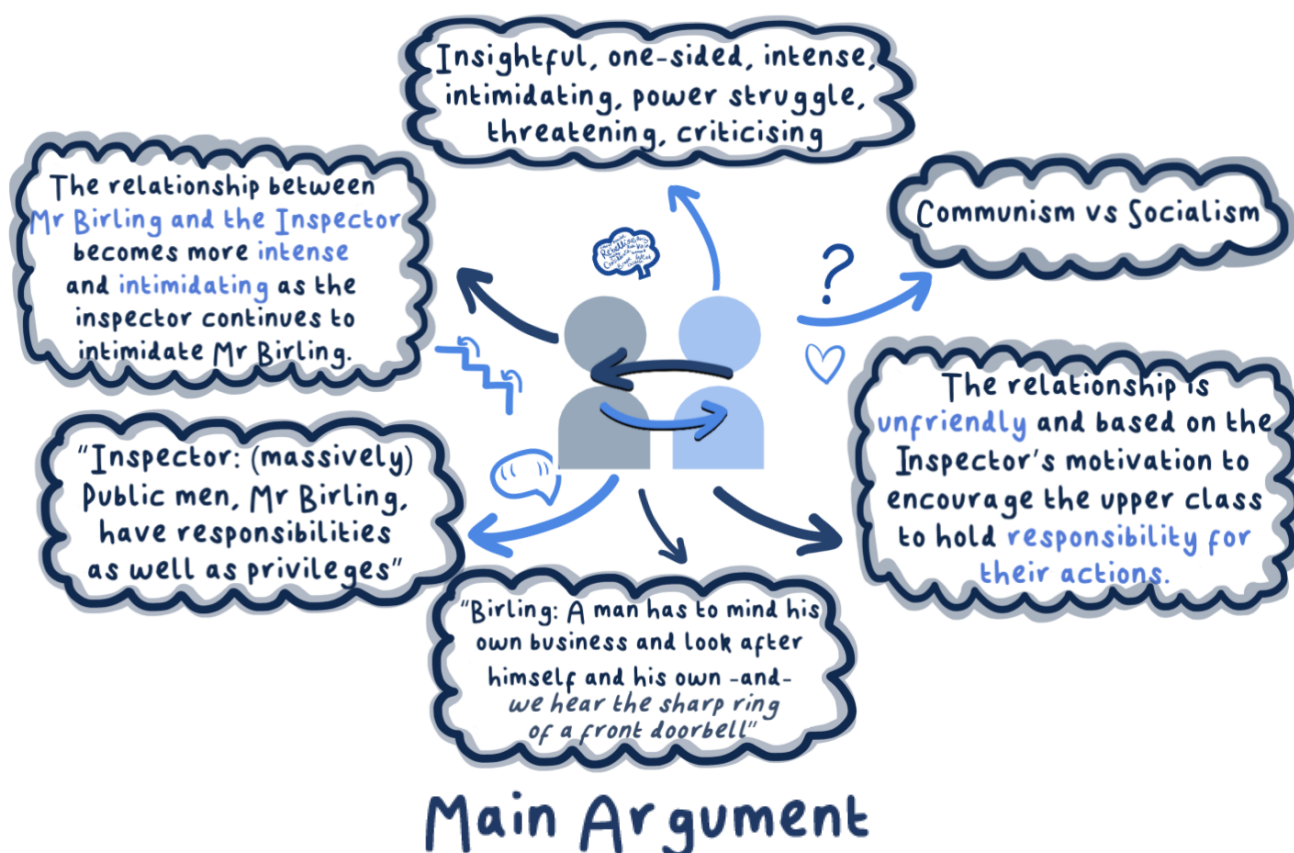
Responsibility holds great thematic weight within the play, so that Priestley can use the Inspector's views on shared accountability as a mouthpiece to express his own socialist views and thus he criticises capitalist views.

What you should be thinking about when responding to a question on the **relationship between two characters**.



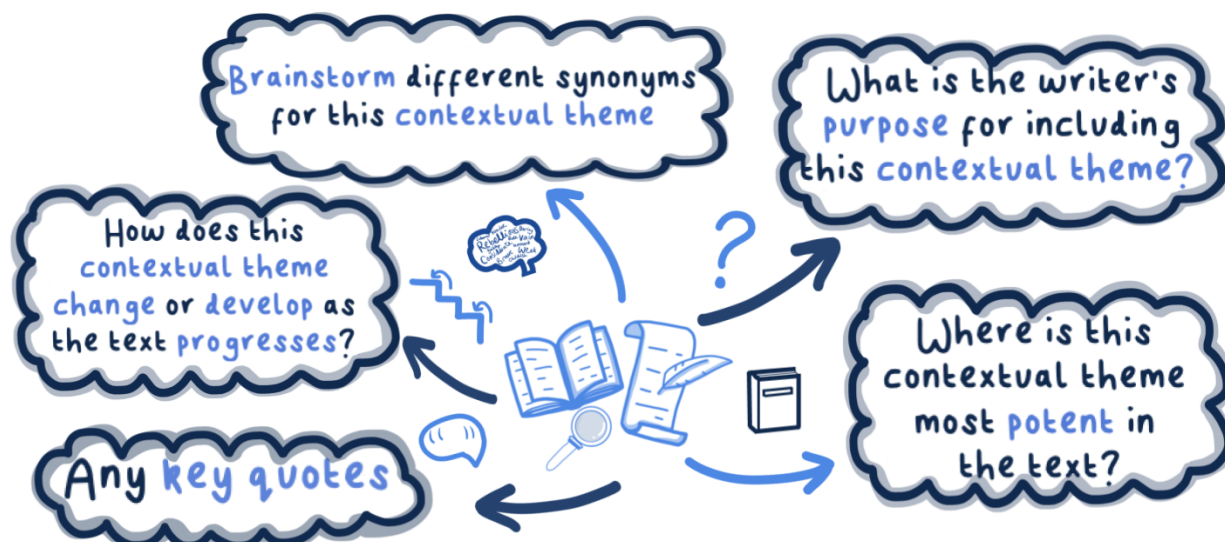
Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this relationship.

Example of a **relationship** question - **Mr Birling and The Inspector**



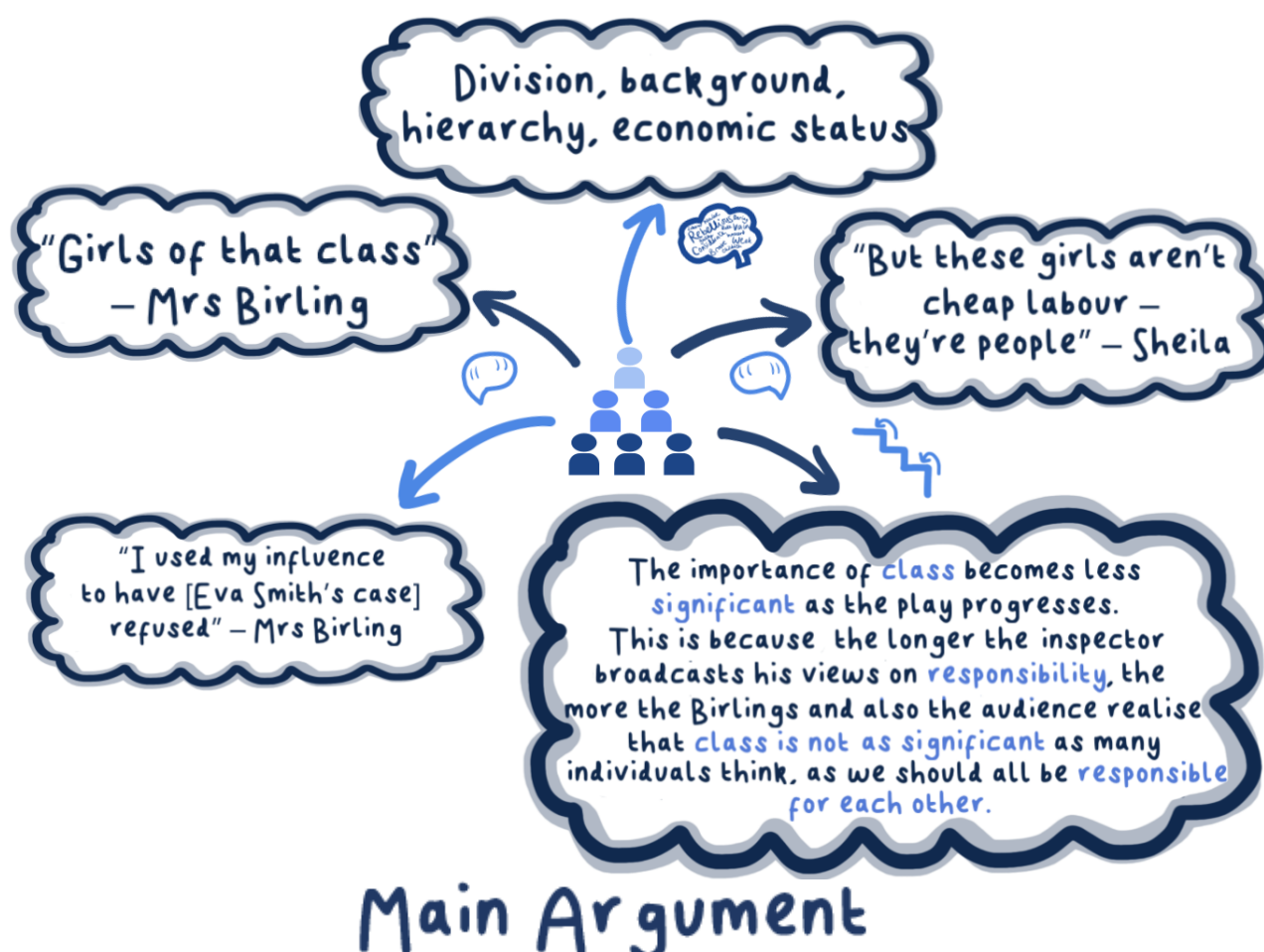
Priestley allows these individuals to have a relationship to show a clear **juxtaposition** between the pair's views. He uses their relationship as a platform to criticise Mr Birling's **capitalist** views.

What you should be thinking about when responding to a question based upon **context**.



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this contextual theme.

Example of a **context** question - **Priestley's Attitudes Towards Class**



Clearly, **Priestley** highlights the **theme of class** within his play to show his audiences the **tragic consequences** of living within a **capitalist society**.