**WJEC English Language and Literature**

**Unit 3**

Look at the following paragraphs taken from essays produced by students in the Summer 2017 session in response to the question:

  **‘Human suffering has entirely human origins.’ Examine the different ways in which suffering is presented in *King Lear*.**

* Consider how relevant the context supplied actually is.
* Assess the paragraphs for AO1, AO2 and AO3.

**Example 1**

Poverty was a prominent issue in the Elizabethan era, as the population grew from 3 to 4 million during Elizabeth 1’s reign alone. As the death rate increased and fertility increased, there became more and more people to feed and more heads to house. The devastating effects of the poor harvests, resulting in starvation led Queen Elizabeth to introduce the ‘Poor Acts’ passing the poor over to society; each person had to pay tax in order to help the poor. This differs hugely from *King Lear* as he never does anything to help the poor when he is in power. He realises later after meeting ‘Poor Tom’, ‘The thing itself’ that he has ‘ta’en too little care of this’. Shakespeare issued a stark warning to James 1 during the performance of *King Lear* through the quote ‘Thou wert better off in a grave than endure the extremities of the skies.’ The noun ‘grave’ really emphasizes how stark this warning was to James 1. James 1 was greedy and spent a lot of money on himself. Poverty was still an issue in James’s reign, even after Elizabeth passed the ‘poor acts’ and something had to be done.

**Example 2**

At the beginning of the play we are shown how Cordelia’s emotional suffering causes the severance of her filial bond with Lear as she refuses to flatter his ego at court illustrated through her blunt declarative utterance ‘I cannot heave my heart into my mouth.’ Cordelia’s use of the contrasting nouns ‘heart’ and ‘mouth’ indicate her feelings that true filial love can only be shown through emotional actions and not by empty flattery. Her words suggest that her emotions towards her father are completely separate from her ability to vocalise them in a public arena and this is emphasized through the dynamic verb ‘heave’. The verb suggests the great burden of love for her father is too large or too precious to use to simply consolidate her hold on her part of the inheritance, unlike her sisters Goneril and Regan who were all too happy to conform to societal and parental expectation. Cordelia’s refusal to give into the whims of the patriarch of court would have shocked Jacobean audiences who would have expected her complete obedience to the monarch. Shakespeare, however, portrays Cordelia as a rebellious heroine who denies seventeenth century conformity. She purposefully removes her only power at court – the language of flattery as she recognises that it does not offer female empowerment but empty filial gain. Cordelia becomes an example of the prototypical Shakespearean heroine, and through her chosen silence feminist critics argue she is defying male authority. However, it can be argued that by offending Lear through this self-imposed silence, Cordelia initiates her own suffering which subsequently results in her tragic death.