



GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION
TYSTYSGRIF GYFFREDINOL ADDYSG UWCHRADD

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

SUMMER 2008

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Statistical Information

GCE (AS/Advanced)

This booklet contains summary details for each unit: number entered; maximum mark available; mean mark achieved; grade ranges. *N.B. These refer to 'raw marks' used in the initial assessment, rather than to the uniform marks reported when results are issued.*

GCSE

The Examiners' Report may refer in general terms to statistical outcomes. Statistical information on candidates' performances in all examination components (whether internally or externally assessed) is provided when results are issued. As well as the marks achieved by individual candidates, the following information can be obtained from these printouts:

For each component: the maximum mark, aggregation factor, mean mark and standard deviation of marks obtained by *all* candidates entered for the examination.

For the subject or option: the total entry and the lowest mark needed for the award of each grade.

Annual Statistical Report

Other information on a centre basis is provided when results are issued. The annual *Statistical Report* (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

ENGLISH

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2008

- Chief Examiners:*
- Chair of Examiners - Mr. B.J.D. Childs, formerly Deputy Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Dyffryn Taf, Whitland;
- Higher Tier Papers 1 and 2 - Dr. K.C. Elliott, formerly Head of Humanities, Wigan and Leigh College;
- Foundation Tier Papers 1 and 2 - Mr. E. Snell, Adviser, Wakefield LEA;
- Coursework - Mr. S.H. Sage, formerly Assistant Headteacher, Holywell High School, Flintshire;
- Speaking and Listening - Mrs. J. Hingley, formerly teacher of English, Tredegar Comprehensive School.

Written Coursework (English/English Literature)

Administration

This year moderators included the checklist of activities regarding folder presentation with the introductory letter and this reduced the number of administrative issues. Five aspects remain problems:

1. It is important that any worksheets and scaffolding provided for the students are included with the folders. On a number of occasions this year moderators had to request such information before they could ascertain how much of the work was actually written by the students. It is worrying when able students are provided with such help which properly should be restricted to the less able.
2. Centres are asked to provide class lists with the folders. It is important that these are arranged by teaching group rather than simply being a full list of the cohort. It is very helpful if these class lists include the examination number for each candidate.
3. In some centres, students are given different marks for pieces entered in both the English and English Literature folders. It is unlikely that this should be the case and if different marks are awarded, there needs to be a clear justification for this situation.
4. Justifications for orally assessed Reading and Literature pieces need to be full, detailed and student specific. It is not sufficient for such assessments simply to list the assessment criteria for the grade. The comments on performance should indicate how the student displayed the skills noted in the assessment criteria. On a number of occasions this year moderators needed to contact the centres to request fuller justifications.
5. It is very helpful to moderators if folders are presented appropriately. The checklist of things to consider before sending off the coursework sample suggests what is suitable. Essays should be placed in coversheet order. Plastic and paper envelopes should be avoided. Many centres now use a treasury tag to keep a student's work together and this is ideal.

Assignments

Before looking at the sections of the folders in detail it is worth making the point that in the Reading and Literature tasks students often feel that it is necessary to provide detailed and lengthy background material. Sometimes this extends to two or three sides and often it is copied from a text or the Internet. It needs to be stressed that moderators are only interested in such material when it has direct relevance to the text under study. For example, moderators do not need to be told biographical information about writers. The stress should be upon the way in which a writer uses the language to convey the themes of his/her work. It is doubly worrying when all the students in a particular group write identical openings to their essays containing such information. Clearly this could be regarded as plagiarism and therefore worthy of recommendation to the Malpractice Committee. Similarly, it is not necessary for students to give lengthy plot summaries of Shakespeare plays and prose texts before embarking on the task. They should presume that the moderators already know this information.

In the Reading and Literature essays, it is worrying when moderators see in-text commentary that simply does not describe the achievement. Thus in some students' work a simple quotation will be credited with a comment like 'Good grasp of style' which clearly the student does not deserve since all he or she has done is select and copy. On other occasions, a simple paraphrase of a quotation will be credited with a comment like 'Good analysis of style' which again is not actually the case. Some students seem to confuse a consideration of style with prosodic elements. Thus a student was rewarded for 'considering style' when he wrote: 'Both poems are more or less the same length as each other. A difference is that in the *Unrelated Incident* poem lines are a lot shorter than the other poem. Another difference is that one poem has punctuation and the other doesn't and one has six verses and the other has one'. I am not convinced that this can be rewarded as a comment on style. Other students seem to think that using jargon will gain them marks. One this year wrote: 'During Juliet's speech, Shakespeare uses the iambic pentameter to emphasise the name which is the semantic field and it also gives tone to the conversation.' This suggests considerable confusion.

As always, the best tasks are clear, manageable and assessable.

English folder: Wales version

As I have noted in the past, the number of centres attempting this option is small but this year some interesting poetry combinations were noted. These included work by Welsh poets like Tony Curtis, Mike Jenkins, Robert Morgan, Harri Webb, Christine Evans, and Jenny Sullivan. Generally the accompanying Different Cultures drama was linked to English Literature set texts, in particular *A View from the Bridge*.

English folder: England version.

Shakespeare

The majority of centres used *Romeo and Juliet* as the chosen text. The appeal is apparent but care needs to be taken in the setting of tasks some of which did not help the students to produce coherent well-planned essays. While many centres set assignments based on particular scenes, Act III scene i being the most popular, others gave the students less precise tasks. For example, the general title 'Write an essay on violence and conflict in *Romeo and Juliet*' led to many general plot driven responses even from more able students. Similarly the title 'Are the deaths of the protagonists the result of free-will or fate?' is very testing and left some less able students with the only option of listing occasions when free will and fate were apparent in the play. A task like 'Trace the growth of love between Romeo and Juliet' leaves the student no option but to tell the story, which is a fairly low level skill. A number of students wrote about the relationship between Juliet and her father. Often work

on this topic was badly misguided and took little notice of what Shakespeare wrote, ignored what Juliet actually does behind her parents' backs and instead saw her as a misunderstood teenager who could do no wrong. This approach disregards the opening and closing of the play when we see Capulet as a very different type of man capable of care, remorse and love. Here, of course, knowledge of contemporary customs in relation to upper class or aristocratic daughters is vital. Many students did not take into account such knowledge or chose to only see the play with 21st Century eyes.

While most students wrote about this play, in some centres a wider range of work was on display with essays on *Twelfth Night* ('Are the men weaker than the women?'), *Othello* ('How does Shakespeare show the descent of Othello through his language?'), *The Merchant of Venice* ('Which character deserves the most sympathy in this play?'), *Macbeth* ('Examine, through a consideration of his language, how Macbeth's character changes in the last Act of the play.') and *Much Ado About Nothing* ('Examine how Beatrice and Benedick's relationship develops in Hero's abortive wedding scene.'). In other centres, there was work on *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. All these texts made refreshing changes from the almost ubiquitous *Romeo and Juliet*. Occasionally the tasks set are far too difficult at this level. Some students this year were asked to 'Compare two Shakespeare plays' which was clearly asking too much of them besides being vague in focus.

Different Cultures

While it is heartening to see some of the suggestions regarding text choice made in previous reports being taken up by centres, the bulk of the poems chosen for the Different Cultures section of the folder remain very predictable. As I have pointed out before, some of the poems chosen offer little for the students to investigate (e.g. *Unrelated Incidents*, *Half Caste*, *Search for my Tongue*, *Two Scavengers...*) and it is dispiriting to see students desperately searching for something new to say about them when there is a wealth of other verse which would more profitably repay study.

However, some centres are more adventurous and I list below some successful combinations seen this year.

Vigil (Giuseppe Ungaretti): *Suicide in the Trenches* (Sassoon)
**I shall Return* (Mackay): *Once upon a Time* (Gabriel Okara)
**First Love* (Clare): *Wondrous Moment* (Pushkin)
Rapunstilskin (Lochhead): *Havisham* (Duffy)
**The Sunne Rising* (John Donne): *Do Not Ask of Me* (Faiz Ahmed Faiz)
**Diane* (Stewart McIntosh): *If the Past Year* (Augusta, Lady Gregory)
War Photograph (Kate Daniels): *War Photographer* (Carol Ann Duffy)
The Teachers (Liz Lochhead): *In Mrs Tilscher's Lesson* (Carol Ann Duffy)
**The Caged Skylark* (Gerard Manley Hopkins): *Sympathy* (Paul Lawrence Dunbar)
Elegy for Wiffin (Meic Stephens): *My Parents Kept me* (Stephen Spender) (England only)
Boy Driving his Father to Confession (Heaney): *Praise Song for my Mother* (Nichols)
**To Mary* (John Clare): *To be in Love* (Gwendolyn Brooks)
Unheroic (Eavan Boland): *September 1913* (Yeats)
The Vet (Gillian Clarke): *February 17th* (Ted Hughes) (England only)
The Mother (Gwendolin Brookes): *The Deliverer* (Tishani Doshi)

Asterisked combinations could also be used in the Pre-1914 section of the English Literature folder.

If the student is not entering the English Literature examination there is no need for poems to be compared. However, most candidates are entered for both examinations and the Different Cultures work must then stand as a comparative piece in the Literature folder. This aspect of the work remains a problem for many candidates. More often than not the comparative aspect covers content only with a 'This poem is about this...and this poem is about this...' approach. Clearly this cannot fulfil the brief when a comparative element is within the question. High marks can only be gained if there is sustained comparison of the styles of the two poets. This is why in the past I have commented that comparing two poems by the same poet makes the comparative element doubly difficult since there is unlikely to be as many stylistic aspects to consider. Good comparative work where the student looks not only at content but also at themes, viewpoints, moods and stylistic aspects is very rare indeed.

Some tasks are extremely unhelpful to the students. For example, the students given tasks based on cultural differences are likely to be led into blind alleys and away from considering the verse as something of value in its own right. It is important that the poems chosen have a common theme rather than achieving commonality only as a result of not having been written by an English man or woman.

Students often confuse 'theme' and 'content' thinking that when they have covered the surface detail of the poem they have discovered the thematic matter. Obviously this is not the case and it may be helpful to students to make a clear distinction between these two vital aspects of any piece of literature.

Narrative/expressive writing

In GCSE English Paper 1, decisions about approaches and topics have to be made very quickly. This is not the case with the coursework Narrative/expressive writing. Clearly, students should look on their coursework as a preparation for the examination and it would certainly help many of them to give more consideration to approaches at this stage in their KS4 education. Some weaknesses noticed this year are the result of teachers making inappropriate choices on the students' behalf; others are the result of students making poor decisions about approaches.

Obviously, teachers are expected to guide the students in the way they approach their Narrative/expressive writing but such guidance is not always helpful.

In a number of centres, all the students have to write on the proscribed task. In the past this has often been on the 'Assassin' using the 'Teachit' open writing kit. I have noted my worry about this task in past reports and I notice that the website now contains disclaimers indicating that examination boards are not happy about the approach being used. Happily the incidence of 'Assassin' essays has reduced dramatically. I, along I suspect with principal moderators from the other boards, would like to see it and any other formulaic structuring disappear for good. Such approaches stifle individuality.

I believe that one size does not fit all and choosing a topic for a whole cohort to attempt seems to me to be counter-productive. The only exception to this is autobiographical writing where virtually all students can, if guided properly, produce engaging work.

In some centres, on the back I presume of the study of *Frankenstein*, students are encouraged to write gothic horror stories and in some cases are required to include a list of gothic characteristics. It is very rare that one comes across a story of this type which is truly effective. Most create atmospheres and environments which are unconvincing, concluding with a suitably bloodthirsty twist. Pragmatically, this type of task does not seem to work very well and it removes from the student the only occasion in the folder where he or she should have some autonomy.

In the same category as the gothic story, I would put any encouragement to write about walks in the forest or haunted houses. The Chief Examiner has warned about this approach in the examination and I feel it is equally risky in coursework.

Another approach which can go badly wrong is descriptive writing. The major danger in using this approach in coursework is that the work will be too short. However, there is an additional risk that the description becomes rather empty and unengaging especially when there is no human contact.

There are still occasions where students are asked to produce 'write-ons' or base their work on literary texts. This approach rarely works to the benefit of the students since it limits original thinking and creativity.

Students sometimes take approaches which are not helpful. The most obvious example of this is the unstructured essay. Coursework, with the opportunities it presents to think carefully before starting unlike the rush of the examination, should be an occasion where careful planning is an essential part of the process. Frequently, especially but not always with weaker students, the rush to get something down on paper results in an unstructured event-driven narrative which does not convince in terms of atmosphere, characters and feelings. Unnecessary detail will delay the narrative and render it rather dull. Another pitfall for the unwary is the overuse of imagery, particularly similes and a belief that the use of triplets is always a good writing technique.

While it is easy to indicate where students go wrong with this type of writing it is much harder to be specific about how successful writers get it right. However, there are some characteristics of good writing as seen in coursework which are apparent.

With careful planning and an awareness of what will interest the reader, most students can write well. It is helpful, once the idea is established, for the writer to consider what kind of affect he or she wants to have on the reader. This should give the piece an overall shape and direction. The details chosen should be part of that shape.

Successful writing tends to involve few characters, who are established quickly with indications of personality rather than lengthy descriptions of height, hair colour and so on. The more able will see the opening of a piece as an opportunity to include narrative hooks and indications of what is to come. Some students very successfully start a narrative *in media res*, thus drawing the reader into a powerful situation and making him or her ask questions. Others this year wrote successful double narratives seeing a situation from two different perspectives.

Analytic/Persuasive Writing.

It is still the case in some centres that the vital aspect of audience is ignored in the analytic/persuasive writing but on the whole tasks are becoming more appropriate. This year, perhaps reflecting the current debate in the media, the issue of Size Zero was a popular choice. This produced some interesting work but care must be taken that students do not rely too heavily on undigested information from 'sources'. Obviously in a well-prepared piece on this topic it will be necessary to quote facts and figures but it is essential that such information be credited with a source. This removes any possibility of the work being referred to the Malpractice Committee.

Work which is heavily reliant on, for example, past examination papers tends to contain too little of the student's own 'voice'. This was the case with a large number of pieces on boxing. Teachers in a number of centres encouraged students to write about the Derek Bentley controversy but here again they were reliant on source material and they found it hard to give a distinctive flavour to what they had to say. As I have commented in the past, the biggest danger of plagiarism comes when students write film reviews or tackle the 'big' issues of abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, vivisection and drug abuse. A worryingly large number of students were investigated for plagiarism when attempting to write about these tasks. Students in some centres presented discursive essays which lacked audience and purpose.

There was, however, some very pleasing work in this section of the folder. Some students wrote feelingly about the relocation of their school and others vehemently argued that their school should not be demolished. In one centre, students were asked to respond to what they saw as an unfair commentary on their hometown in the Rough Guide to Britain. Speech writing was fairly popular. There were some good addresses by those wishing to be elected by their peers to a school or college council. I remain convinced that local issues are the best subject matter for this section of the folder.

English Literature

Pre-1914 poetry

Very few new texts appeared this year and the well-trying and tested combinations of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Dulce et Decorum Est* along with *To His Coy Mistress* and *The Seduction* were very popular. In more adventurous centres the realisation that in this section it is not necessary for both poems to be Pre-1914 or indeed from the English literary heritage, has led to some interesting new combinations, for example the linking of *First Love* (Clare) with *Wondrous Moment* (Pushkin). Other combinations, which seemed to offer good opportunities for students include:

The Light of Other Days (Thomas Moore): *Old Woman* (Elizabeth Jennings)
Song of a Worker's Wife (Alice Grey Jones) (Trans. by Katie Grayish): *The Married State* (Katherine Philips)
**What lips have kissed* (Edna St Vincent Malay): *They flee from me* (Sir Thomas Wyatt)
Birthday (Christina Rossetti): *Away Melancholy* (Stevie Smith)
**To Virgins to make much of Time* (Robert Herrick): *Blue Girls* (John Crowe Ransom)
**Variations on the Word Love* (Margaret Atwood): *Song* (Aphra Behn)
Still to be Neat (Ben Jonson): *Delight in Disorder* (Robert Herrick)
London (Blake): *Brussels in Winter* (Auden)
Sonnet 18 (Shakespeare): *Methought I saw my late espoused saint* (Milton)
Plena Timoris (Hardy): *Meeting at Night* (Browning)
When we two parted (Byron): *Long Distance* (Harrison)

Asterisked pairings could also be used in the Different Cultures section of the English folder.

Prose

Most centres encourage their students to work on small areas of text. Often this type of task is based on a Dickens' novel (most frequently *Great Expectations*) or a classic short story. Occasionally students attempt a comparative piece and while this is perfectly acceptable, it must be remembered that comparing prose texts presents problems in terms of content and length. Some students are required to add a third comparison to their two poetry essays and this is unnecessary.

Task setting has improved over the years but it is still in this part of the folder that misleading or disempowering assignments are most likely to be set. Often such assignments can lead only to a narrative response (e.g. 'Describe the four ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*' and 'Describe the treatment of Pip in the opening chapters of *Great Expectations*'). Other tasks are unsuitably vague (e.g. 'Account for the success of Conan Doyle's stories.'). Some require the students to move away from the study of literature into something totally inappropriate (e.g. 'What do we learn about the community and society in Jane Austen's life time from reading the first four chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*?'). Occasionally the task is so large that it would be daunting for an undergraduate (e.g. 'Explore the social inequality in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.'). Successful use was made of some new texts this year including Brian Moore's *Lies of Silence*, Michele Roberts' *Your Shoes*, Gorky's *Twenty Six Men and a Girl*, Trollope's *Malachi's Cove* and Amelia B Edward's *The Phantom Coach*.

As I have noted before, high marks come with the close study of the language of the text. Tasks that do not allow this disempower the students.

Drama

Virtually all centres enter the Shakespeare essay in the drama section of the Literature folder but when Shakespeare is chosen as an examination text, the folders most frequently include Post-1914 drama texts like *An Inspector Calls* and *The Crucible*. There is a small but interesting and welcome trend to study Tennessee Williams' plays.

Assessment

The oral assessments still remain a problem as I have noted above. The best practice in this respect includes a clear statement about the task and detailed student specific criteria related commentary on performance. It should be perfectly clear how the student displayed the skills noted. If this information is not provided, it will be requested.

I have also commented above on in-text commentary that does not reflect student achievement. When it occurs, it is not clear whether such comments are aimed at the student or the moderator. Clearly, coursework annotation should principally be an aid for the student who hopefully will be able develop skills as a result. In some centres, this is very much the case and the moderator can see a definite development of the student's skills as he or she takes the advice to heart. However, implying through a comment that a skill has been displayed when it clearly has not is unhelpful to either the student or the moderator.

It is expected that mechanical errors be flagged up in the marking process in both pieces of Writing work. If they are not, teachers can get a very optimistic view of technical accuracy which distorts the marks. Many moderators this year commented on the generous SSPS marks awarded. Generous assessments are usually the result of one or more of the following:

- optimistic marking of brief /skimpy work;
- over-reliance on storytelling in Reading and Literature essays;
- reliance on feature spotting at the expense of probing of texts;
- failure to encourage students to work through poems closely and methodically;
- perfunctory attention given to comparison;
- over-emphasis on cultural/historical information at the expense of looking at the literature as literature;
- often long and meaningless preambles to reading essays;
- failure to indicate errors in writing or to take account of technical shortcomings.

In many centres there is a clear progression apparent in the internal moderation process. This must be very helpful indeed to teachers new to the system and it shows the moderator that a full consideration has been given to each piece of work. In such centres, one can only stand back and admire the care and concern apparent in the attempt to establish a fair mark for each student. However, it is essential that one person make final decisions. This should create a parity of assessment across a centre. Moderators occasionally find one teacher within a centre out of line with the remainder and this generally results in a teacher scaling or remark. In such cases, one can only presume that the internal moderation process has broken down. However, one must not overlook the fact that the vast majority of centres get the assessments right. This is no mean achievement and it is especially impressive in the case of the very large centres.

A number of moderators commented this year on the number of errors in the transfer of marks from the work to the coversheets and the changing of marks on the coversheets without any clear indication of the reason for such changes.

Finally, I must pay tribute to the students, the majority of whom embrace their coursework with an enthusiasm and determination, and their teachers, who guide them with skill and professionalism.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Administration

Each year the same problems arise, but it is fair to say that their occurrence seems to be less. I am not going to reiterate the same list of difficulties in receiving and disseminating information, be it regarding tasks being undertaken, details on E3 forms or arrangements for visits. There are, however, just one or two points I would like to highlight.

I can report that record keeping is generally of an extremely satisfactory standard, with many centres adopting very impressive methods incorporating both teacher and pupil input. In some colleges, these records are kept on computer and can be accessed by both staff and students, which is obviously good practice.

I would ask that teachers responsible for Speaking and Listening pay particular attention to the details included in the correspondence regarding the conduct of visits: a number of moderators have found that although these give a clear indication of what is required in terms of numbers of pupils and types of activity, there have been occasions when it has been patently obvious that these guidelines have not been read.

Many moderators travel considerable distances to schools and colleges, some even staying in an area for several days to complete visits. Cancellation of a visit on the day, or even the previous day, can be very inconvenient. It is appreciated that occasionally an unforeseen situation, such as staff illness, may arise, but a number of moderators made wasted journeys and were consequently unable to re-schedule visits.

Assignments

There were fewer cases this year – although worryingly they do still occur – of tasks being unhelpful in eliciting responses from pupils. When this situation did occur, it was often through provision of too much reading material: one moderator cited a centre where pupils were provided with three hefty newspapers to read and discuss before selecting a favoured news story for a discussion and presentation. On the other hand, using quite demanding stimuli – usually literary - with a wide ability range of pupils within one group sometimes resulted in the most articulate inhibiting the less able from contributing.

Moderators were pleased to see a good range of activities, fulfilling the three areas of Individual Extended Contribution, Group Discussion and Interaction and Drama Focused Activity. It was less common that centres failed to produce examples of all three contexts, and the incidence of over-prepared or revisited tasks seemed less prevalent this year. In many cases, teachers were careful to remind pupils of the skills they should be addressing prior to the task, and it was encouraging that pupils made spontaneous comments such as 'We've done something like this before'.

The comments made last year concerning the possible disadvantages of using PowerPoint for presentations seem to have been heeded. One example seen was where it was very aptly used to illustrate a very witty and assured 'Room 101' presentation, providing that element of polish which appears in the television programme.

Moderators have highlighted a number of activities which are noted below. In particular, themed activities, covering all three contexts, proved very successful and engaged the pupils fully:

Individual presentation – The importance on music in my life. This led to group/pair discussion on the poem 'Elvis'. Finally, they presented a lively meeting, with pupils in role, about plans to stage a rock festival in the local village.

Schools of the Future. Paired discussion of images representing possible scenarios for schools in fifty years' time, such as cyber learning and virtual classrooms. Role play ensued, with pupils as parents, teachers and pupils of the future. Finally a presentation using persuasive techniques.

Healthy Living Programme in school. Discussion leading to a presentation to the Headmaster and Governors.

Crime. Group/paired discussion to decide a rank order for seriousness of a given list of crimes. This led to a role-play from an ASBO situation.

News. Using a thoughtfully selected collection of newspaper articles (some with specific local interest), there was discussion regarding their rank order in terms of public interest. This led to improvisation and performance of a news item from the selection, employing appropriate genre and style.

Response to a proposed Drug Rehabilitation Centre in the area. Group discussion, followed by paired role-play.

Other tasks relating to one or two contexts were also successful. These include:

- Group discussion, using de Bono's hats' principle, on whether the mosquito device (used to deter young people from gathering at a particular location) should be banned.
- Group discussion on the merits and dangers of the Internet. Pupils were in specific roles such as a member of Bebo or a concerned parent.
- Group discussion on how to improve the school's local area to promote community spirit. Each smaller group presented their ideas to the others.
- Group discussion on a local road-widening plan, with pupils in a variety of roles.
- Group discussion on the rights and responsibilities of young people based on 'The Seduction'.
- Individual Extended Presentation based on 'Dragon's Den', in which there was a sales' pitch for a commodity.
- Group discussion on whether a school should be closed. This was a real possibility for the school concerned and generated very lively debate.

There were also some unsuccessful tasks, aside from those mentioned above. Free choice regarding individual presentations can sometimes result in able pupils making poor choices. Guidance is needed to ensure that they choose a topic which allows the higher grade criteria to be reached. Vague tasks such as 'discuss this poem' or 'talk about something that interests you' also have their pitfalls. Mounting the trial of Lennie from 'Of Mice and Men' and producing a more satisfactory ending to the novel seemed a rather bizarre – and unhelpful - notion.

Assessment

There was clear evidence of teachers using the criteria to inform their assessments. In a number of cases, newly qualified teachers were involved in the sessions. This can prove invaluable as training, and in all cases the pupils were comfortable with the presence of extra staff. Teachers were anxious to get assessments right, and although sometimes pupils did not perform as they had done in the classroom, assessments on the day were generally accurate. This is testimony to the hard work put in by teachers in an area which is notoriously difficult to address by virtue of its transient and time-consuming nature.

Teachers welcomed the opportunity to discuss specific issues, such as the respective values of quantity of contribution and quality. It was observed that often the most thoughtful pupils might say less in discussion, but, after listening carefully and thinking, might make the most pertinent contributions.

Although there were still cases where the records were not standardised across the department, or were not linked to the criteria, these were far fewer than in previous years. As already mentioned, record keeping was often described as 'exemplary', with most centres adopting a common approach with room for both teacher and pupil comment and, in some cases, space on the record for evidence of cross moderation.

As ever, the opportunity for cross moderation varied tremendously from a generous two week period of Speaking and Listening activities which included time for a full scale moderation exercise to no time at all. In between these extremes were days given to the whole department so that all pupils could be seen by two teachers other than their own, or time found during 'free' periods, at lunch time or after school. Obviously cross moderation is at its best when it is on-going, but the practicalities are another matter.

One other solution that many centres have adopted is to video activities in the classroom and use them for moderation purposes. Indeed, one moderator reported that the session in which he was involved was videoed and the plan was to show the recording to the rest of the department and report on the details of the discussion regarding the assessments held afterwards.

The standardising material is also of use for both pupils and teachers, but there were concerns that a number of teachers, including, worryingly, those responsible for Speaking and Listening, had not seen the most recent material. Sometimes lack of dedicated time for viewing the material was cited as the reason. It is essential that this bank of tasks, with the accompanying commentary, is made available for both reference and discussion within departments.

Small centres, of which there are many of very differing types, often feel isolated and one solution was seen where three teachers from nearby small units had created a 'consortium', and all attended an advisory session together.

Despite the difficulties encountered by some centres and the challenges of assessment, it is clear that teachers are working very hard to teach oral skills. The young people seen by the moderators were invariably comfortable in the presence of an unfamiliar adult, and spoke purposefully and articulately on a wide range of topics. I am sure that this positive trend will continue to develop.

FOUNDATION TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

Candidates should have found few surprises in the structure of this year's Foundation Tier papers and the questions followed a familiar pattern. It is pleasing to report that the majority of candidates completed the papers but some struggled to manage their time effectively, and it is always sensible to work to the timings suggested on the front of the papers.

PAPER ONE

The short story by Alan Paton seemed to engage most candidates, and although the narrative was the straightforward tale of a man desperate to avoid becoming a victim of a gang, the twist in the tale, that resulted in the central character killing his own son, who was one of the gang, demanded that candidates read the story carefully and understood relationships as well as the story line. Part of the attraction of the story lay in the way Paton captured the panic and desperation of the central character in his attempt to escape the gang.

Section A

A1

This question asked candidates to track the reaction of Mike, the central character, as he realises the danger he suddenly finds himself in. The section of text was only 15 lines but required close reading and the ability to focus on the character's reactions – what he thinks, feels and does. Well-prepared candidates simply worked methodically through the text, looking at Mike's reactions, and on occasions adding comments that showed good understanding of his thoughts and feelings. From the opening sentence, careful readers could see that Mike very quickly realises the potential danger he finds himself in, as the bus moves away and he sees the gang of young men nearby. Even in these two opening sentences there is the realisation that he may be attacked, and this is made even clearer when he knows he cannot get back to the safety of the bus. Candidates who explored these opening sentences were able to get their response off to a good start, but some ignored the detail and offered only a rather general statement that 'Mike panicked', some of them then saying that he ran into the wasteland, which at this point, is clearly incorrect. Those who said he was scared or terrified gained reward and most selected appropriate details like, "his mouth was dry" or "his heart was pounding in his chest" to support this view. Where candidates were able to 'break down' sentences they often gained more reward as this led to them probing the text in greater detail; weaker readers still have the tendency to quote quite large chunks of text with little or no comment; the final sentence of the first paragraph was often an example of this.

The second paragraph explores Mike's thoughts: he thinks about the money he has, he realises that is why he is likely to be attacked, and he is also thinking about the consequences of the attack – that he may be killed and his family left fatherless. He is absolutely sure the gang will show no mercy to him. The paragraph provided opportunities to explore the text in some detail and good candidates were able to do this, whilst weaker candidates often made only limited explorations and relied on quoting without comment. At this point in the passage, Mike is unsure what to do: he stands 'uncertainly', weighing up his options. He feels trapped, knowing there will be no help from the convent. In the end he knows the waste land offers him his only hope. He moves towards it but realises that some of the gang are there too. As with many questions, those who were prepared to work through the text carefully and always think in terms of his reactions, gained good marks by steady accumulation. Weaker candidates gained some reward for correct location and selection of detail, but, as has been said in Inset meetings and previous reports, the steady accumulation of marks is, for many, the best way of gaining a high grade, and this first question often gave good candidates a good start.

A2

This question was really looking at the writer's craft and how Paton had managed to capture the tension and drama of Mike being chased through the waste land by the gang of young men intent on robbing him. However, it was important that candidates followed the instructions to structure their responses around the two bullet points, which gave reward for exploration of what happens in the story as well as their ability to probe particular words and phrases to consider how these impact on the reader.

The events in this part of the story are fairly straightforward and contain many elements of classic chase scenes that readers will have been familiar with. Mike's anxiety about what could happen to him has now been replaced by panic, and he can smell his own fear, knowing the gang are in pursuit and getting closer. He feels trapped, and some readers wrote about the adrenaline rush that gave him strength and anger. As one of the gang looms up at him, he lashes out wildly with his stick, causing the man to give "a cry of pain" and then he plunges "blindly" into the waste land, desperate to escape. When his leg is caught by "something", we wonder if one of the gang has grabbed him but as he again lashes out blindly, we find it is just a piece of iron that has caught him. As he pushes on, he can hear pursuers behind him, noisily giving chase. He then falls into a "tangle of wire" that traps and holds him, and again the reader is led to believe this is the end for him; he cannot escape the wire and he feebly cries out for help, but expects to be killed at any moment. The passage was just twelve lines long but was rich in detail and offered lots of points for exploration. It was possible to accumulate marks sufficient for a creditable mid-band mark just by careful tracking of events, but the focus on the words and phrases gave stronger candidates ample opportunity to push into the top mark band. Some were able to explore the impact of phrases like "plunged blindly" or individual words like "loomed" or they explored the "something" that held his leg or the way the wire "tore at his clothes". Others looked at the language that showed Mike's panic: "sobbing and out of breath" or the way his cry for help was "voiceless and gasping".

There was no shortage of phrases or words upon which to focus, and the strongest candidates were able to write sensibly of the way they conveyed Mike's fear or intensified the effect for the readers. There were weaker readers who simply told examiners that "it made you feel like you were there" or they copied sentences and reported that these "made it exciting", but there were many candidates who moved some way beyond this, showing they could make sensible analysis of how the passage had been made tense and exciting.

A3

This question asked candidates to look at the ways the writer showed Mike's fear, and as with the previous questions, it demanded careful tracking of the text. It was possible to get a good mark here simply by identifying what Mike does, and where appropriate, by recognising his reactions and feelings.

Good candidates began by noting that his fear was shown by his own stark realisation that "he was facing death", that he was unlikely to escape his pursuers. They then went on to explore his feelings of injustice: that he did not deserve to die like this. The way that candidates used the text was important: long quotations, often complex sentences, brought some limited reward for correct location, but where candidates were able to break these sentences into a number of separate points, it often brought them greater reward. Many candidates noted that Mike hit one of his attackers, but more careful readers saw that killing the man showed Mike's desperation and fear, showing perhaps a powerful contrast with the 'hardworking and honest' man that he considers himself to be; his fear has turned him into a man capable of the ultimate violence. The importance of really careful reading was clear, as some candidates mistakenly thought he had been hit by his attacker, while others confidently claimed that a lorry had driven into him. Stronger readers used the phrase, "ran wildly" as an indicator of his blind panic and saw that, even in his stunned state, as he lay on the floor, his natural instinct for preservation sent him rolling under the lorry to escape the men. Too many weaker readers then relied on simply quoting the final three sentences rather than attempting to break down his actions and thoughts; for those who were prepared to do this, however, and perhaps add just a brief comment or two, it was often enough to carry them into the top band of marks.

A4

This final question invited candidates to show their understanding of the events in the story, and particularly the relationship between Mike and Freddy, one of the gang, and then to offer some personal response to the way the story unfolded. Most candidates chose to weave their reactions into their exploration of the events, and this was perhaps the most effective way of tracking one's own changing reactions, although there were many others who dealt with the two parts of the question entirely separately and achieved good marks. In some cases, markers noted that candidates had given a detailed and accurate account of the events, but no personal reaction, or conversely, had given a range of sensible reactions but little information about what had actually happened. In most of these cases it was possible to gain a creditable mid-band mark, but to push into the top band, both elements of the question needed to be addressed. The very weakest readers sometimes struggled to make sense of what had happened, and it was important to be selective here. These readers particularly struggled to explain the relationship between Mike and Freddy. Better readers were able to explain that Freddy was Mike's son, and examiners were then looking for candidates to push on to say that it had been Mike who had killed him. Stronger readers who had been able to make these links were in a good position to explore a range of reactions to these events. For example, many readers were rightly concerned about Mike being discovered by the gang. As they grappled with the events and the relationship between Mike and Freddy, they often wrote of their initial confusion, a perfectly sensible reaction. Some were understandably angered by Freddy's involvement in the attack on Mike and just occasionally moral outrage took them away from the text as they reflected at length on family values and Freddy's betrayal of his father. Shock that Mike had killed his own son was the sensible reaction of many, but some also viewed the gang's treatment of Freddy as especially callous. Lots of candidates were pleased or relieved that Mike had escaped detection but also reflected about how he must have felt to be lying next to his dead son. Occasionally, weaker readers reported that this must be a cliffhanger and demanded to know what happened next, but where readers had a good grasp of events and relationships, many handled both parts of the question successfully and there were some very creditable and sensitive responses.

Section B

Section B is common to candidates on both tiers and the key messages in the Higher Tier report apply equally to candidates who took the Foundation Tier examination.

B1

The descriptive writing task is one that has had much Inset time devoted to it and candidates on both tiers appear to be more confident about tackling it. However, the messages in this and the Higher Tier report will be familiar. Candidates now seem clearer that descriptive writing is not a personal narrative, and stronger candidates usually chose to write in the third person, avoiding the tendency to write about "my coach trip", although this was still a feature of too many pieces. There has certainly been an improvement in the way stronger writers recognise the need to move from a generalised description of the whole scene or event, into the more interesting specific `snapshots` or cameos of individuals captured at particular moments. This ability to `zoom in` is what gives the scenes or people life and authenticity. The `coach at a road works` scene gave lots of opportunities to focus on those inside the coach, workers at the road works and others caught up in the scene, such as car drivers and pedestrians. Some candidates also took the opportunity to describe the town or country scene where the coach was stuck. Inside the coach there were opportunities to describe the passengers as well as the driver, and more able writers were able to focus on these without drifting into stereotypes.

At times there was a tendency for weaker writers to seek refuge in a formulaic approach that either focused almost entirely on individuals, where the focus was primarily on what people were wearing, and where the circumstances of the coach at the road works played almost no part, or they offered exaggerated descriptions of the (always obese and heavily perspiring) bus driver bawling at the workmen, the school trouble-makers causing mayhem on the back seats of the bus, the Armani-suited businessman shouting into his mobile and the harassed mother desperately soothing her screaming baby.

Where the writing was more assured, candidates moved beyond just physical description and links were made between the actions of one passenger and another, there were snatches of dialogue or conversations and sustained descriptions that built and extended details of the scene. Some focused on the roadworkers as well as the coach passengers, and there was a sense, in the best pieces, of a camera moving inside and outside the bus, zooming in and focusing on some key points of interest, effectively capturing the scene.

In terms of content and organisation, many of the stronger candidates are producing some sustained, lively pieces of writing for this task, but too many are still let down by poor technical accuracy. Writing in complete sentences remains a key concern in this task and the work of many candidates suffers because simple spelling errors, weak punctuation and errors in grammar lose them valuable marks. It is probably true to say that whilst markers have seen a gradual improvement in the quality of content and organisation in this writing task, technical accuracy remains an issue.

B2

Most Foundation Tier candidates appeared able to complete both writing pieces, and as usual there were many narrative pieces that were engaging and interesting. Generally, candidates seemed more confident writing in the first person, but the issues of technical accuracy, seen in the descriptive pieces, also played an important part in determining candidates' overall marks.

(a) The Traitor

This title was a popular option and responses seemed to be equally divided between personal betrayal and a tale of betrayal set in a period of war. Whilst some candidates tried to produce tales of epic proportions, the more successful pieces tended to have a simple plot, few characters and a relatively short time span. Many candidates showed they could respond well to these 'open' narratives in the time available and produced good tales that suggested teachers had spent time during the examination course investing time in developing candidates' skills as writers of short stories.

(b) Write about an incident when you were embarrassed by your friends or family.

Personal narratives are often a 'safe bet' in an examination situation and there were invariably good pieces drawn from real life situations. As in previous years, this was a popular option and often proved to be a good choice for the candidate. Many of the tales involved incidents with newly-acquired boy/girl friends meeting the family for the first time and these were often engaging, warm and humorous.

(c) A Day at the Seaside

Whilst this appeared to be a straightforward, even 'easy' choice, it proved to be a problematic option for some candidates, who sometimes began their tales with long, over-elaborate accounts of the preparations for the journey, the journey itself, and then seemed too exhausted to give much attention to the time spent by the sea. Some merely drifted through a series of low-key events, whilst others had dramatic near-tragic events dominating the day. The best were often those that realistically captured the family on its day trip, with some attention to detail and these brought individual members of the family to life through their behaviour, speech and interaction.

(d) Write about an occasion when you appeared on stage.

This was a popular option and it did perhaps benefit from being a personal narrative that was very time-limited. Involvement in a talent show was the most usual vehicle for candidates, but first rock-band gigs and school drama/music productions also presented good opportunities for writers to capture the drama, anxiety and success (or at times, failure) of the occasion. There were also some good pieces where the narrator unexpectedly captured the spotlight, by being invited on to the stage for a special award, or through some third party involvement, and for most who chose this option, it gave good opportunities for lively and engaging writing.

(e) Write a story which begins: He hoped he would have the strength to do what was right.

The fact that this was a third-person narrative made this a fairly demanding task, and some weaker writers sometimes slipped into first person part way through the narrative. It also demanded a clear narrative line and this too tested some weaker writers whose plot construction sometimes went awry. For those who could construct a plot around a character determined to do right, often against the odds, this was a good choice as it offered opportunities to develop a character and build a plot that sometimes demanded time-shifts as it moved towards a decisive conclusion.

PAPER TWO

Section A

In some ways, the kinds of materials used in Paper 2 will have seemed familiar territory for many candidates who had tackled last year's `Warwick Castle` leaflet and article as their `mock` examination. In this year's paper, the promotional materials inviting visitors to Bradford was paired with a more negative view of the city, taken from Bill Bryson's `Tales from a Small Island`. Although Bryson has never been used on Foundation Tier before, many candidates will have been familiar with his style of writing, especially if they had worked on Higher Tier papers, where he has appeared in the past. The questions should have been fairly predictable but as ever, the paper demanded good time management in order to cover both sections of the paper effectively.

A1

No candidate should have been surprised by the first question, calling for location and selection skills, though the questions did require some careful reading. It was disappointing to see quite able candidates fail to score good marks simply because of a rushed or muddled response to a straightforward `search and find` question. Most candidates correctly identified Bradford's historic buildings, though some only selected two of the three. For most, identifying the two theatres, The Alhambra and The Priestley posed no problems and the range of sporting facilities meant most could find at least two. For some candidates, the focus on the `film` in the question eluded them and they failed to pick up three easy marks. Overall, candidates gained good marks in this question and this should have settled the nerves and convinced them they could tackle the rest of the paper with some confidence.

A2

The wording of this question was almost identical to one in last year's paper, and the bullet points should have helped candidates to structure their response. However, it was important that candidates were aware that this was a `How` question, and was not merely asking for `what` was in the brochure. The weakest responses simply selected and listed a few attractions or copied chunks of the brochure fairly unselectively. Listing words does show some skills of selection but only stronger readers seemed willing to explore how the language of the brochure would attract a potential visitor, or who would be particularly

attracted by the kinds of attractions described. These readers usually focused on the wide range of attractions that would appeal to families and the young and the old. Cultural activities, such as the film festivals and the theatres were often given some attention, but so too were the way that the range of sports facilities would attract a wide audience. Weaker readers often listed attractions and added a simple comment that “this would make me want to go”. Similarly, when considering the photographs, weaker candidates’ responses tended to be limited to single word comments like “big”, “colourful” or “different”, whilst those prepared to consider why these photographs had been selected talked about how the Bradford Festival picture captured the excitement of the occasion, and the way this looked like an enjoyable, multicultural experience. They sometimes commented on the pictures of the markets, emphasising the range of shopping experiences on offer, or used the Imax and Centenary Square photographs to emphasise the range of attractions that would appeal to all the family, or young and old alike. It was true that candidates could get some way by ‘spotting’ details but it was only by addressing ‘how’, through sensible comment and analysis, that it was possible to push into the top band of marks.

A3

If candidates had read the passage and question carefully and followed the bullet points, it was hard to go far wrong, particularly if a little comment was added to some of the points that Bryson makes. The real test lay in the selection of details made in order to evidence his likes and dislikes and then to analyse the way these influenced the overall impression he has of the town.

It was a fairly straightforward task to identify those features of the town that Bryson liked: he was impressed by the few remaining wool warehouses, that he calls ‘striking’, and as candidates tracked through the fourth and fifth paragraphs it was easy to identify attractions like Lister Park, the pubs and The Alhambra Theatre that he was impressed by. Most saw that he approved of the National Media Museum, despite the Imax being housed there. He also very much liked the curry houses, extolling the delights of ‘The Kashmir’ in particular. Most candidates found it simple enough to identify these attractions, though weaker readers tended to copy out sentences, but sometimes missed the key details.

In dealing with his dislikes, readers needed to select from the whole passage to capture a real sense of Bryson’s criticism of the city. He begins with an attack on the destruction of Bradford’s fine architectural past, and goes on to write about the present, dismal state of the town, with its ‘vacant shops’, office buildings with ‘To Let’ signs and other examples of urban decay. Selection of detail gained reward but weaker readers saw his attack upon the ‘misguided meddling by planners’ as no greater criticism than that of the ice-rink. More able readers recognised that his views about the destruction of the city’s fine buildings entirely influenced his overall view of the city, and that in consequence, he had a negative overall view of this ‘depressing city’. Despite some touches of typical Bryson humour, in places the text was a challenging read and some weaker readers found his style and language a struggle. For example, some candidates felt he did not actually like the curry houses because he had called them “a terrible oversight”, and others took refuge in lengthy copying of chunks of text that showed little real understanding of Bryson’s views. Good candidates selected words and phrases carefully to support their assertions, noting for example, that he had called Bradford’s historic buildings, a “meagre stock” or that most shops in the city were, “barely hanging on”. Short, pithy selections invariably gained reward, especially when supported by a comment that clarified or confirmed understanding. This was a question that most candidates tackled at some length and where they were clear about Bryson’s overall impression of the city, they gained high marks.

A4

The move towards comparison of content across the two texts has made this final question in the reading section rather more accessible to candidates, but it still requires careful reading and the willingness to stick to the instructions – in this case to organise answers into three separate paragraphs, each on a very specific aspect of the texts. Those who chose not to do this struggled with a jumble of detail that was often impossible to untangle.

Where candidates stuck to the suggested structure, it was fairly easy to see that Bryson's view about Bradford's buildings differed entirely to that given in the brochure. Where the brochure talked of "many" historic buildings being preserved and that these were "excellent" or "stunning", Bryson's view was that although some "striking warehouses" remain, there are few other historic buildings worthy of note, because most have been "swept away". Candidates also gained reward if they saw that Bryson commented on the many buildings that were vacant or covered with scaffolding, or that the new office buildings were "angular" or ugly. Candidates who tackled this well organised their material into what the brochure said, compared to Bryson's view and the use of words like `but` and `whereas` helped them to structure the response effectively.

In looking at the attractions, good candidates saw that the brochure had identified a huge variety of different attractions and that these catered for all the family and for all ages of visitor. Some also noted the emphasis on festivals and events that took place over the year. Bryson's view, in contrast, is that whilst there are attractions, such as Lister Park and the Alhambra Theatre, overall there are too few attractions to entice the visitor, some of the attractions were "dull" or "appalling", and even on a Saturday evening, the city seemed dead. In considering what the texts had said about places to eat, across the two texts there was agreement that the curry houses were good, although whereas Bryson focused solely on the curry houses and one such restaurant where the food was good and cheap, the brochure also talked of the broader range of food available, from "fine international cuisine" to "traditional local food". Where candidates tackled the question methodically, they often gained good marks, but there were examples where candidates tackled only one of the bullet points or wrote in such general unspecific terms that it brought only limited reward.

Section B

B1

This task gave candidates the opportunity to write about their home area but for a very specific purpose and audience. This meant that the selection of content was particularly important, and it was possible to be both informative and offer an opinion. As with last year's paper, some weaker candidates struggled with the notion of an article and produced leaflet-like pieces with little text. Others ignored the task and produced pieces of promotional writing that might have been helpful for a visitor contemplating a day's visit but gave few real clues about what the place was like to live in. Those who read the task instructions carefully often produced detailed and informed pieces that gave good, useful insights into the advantages and disadvantages of living in their home town, city or village. The best were also in tune with their age group, telling readers about the best clubs, places to relax and shop, and in some cases, information about schools in the area. Transport arrangements often featured highly, especially where services were poor, and good writers usually balanced the area's strengths and weaknesses well, although there were also entertaining and lively pieces that attacked or defended a place with a vigour that Bill Bryson would have appreciated. The best writing was impressive, giving relevant information and having a good sense of audience.

B2

Higher Tier candidates also tackled this task and many of the features highlighted in the Higher Tier report were also seen in Foundation Tier candidates' work.

Having a clarity about the purpose and audience for this piece of writing was essential, and there were some candidates who thought the newspaper editor was responsible for the ban on smoking in public places, which made it difficult to construct and sustain a convincing argument. Whilst there are debates about exactly how a letter should be set out, there were many candidates who ignored all conventions and the writing looked no different at all from the way B1 was set out. In some cases, this led to candidates drifting from an appropriate tone for a formal letter which adversely affected their mark. Where the writing was good, candidates invariably began well, so that the purpose of the letter and also the writer's view on the subject was clear. The opening sentence often set the tone for all that was to follow and the best pieces were then structured so that the letter raised three or four points in support of the writer's view. Where each paragraph dealt with a separate argument which then led neatly to the next point, candidates gained good marks for content and organization. Occasionally, candidates tried to be even-handed, seeing both advantages and disadvantages to the smoking ban, but this was not the best approach, as writers found themselves trying to justify a view they had previously criticized, and the impact of their letter was lost. Others moved into `rant` mode, which sometimes provided quite an effective opening but made it more difficult to develop an argument in any real detail, and often this approach led candidates into the wider argument about smoking in general, and the focus on the original argument became lost. The best pieces used a mix of personal experience and statistical evidence to support their points of view, often exploring why those who disagreed with them were wrong but adopting a measure and reflective approach as they considered all the advantages or disadvantages that the change in the law had brought. As with all the writing tackled in the examination, technical accuracy influenced the final mark and there were still many candidates whose work was adversely affected by errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. However, the overwhelming view of examiners was that the vast majority of candidates had worked hard and there was much to enjoy in this year's papers.

HIGHER TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

The structure of the papers followed the predictable pattern and the questions should have come as no surprise to the candidates. However, the papers always require disciplined time-management from the candidates and, inevitably perhaps, some candidates failed to organise their time sensibly. There is an important issue here about judging the length of answers and practising on past papers to ensure that the candidates know what they can produce in the time available. It is really not sensible to devote too much time and effort to Section A if this is done only at the expense of Section B where the writing is heavily weighted.

PAPER ONE

The short story by Doris Lessing explored the effect of a particular incident in the development of a young boy and most candidates were able to identify with this 'rite of passage'. The narrative had a reasonably straightforward surface but there was a thematic richness in the story which was thought provoking and invited the candidates to reflect on the issue of personal responsibility.

Section A

A1

The opening question required the candidates to track the thoughts and feelings of the unnamed boy and, although there were some obvious points to make, there were also more subtle and complex emotions involved here which allowed the able candidates to show the depth of their understanding of the character.

It was important to recognise that this question focused on the boy's thoughts and feelings, as opposed to the reader's response to the character, and a third-person approach worked best. 'Positioning' is a vital examination technique and, having established the way in to the question, the best answers then tracked methodically through this opening section. It is also worth mentioning that the best candidates avoid simply telling the story and use 'when' as a subordinating device to stay in position.

The first point was that he felt full of energy and the excitement of going shooting as he jumped from his bed 'like a fish leaping'. He also felt cold and there were some obvious textual details which could be used to support that conclusion. He dressed 'rapidly', his hands were 'numb' and he could 'scarcely hold his shoes'. His thoughts then turned to his parents and he was afraid of waking them so he did not put on his shoes. He imagined them turning in their beds and 'smiled scornfully'. Many candidates simply quoted that detail but the better answers remembered the question and made an attempt to infer what he was feeling. They argued that he felt a sense of superiority or 'looked down' on his parents who did not suspect how early he rose or what he was doing. Some saw the arrogance of youth. Weaker answers missed the scorn or argued that he was scared of his parents.

He then thought he would have to hurry because morning was breaking but, more importantly, he felt fit and strong. When he felt the dust between his toes, he thought that he could walk a hundred miles on his feet and walk all day and never tire. The best answers noted the surge of pride and self-confidence. The boy also realised he was too late to shoot the guinea fowl but he 'did not mind'. Most candidates noticed this point and it was fair enough.

However, those who could select and prioritise gave their attention to the boy's feeling of 'the joy of living and being young', noting how he leapt into the air, shouted 'wildly' and ran 'madly'. There were plenty of textual details to choose in this part of the text. For example, he felt his body rise and fall back to the ground and, although he thinks he could break his ankle, he does not believe it could happen to him. He felt the excitement of being fifteen and thought there was 'nothing' he could not do. He felt life was 'great' and 'wonderful'. He thought he was like all other great men with the ability to choose to do anything and change everything. However, the best answers tried to take the extra step towards inference and overview and argued that he was feeling the opportunities of having his life ahead of him and the exciting promise of being young. These answers showed a clear and coherent understanding of the boy and this was a real opportunity to score heavily, simply by staying with the text. The dogged responses often gained a lot of marks.

A2

This question was entirely predictable, focusing on the craft of the writer and how she showed the suffering of the deer. Most readers would react emotionally to this description of an animal in fear and pain and all the candidates had to do was explore how that reaction was created. The bullet points were an attempt to steer the candidates towards looking at content and language. They only had to look at a short piece of the text but they had to look closely and it made sense to follow the sequence of the text. Close reading was the key to success and there was no place for formulaic spotting of technical features or unconvincing comments about the effects of punctuation or sentence length. Some did try this approach but I am pleased to report that most candidates decided to read the passage rather than look for refuge in jargon. Thoughtful commentary and attention to the effect of language was well rewarded.

This section of the text began with the boy, who was familiar with the bush, hearing a noise which 'puzzled' him, suggesting it was strange, unfamiliar and not normal. The deer's scream, suggesting pain and terror, was described as 'shortened' as if it was struggling for breath. It was obviously the screaming of a 'frightened' animal and the writer showed that it was unnerving and shocking as it made the boy's heart beat fast. Able candidates saw that the writer was using the effect of all this on the boy – no sentimentalist about animals – to highlight the suffering of the deer. The animal was unrecognisable at first and was described as 'a strange beast'. The writer focused on its dreadful injuries, describing the tufts of hair as 'ragged' and stressing the gruesome patches of 'raw flesh'. The repetition of scream emphasised its suffering and the screams were 'gasping', showing its desperation. The animal seemed completely out of control as it leaped 'drunkenly' as if it were blind. Careless readers thought it was literally blind. The terrible suffering of the deer was also revealed when the writer described the ground as 'black' with 'great, energetic ants', attacking the helpless animal. The deer was merely a 'fighting shape', struggling desperately for life. When the deer fell, the suffering was so awful that even the boy wanted to shoot the deer to end its misery. It was so upsetting that a quick death would have been a mercy. The writer suggested that the deer had no feeling left and its 'fighting' was merely the nervous reaction of a dying animal, a 'protest of the nerves.' A methodical approach brought a good reward here and a lot of candidates tackled this question successfully.

A3

This question also focused on a short section of the text and it followed logically to ask the candidates to explore the boy's reaction to what he had witnessed. The word 'react' in the question required the candidates to look at what the boy did but also at what he thought and felt. The wording of the question indicated what was required and there was an opportunity here to explore the effect of this incident on the boy and how it made him reflect on the nature of life and death. The best answers were thoughtful and sensitive, seeing the powerful emotional effect of the deer's suffering on the boy.

His first reaction was a 'feeling of rage and misery'. He was angry and upset by what happened to the deer. However, he then told himself that this is the law of nature, recognising that things like this happen 'all over the bush'. He tried to understand and accept that 'life goes on, by living things dying in anguish' and that pain and death are an inevitable and perhaps necessary part of the cycle of life. He reacted very powerfully and the way he 'gripped' the gun between his knees showed how intensely he felt about what had happened. He felt 'the pain of the twitching animal', empathising with its suffering, and told himself over and over again that he could not do anything to stop the brutish laws of nature. Some argued that he felt helpless and perhaps frustrated as he cried and the tears 'streamed down his face'. The strength of his feelings was also indicated by the fact that his clothes were 'soaked with the sweat of the creature's pain' and he then went to look at the skeleton. It was possible to argue that he felt anger as he 'strode' forward and perhaps took some revenge in deliberately crushing the ants beneath his feet. He also felt disbelief, or shock, that the skeleton had been picked clean in just a few minutes.

Careful tracking of the text was essential here but those who did that scored very well.

A4

The final question in this section dealt with the ending of the story but in a way it tested the candidates' understanding of the whole text. This question discriminated very well and allowed the able candidates to show their clarity of thought.

The traumatic incident with the deer made the boy face the law of nature and the reality of life and death in the bush and it prompted him to reflect on the experience and on his own behaviour. The distinction between 'how' and 'why' was perhaps rather slippery for some candidates but the best answers followed the boy's train of thought carefully to explain how and why this changed his view of things.

He began by thinking that only an hour earlier the animal had been 'stepping proud', rather like himself, and he then asked himself what had happened to cause the death of the deer. He found it impossible to believe that such a 'swift thing' could be trapped by a swarm of ants but he saw the broken leg. He rejected the idea of a fall as 'impossible' and concluded that the animal must have been injured by men throwing stones at it, trying to kill it for its meat. It was sensible to follow the logic of his thoughts but this was a key moment as the boy made the connection to his own behaviour. He pictured himself 'drunk with excitement' and shooting at a deer but then persuading himself that it was not worth finding out whether he had hit the animal or not. The able candidates understood the chronology here and grasped that the boy had not killed this deer but had been responsible for similar suffering because of his thoughtless, selfish behaviour on other mornings.

If that point was clearly grasped then the 'how' followed logically. The boy felt guilty and the way he kicked 'sulkily' at the skeleton and hung his head in shame like a small boy showed his uncomfortable awareness that his actions have consequences. He now tried to justify going home as he had on other occasions but he had to tell himself 'defiantly' that he wanted his breakfast and that it was too hot to be roaming the bush. Walking 'heavily' contrasted with his earlier, carefree attitude and showed that he could not simply walk away from what he had seen. When he 'frowned', it showed that he was still troubled by the death of the animal and his realisation that he too may have caused thoughtless suffering and death. The self-confident and self-absorbed boy knew at this point in the story that there was 'something he had to think out.' He was 'concerned' by the deer's death and 'by no means finished with it.' The hunter, who killed animals for sport, now had the death of the deer lying 'uncomfortably' at the back of his mind. He knew he still had some thinking to do but it was clear that he felt guilty about his part in the suffering of animals. Most candidates got some of 'how' he had changed but only the close readers understood 'why' he had changed.

Section B

B1

I commented last year that more candidates seem to have grasped how to approach descriptive writing and they do have a technique for coping with description by avoiding long preambles and the trap of slipping into narrative. However, a significant proportion of the marks are for technical accuracy and the weak candidates make too many errors.

As usual, this task gave almost everyone the opportunity to write from memory and personal observation and the best answers brought a sense of authenticity to their work. The use of third person remains the safest method and the ability to move easily from the general to the particular is a key feature of successful descriptive writing. Convincing observation of physical details and characters is the key to this type of writing and the best achieve a balance between the two, creating an authentic sense of place and 'zooming in' on the people who inhabit the scene.

The tendency to slip into first-person narrative is risky and leads the candidates away from description. They would be well advised to assume the position of the detached observer. The use of the verbless sentence remains a familiar problem in this type of writing and sentences do require a main verb, even in descriptive writing. The instruction to write 'about a page' should not be ignored. The better answers do avoid being 'skimpy' and they devote enough time and energy to the task to produce work of some substance. However, they do not waste time by being self-indulgent and writing too much. Realistically, this piece of writing should probably consist of four or five paragraphs of well-organised observation.

This particular task allowed observation of the scene inside or outside the bus and there were plenty of possible characters to describe. The passengers in the bus, the workers outside the bus, car drivers and passers-by were all potential targets. However, the best answers included *what* they saw and heard as well as *who* they saw. It is also worth emphasising that people are not waxwork figures. It is perfectly acceptable to describe physical appearance and what people are wearing but they also do things and move. I had hoped that the wording of the question would almost force the candidates into a 'snapshot' with a very limited time-scale. However, some candidates decided that the traffic jam lasted for hours, usually while the passengers were being boiled alive in the bus. This was not the most convincing approach!

B2

The choice of titles always allows the candidates to write imaginatively or from personal experience and, as usual, the best were thoroughly entertaining and impressive. This question is often done well and there are some really outstanding responses. It was perhaps a blessing that there were no obvious opportunities here to disappear into a forest or a haunted house. That may have helped some candidates to avoid disaster.

(a) The Traitor

This type of 'open' title is popular and, although it could stimulate imaginative responses, it also could be based on personal experience of betrayal. Indeed, the lies and deceit included in some of these allegedly 'true' stories would not have looked out of place in a Jacobean tragedy. My favourite was a beautifully handled account of how a young girl 'betrayed' her younger sister by revealing that 'Santa did not exist'. The weaker responses struggled to find a narrative in which treachery played a significant part.

(b) Write about an incident when you were embarrassed by your friends or family.

I suspect that very few of us get through life without experiencing the embarrassment caused by friends and family and this was an opportunity to write with humour and honesty. There were some delightful responses to this title and I particularly enjoyed those which involved parents showing 'baby' photographs of their children to girlfriends and boyfriends. Some of these were handled with a self-deprecating humour which was difficult to resist.

(c) A Day at the Seaside

This proved to be a rather tricky option but it was interesting in the way it illustrated some of the problems that the candidates can have with narrative writing. Some accounts were very mundane and seemed to involve little more than sunbathing, an ice cream and perhaps an encounter with one or more members of the opposite sex. At the other extreme, some candidates attempted to inject drama by using accidents of one sort or another. Some of the boating or surfing accidents were reasonable enough but the tendency to improbable melodrama was not always resisted. War stories were the strangest narratives in this context and I very much doubt that the veterans of the Normandy landings regarded the experience as a 'day at the seaside'!

The best responses here were those which reflected on childhood emotions and captured the magic of the seaside through the eyes of the young.

(d) Write about an occasion when you appeared on stage.

The popularity of television programmes which encourage aspiring 'stars' to display their 'talent' may have encouraged some wishful thinking here but the best answers had a feel of authenticity and the candidates were given an opportunity to reflect on moments in their lives when they took part in a dramatic or musical performance. Again, the most successful responses explored the emotions created by public performance. There were some good answers from aspiring rock musicians and the accounts of dramatic triumphs in primary school were often amusing and charming.

(e) Write a story which begins: He hoped he would have the strength to do what was right.

This was a third-person narrative and that did push the candidates away from personal experience unless they were flexible enough to adapt a story. Too many of the candidates who chose this option struggled to construct a narrative which moved convincingly from the given starting point and it was sometimes difficult to see any connection between the opening sentence and the rest of the story. That said, there were some outstanding responses to this title, involving moral dilemmas or situations where physical courage was demanded.

PAPER TWO

Section A

The material in Paper 2 was lighter in mood than the story in Paper 1 and it certainly struck a chord with many candidates. The subject matter was clearly relevant to them and many of them may have recognised themselves, and indeed their parents, in the passages by Edward Enfield and Holly Graham. The two passages were nicely balanced and I hoped that the candidates would be interested and even entertained by them. Edward Enfield also managed to enrage some candidates, who could hardly contain their anger.

A1

The key to this question was the ability to sort out what applied to Harry Enfield in particular as opposed to the comic character of 'Kevin' or teenagers in general. Too many candidates confused Harry with Kevin, or indeed with teenagers in general. However, the question was predictable enough and a series of impressions supported by evidence gained high marks. Weaker answers merely repeated information in the text in an unselective way and failed to draw out the impressions created by Edward Enfield of his son. Many candidates claimed, with little apparent sense of irony, that Harry was a 'typical' teenager in playing 'filthy pop music' very loud. He was certainly inconsiderate and also uncommunicative, self-pitying and moody, choosing to express himself in 'grunts, sighs and sulks.' The impression was also given that he was deceitful in using his dinner money to lunch on coffee and cigarettes at the local cinema while 'swearing blind' that he had had 'a proper meal' at school. Edward Enfield suggested that his son was stupid in his attempt to deny that he smoked and naïve in his belief that he could hide his habit when, in fact, he left a trail of incriminating evidence. Harry developed an almost incomprehensible way of speaking in his mid-teens, dropping half the syllables from his speech and 'slurring the rest'. The impression was given that he was usually 'scruffy' but he also led a 'double life', transforming himself into a punk on his way to the 'yoof club'. Some candidates argued, quite sensibly, that he seemed to want to be 'cool' or 'fit in' with his friends. However, Edward Enfield did concede that Harry could be sociable with visitors and, in contrast to his sisters, he was 'pretty chatty'

This was not really a difficult question and, provided the answer stayed clearly in touch with what the question required, it was possible to score well here. However, too many candidates lost sight of Harry and, sadly, produced a confused jumble of material.

A2

This question asked the candidates to engage with the writer's thoughts and feelings about teenagers in general and the best answers slipped into position, using 'he thinks' and 'he feels' to begin most sentences. There was an element of 'search and find' here but also some inference. The problem for many candidates was, again, the failure to sort out what applied to 'teenagers' and what applied only to Edward Enfield's own children. Those who did get into 'position' showed just how easy this question could be.

Based on his discussions with taxi drivers and the assumption that they are fairly representative of humanity, Edward Enfield thought that most teenagers were 'Kevins'. He thought that 'Kevins' were a 'widespread phenomenon' and that they were 'surly' and 'grumpy'. He did not seem to think that teenagers could be changed and he mocked the academic research which concluded that they have 'too much activity in their juvenile brains.' His sceptical tone suggested that he was not really convinced that too much intellectual activity was the real problem. He then used the 'Kevin' sketch about washing the family car and suggested that this was typical teenage behaviour. He thought that teenagers would do a job with 'very bad grace and extreme incompetence', not because they were 'afflicted' with too much nerve activity in the brain but because they were awkward, difficult and lazy. He felt they 'just don't want to'. He felt that girls are generally 'less frightful' than boys, although he admitted that this was a step into 'dangerous territory'. He felt that teenagers were very difficult to live with and his final thought was that they do actually revert to being 'human beings' when they leave home. Perhaps there is hope!

A3

The defence of teenagers by Holly Graham was a relatively short and straightforward text and, although the candidates had to follow her argument and try to analyse how she suggested that parents were as bad as teenagers, this was not the most difficult of texts. A willingness to 'disentangle' the detail took the candidates a long way and the best answers also showed an ability to 'stand back' and comment on language, tone and persuasive technique. The best approach was probably to follow the structure of the text, tracking the sequence of the argument.

The most obvious feature of this text was the reliance on personal experience and examples. In particular, Holly Graham used the example of her own mother and father, insisting that her mother was 'definitely' more like 'Kevin' than she was and accusing her of being 'grumpy, moody, awkward and sulky' like the 'typical' teenager of the parental imagination.

She provided a list of her mother's 'stereotypical' teenage habits such as her 'speciality' of rolling her eyes and sighing and, sarcastically, pointed out that no explanation was given because 'we wouldn't understand'. There were plenty of details here and it was sensible to mention the way Holly's mother disappeared to her study, slammed doors, answered back and made biting, sarcastic comments in a sort of parody of teenage behaviour.

The argument then turned to parental 'hypocrisy' and 'double standards'. Holly suggested that the constant 'nagging' about drinking alcohol, eating chocolate and spending too much money was really motivated by guilt as her mother knows 'that is how she should behave'. The accusation of hypocrisy was driven home by the fact that the lecture was delivered in a 'ridiculously expensive' kitchen while her mother was drinking wine and eating chocolate.

Holly then insisted that her mother was guilty of far worse moods than she was and accused her of becoming 'obsessed' with 'stupid stuff' such as towels being left on the bathroom floor or not cleaning the bath. The sense of overreaction was emphasised by the claim that her mother behaved as if it was the 'end of the world'. Holly went on to claim that her mother, even when trying to be protective, was unreasonable, inconsistent and 'ridiculous' in her behaviour, and capable of being 'irritable for a whole day' over her trivial problems. There was a clear suggestion that it was mother who was immature, or even childish.

Holly then turned her fire on her father who was also accused of being hypocritical, and perhaps childish, about television and football. The sarcastic humour was still evident.

The final section of the text provided more examples of both parents' hypocrisy, this time in relation to money and untidiness and, not for the first time in the text, Holly conceded that she could be guilty as charged while insisting that her parents, guilty of buying self-indulgent luxuries, were 'just as bad'.

This argument was always likely to provoke a positive response in most of the candidates and this question gave them a real opportunity to score well. However, vague, formulaic comments were not the answer and the better answers focused on specific details and features of the text. I mention last year that candidates should avoid comments which could be applied to any text. That message is still true.

A4

This approach to cross-referencing seems to have helped most of the candidates in recent years to have a clear focus for comparison and the bullet points give them a structure within which they can work purposefully. Using the bullet points as headings encourages clarity and coherence and it is sensible to work within the framework. However, those candidates who ignored the instructions in the question –and there were too many of them - simply produced a shapeless jumble, which was difficult to reward.

The contrasts were sharp and really quite clear. Edward Enfield presented teenagers as 'surlly' and 'grumpy', a generation of 'Kevins'. He suggested that they were lazy and awkward rather than victims of excess 'nerve activity in the brain' and, if his son Harry was typical, scruffy, deceitful and not particularly intelligent in his acts of teenage rebellion. However, he did suggest that girls were generally 'less frightful' than boys. On the other hand, Holly Graham presented teenagers as having some faults but also as the victims of a lot of parental hypocrisy. She also claimed that teenagers get a 'very unfair representation' from the papers and television and that the image of the 'typical' teenager is just a media-induced fantasy.

Edward Enfield presented parents as long-suffering victims, having to endure years of teenage folly. He suggested that parents are hardworking and generally reasonable people, although he also admitted that they do not always know what their teenage children are doing. Holly Graham provided the alternative view that it is parents who are the real 'Kevins'. She presented them as nagging and overreacting to trivial issues. She placed emphasis on the hypocrisy of parents and their immaturity.

Good answers provided supporting detail but the outline should have been straightforward enough. This type of question is handled best by those candidates who can stand back and see the broad picture.

Section B

B1

This task gave the candidates an opportunity to have their say on the subject of teenagers and adopt a journalistic style. It was perfectly acceptable to treat the subject in a serious way but the best answers took the hint in the wording of the question and tried to be 'lively', allowing a sense of humour to emerge. The implied audience for this task was parents who had to cope with teenagers and few candidates were short of things to say. Some were remarkably honest and their confessions were invariably interesting, and often amusing. The candidates were the 'experts' on this subject and many of them wrote with impressive assurance.

B2

This was a formal letter to a newspaper on a subject which was topical and almost certainly relevant to the candidates. It is a topic which arouses strong feelings on both sides but opinion is 'free' and the candidates were entitled to express their views. However, the content needed to be coherent and organised with a sense of shape and direction. The best answers remembered to establish what they were writing about, and where they stood on the matter, at the beginning of the letter. They could then develop their arguments and put across their opinions without losing sight of the purpose of the task or the direction of their argument. Some responses slipped into an anti-smoking rant while others displayed a worrying naivety about what the smoking ban actually involved. Attempts at 'balance' often led to contradiction but there were some very powerfully argued responses which focused on the improvements to health and atmosphere in places such as restaurants and offices. Ironically, those who attacked the legislation were often able to generate some rhetorical fire as they denounced the infringement of personal freedom. At first sight, it seemed that they had chosen the 'weaker' argument but many of them did it very well indeed.

Although there were many impressive and mature responses to this question, I think there is still work to be done in preparing candidates for this type of writing. This is an issue which will be addressed in the Inset programme.

Overall, there was a lot to admire in the work of the candidates and they could not be faulted for the effort they put in to these examinations. Reading skills are often good but technical accuracy in writing remains a concern and I think this is an important issue if standards are to improve. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation of the hard work done by all concerned in this process.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2008

Chair of Examiners: Jonathan Harrington, Teacher Training Coordinator, Brockenhurst College, Brockenhurst, Hampshire;

Chief Examiners: Specification A: Margaret Graham, formerly Head of English, Ysgol Bryn Alyn, Wrexham;

Specification B: Ken Welsh, formerly Head of English, Gateacre Comprehensive School, Liverpool.

SPECIFICATION A

Candidates on both tiers impressed examiners with their detailed knowledge of, and engagement with, their set texts, clearly the end product of some very well focused preparation throughout the course. Messages from INSET meetings and previous reports had apparently filtered through once again, as improvements in approaches to the unseen poems, the extracts and responses to certain types of questions, such as those giving advice to an actor, were evident.

That said, it is worth highlighting some points for attention for future examinations. The first relates to timing. Although incomplete scripts are very rare, ones in which time has been mismanaged are more apparent, with some disproportionately long extract or poetry responses. A few candidates chose or had been advised, to start with the poem. This is rarely a good idea, as the temptation is then to spend longer than thirty minutes on it, which could have implications for the twenty mark drama essay, which would, in such circumstances, be the last answer on the script. Furthermore, when the sequence of the paper is followed, candidates have built up their confidence answering on their set texts, and the unseen poem is not seen as a hurdle, to be got out of the way with. The mantra of 20, 40, 20, 40, 30 (for the minutes allocated to each part of the paper) needs to be second nature by the time candidates get into the examination, and plenty of practice at working in timed conditions is time well spent. As was mentioned last year, weaker candidates on the Higher Tier sometimes write disproportionately long responses on the extracts, using them as a sort of security blanket, and then write equally disproportionately short essay responses, occasionally using only information from the extract. Some of these candidates may have been better served by the questions on the Foundation Tier, with their added structure.

With the extracts, there is still a tendency for some candidates to drift away from the passage set into telling the story of the novel or play as a whole - brief contextualisation is all that is necessary. Treating the extract as an unseen was less evident this year, but uneven coverage is still an issue, and many candidates either failed to reach, or decided not to mention, the ending of the passage. The best responses engage directly with the extract presented, and the "one size fits all" approach attempted by some, whether it be short sentences for tension, or gothic atmosphere (rather in vogue this year!) is likely to be less successful.

The "one I've prepared earlier" approach was also evident in some essay responses this year, too, with candidates revisiting previous questions, sometimes almost regardless of the question on this year's paper. Whilst judicious use of previously tackled questions is perfectly acceptable, there is some skill involved in moulding the material to the new question - again, a matter for practice prior to the examination. Detailed knowledge is the key to a grade C or above, and the majority of candidates showed an impressive and secure knowledge of their set texts, although there are still some who seem unable to distinguish

between the “real” text and the film versions. As has been mentioned before, film versions can be a very useful supplement to the written text and can stimulate lively discussions when considering directorial decisions, but it is important that candidates know which is which, and that it is the written text on which they are to be examined.

The unseen poems were both particularly successful this year, candidates tackling them confidently and with engagement. The fact that there was less dependence on formulae or mnemonics reinforced this sense of confidence.

HIGHER TIER

Whilst the march of *Of Mice and Men* continues, pretty well unchecked, in Section A, *To Kill A Mockingbird* is also popular on this tier, and knowledgeable, engaged responses on all the set texts were in evidence. It was good to note that the relatively recent addition of *Anita and Me* was in greater evidence this year. In Section B, *An Inspector Calls* is the leader, with *A View From The Bridge* and *Blood Brothers* the next most popular. *Hobson’s Choice* seems to be increasing in popularity, and *Under Milk Wood* continues to be very much of a minority choice, possibly even more so than in previous years. The three Shakespeare texts continue to hold up well, and it was particularly pleasing to see more centres working with *Othello* this year.

Section A

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings is always answered on by more candidates than have studied it, owing to its position in the paper, and this year such candidates were in luck with the extract, as it was particularly self contained, and elicited sensitive and thoughtful responses. The question about Maya and Bailey was the more popular option of the two essays (and here those who had tackled the extract unseen came a cropper as they tried to make the baby in the extract Maya’s baby brother!) Those who knew the text discussed the relationship thoughtfully, the best drawing on the whole text, right up to the ending of the book. For Q.1.(c), candidates responded well to the flexibility within the question, and some chose to focus on the episode with Mr. Freeman, or the trip to Mexico, although most chose Maya’s early years.

Pride and Prejudice is becoming increasingly popular, and works well across the ability range. Some candidates were not clear as to the context for the extract, but most picked up on the embarrassment, and the best showed real sensitivity to Elizabeth’s feelings of shame, too. The empathy responses as Jane were particularly well done, with apt use of detail and a convincing voice, and there were also some astute discussions of the relationship between Lydia and Wickham.

The extract on *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* was well answered, with candidates, as always, showing real affection in their responses to the character of Paddy. The best answers here went beyond the sibling rivalry to Paddy’s feelings for his mother. There were also thoughtful discussions of Paddy’s father, in Q.3.(b), showing a sound grasp of textual detail. Most responses to Q.3.(c) also showed a secure knowledge of the text, and the best went on to address the “how” in the question.

Silas Marner, like *Pride and Prejudice*, works well with a wide range of abilities, with its strong characters and clear narrative, and candidates answering on it relished the opportunity to discuss the extract. There was plenty of detail there to reward those who sought it out, and those who tackled Eliot’s use of light, or the image of the “new hatched gosling” were well on the way to high marks. Although Eppie was the more popular choice for the essay, there were also some very successful discussions of Raveloe and its inhabitants. In both of these essays those who considered the function of Lantern Yard, particularly at the end of the novel, were moving into evaluation and appreciation of symbolism and structure, features again associated with the higher grades.

The extract from *To Kill A Mockingbird* was most successfully handled when candidates successfully fixed its context, and went right to the end, to the anti climax of Cecil Jacobs' jumping out (some, indeed, showed appreciation of overview by linking that to Bob Ewell's later attack.) Some misread Jem's contribution to the mood, claiming it made it humorous, but most recognised the overall ominous atmosphere. Weaker responses were dependent on feature spotting, largely out of context. The candidates who chose to write as Dill in Q.5. (b) seemed to really enjoy the task, as tends to be the case with empathy responses, and the majority captured a convincing voice. Some focused on the relationship with Jem and Scout at the expense of his view of the trial, and of his family background, and those who failed to follow the rubric "now grown up" missed the opportunity of relating their opinions to hindsight, but, on the whole, examiners enjoyed reading these responses as much as candidates appeared to have enjoyed writing them! The question on parent/child relationships elicited an interesting range of responses, from those who confined themselves to a detailed discussion of Atticus, Scout and Jem, to those who widened their scope. Most saw contrasts between the Finch and Ewell families, but others discussed Cal's role in both her and Atticus' family, the families of the Cunninghams and the Radleys, as well as Aunt Alexandra and Dill's familial connections. This was the more popular of the two questions on this novel.

Of Mice and Men is by far the most commonly studied text in Section A, and elicited a correspondingly wide range of responses. There was plenty in the extract for candidates to get their teeth into, from the "terrier" reference in the first line, to the violent imagery later on, to the contrasts in the aftermath of the fight. The best answers selected wisely, thus leaving time to pick up on Lennie, "crouched cowering" at the end, and explored this; one perceptive candidate noted how both Curley and Lennie "are portrayed as animalistic which suggests that neither are able to cope with the complexities of human society," thereby showing skills of evaluation and stylistic analysis. Less successful answers were more general, making reference to "uncontrollable mood" or "mood of innocence" without focusing directly on Steinbeck's techniques. Both essays were popular, and the extract led naturally into them both. Some responses, however, went no further than the scope of the extract and therefore placed a limit on candidates' achievement: it would be worth reminding candidates that they should expect to show detailed knowledge of the whole text in the essays. Those choosing Q.6.(b) wrote confidently about Curley (though some drew on their knowledge of the film when referring to his exchanges with his wife!), and there were some astute character appraisals, such as how he lacks "the moral fibre that Slim seems to ooze." There were some interesting discussions of the glove "fulla vaseline", including at least one candidate who was convinced it was a boxing glove! Some answers employed speculative psychological theories into the relationship between Curley and his father, and, of course, his "little man syndrome"! One candidate noted, perhaps tongue in cheek, how "Curley speaks down to people but he can't because he is so small height wise." The responses to Q.6.(c) were best, inevitably, when focus on the question was maintained throughout; some answers, however, drifted off into a discussion of loneliness or dreams, and, whilst these could be valid manifestations of the harshness of ranch life, sometimes the responses never found their way back to the question set. Some confident candidates made a strong case for the tenderness of the relationship between Lennie and George (and Slim, to a lesser extent) counterbalancing some of the harshness and violence. Just occasionally, candidates wrote at great length about the historical context of ranch workers' lives in the early twentieth century, and neglected the details of the actual text almost completely - detailed knowledge of the text is, after all, the key to Grade C and above.

Stone Cold did not seem to be as frequently studied this year, on this tier, at any rate. As always, the extract elicited very empathetic responses, but those who addressed its style fared the best. Some misinterpreted Link's cynicism at the end, and this tended to be a differentiating factor at the higher grades. The question on Shelter was well done, with most picking up on the character's increasingly psychotic behaviour. Some of those who answered on Q.7.(c) tended to re-tell specific incidents or discuss characters, rather than use this knowledge to develop an overview, although there were also some perceptive responses.

Anita and Me seemed to have a few more takers on the Higher Tier this year, and there is a freshness and engagement to the responses on this text. All recognised the context of the extract, and engaged with it, although only the best discussed its humour. Q.8.(b) demanded a more detailed knowledge of the whole text than some candidates were able to muster, but most made valid points about the relationship between Meena's parents. For Q. 8.(c), Anita was, predictably, often chosen as an influential figure, but Sam Lowbridge and Nanima were quite popular choices, too.

Section B

Those few candidates who answered on *Under Milk Wood* wrote well on the extract, recognising the fiscal subtext to Mog Edwards' and Miss Price's relationship, although they tended (understandably, perhaps!) to be a bit coy about articulating the erotic references. One colleague, however, applauded a candidate who compared Miss Price's last line to the notorious deli scene in the film *When Harry Met Sally*, so that candidate, at least, presumably grasped the nature of the characters' dreams! The question on Captain Cat was the less popular of the two essay questions, and some who wrote on its themes tended to run out of steam, limiting themselves to re-telling parts of the play, but others wrote openly on their views of the text and its essentially fragmented narrative.

A View From The Bridge is one of the more frequently studied drama texts, and candidates of all abilities respond very well to it. Much better use is made of stage directions in responding to drama texts nowadays, and there were, as ever with Miller, plenty to address in the extract set, although surprisingly few picked up on the glowing phone booth in the final section. Some candidates concentrated unduly on Alfieri's opening speech, foregoing the opportunities for probing of some of the detail later on, whilst some missed it out, and launched straight into Eddie's arrival, but, on the whole, answers were thoughtful and many were sensitive. The open question in Q.10.(b) was the more popular of the two essays, and, although Catherine and Beatrice were often chosen as characters deserving of sympathy, significant numbers also chose Rodolfo, Alfieri and Eddie. The breadth of knowledge of the text used in support in these responses was often impressive. Those who chose to give advice to the actor playing Marco usually gave sensible advice, often focusing on key areas of the text, and showing the development of his character throughout the play, and fewer than in the past gave generic advice about speaking loudly, or learning lines, or believed the character's costume was in the gift of the actor.

An Inspector Calls continues to be the most commonly studied play, and the extract elicited confident responses. Priestley, like Miller, is generous with his stage directions, and many candidates again made apt use of those in this extract. The best candidates (and this is becoming something of a theme) addressed the impact of the ending, and discussed Mr. Birling's broken syntax reflecting how the phone call had affected him; the majority picked up on the differences between the generations, and Gerald's awkward position, while some noted how the Inspector's presence was still strongly felt, despite his having left the house. Less successful responses generalised: "the mood is lighthearted at the start of the extract", missing Sheila and Eric's attitudes. There were some very strong responses to Q.11.(b), with candidates really engaging with the character of Gerald, in a range of plausible interpretations-some focusing on his guilt, some on his arrogance and some a more complex mix of the two. Weaker responses to Q.11.(c) were overly narrative driven, which can be a tendency with this text, but others perceptively analysed the theme of responsibility, with due focus on the "how" of the question. Those who regarded the character of the Inspector as the embodiment of the play's ideas often used this as a basis for their answer. There is an emerging tendency for discussion of political ideologies to dominate responses to this play, and sometimes candidates not only drift away from the content, but also get confused as to exactly who are the capitalists and who the communists, so this needs to be guarded against.

The Merchant Of Venice did not seem to have been as commonly studied this year, but those candidates who had done so usually coped confidently with the extract, exploring the possible motives of both Shylock and Antonio. The candidates who chose to write about Jessica were well prepared, and discussed her character with engagement, exploring her relationship with her father, and speculating as to her possible regrets at the end of the play. The second essay question, about prejudice, was the more popular of the two, and, again, candidates wrote confidently and relevantly on the theme.

Romeo and Juliet is the most commonly studied of the three Shakespeare plays - although some readings seemed heavily, if not exclusively, dependent on the Luhrmann film. With the extract from the play, a surprising number failed to show awareness of the audience's knowledge of Romeo's response to Juliet's message, so missed some of the nuances of the scene, with comments such as "The audience is on the edge of their seats to hear what Romeo has said to the nurse." A discriminator tended to be if candidates saw the humour in the scene, but empathy, and close reading, could get them a long way, too. More could have been made of how the exclamations, questions and quick exchanges between the characters contribute to the mood and atmosphere. With Q.13.(b), whilst most could write confidently about Juliet's character, the best focused clearly on the words "huge change", and selected and highlighted accordingly. Q.13.(c) was less popular, but tended to be done very well when it was chosen. Lord Capulet is not the most straightforward character, and there were some interesting ideas presented, with sensible awareness of historical context in many instances.

It was good to see more candidates answering confidently on *Othello*; they seemed to regard Iago's machinations in the extract with a sort of appalled fascination and almost admiration, but, despite this, the question on Iago's victims was less commonly answered than that on the, admittedly central, theme of jealousy, which elicited thoughtful and well referenced responses.

Hobson's Choice continues to be popular with its aficionados, and candidates respond to it with real affection and engagement. Most candidates sensibly contextualised the extract, discussing how Willie had changed since the beginning of the play, and there was a variety of equally valid views on his behaviour, but, yet again, a significant number missed the importance of the ending of the extract and what it reveals about how Maggie still has influence over Willie. The essays were more or less equally popular. The best answers on Hobson addressed his changing power, and his relationships with the other characters; less successful got caught up with discussing his clothes (and build!) There were sensitive and thoughtful discussions of the relationship between Maggie and her sisters, with the best exploring the generosity of the former in the face of the selfishness of the latter.

Blood Brothers continues to be one of the most popular texts in this section. Responses to the extract were generally sound, and often thoughtful, but closer focus on specific detail, whether related to dialogue or to stage directions, was relatively rare, some sticking at simpler points, such as the contrast between "me mam" and "my mummy". Some identified weeing on sweets as a trait of working class culture, although others, more successfully, saw this claim as evidence of Mickey's guile. With the advice to the actor playing Mickey, as with other questions of this type, some candidates were side tracked into discussing his accent (rather alarmingly identified as everything from Yorkshire to Cockney by some!) and clothes, and one interesting piece of advice was for the actor to "drink thirteen cans of Red Bull to get you excited and hyperactive to replace the adrenalin which is produced before you kill someone", but many wrote perceptively and often sensitively about the moving changes wrought in the character as the play progresses. Less successful responses focused on Mickey the child at the expense of the deterioration of his character in the later stages of the play. As was highlighted in last year's report and INSET meetings, focus on the end of the text (or a character's final appearance) is always well worthwhile. The question on superstition was rather more popular, and there was a range of responses, from narrative dependent accounts, to thoughtful discussions of how Mrs. Johnstone's superstitions came to affect Mrs. Lyons, to the best which also considered the role of the narrator, the significance of some of the songs, and the importance of other factors, too.

Section C

A London Thoroughfare Two A.M. was a resounding success as an unseen poem, eliciting thoughtful, engaged, and often analytical responses. Interestingly, as it dates from 1912, and Amy Lowell was an American (some candidates actually speculated on the nationality of the poet, having picked up on the references to “sidewalks” and “cabs”), the poem may well come in handy as a coursework poem in the future. However, had candidates known its date, it is quite possible that they may not have responded so personally and positively or have found it as relevant to their own lives and situations as they did. Although there were a few more bizarre interpretations - the poem being narrated by a creature of the night, such as an owl, or a cat, or by an alien, or even a child’s toy, and some health and safety conscious candidates worried about the tramps dozing on window sills, “which seems unsafe for people walking by”, the vast majority of candidates just got on with exploring its ideas, particularly the contrast between nature and technology, and the comfort the familiarity of the moon can offer in an “alien” environment. One candidate, who was clearly all ready to spot techniques, wrote “I dislike the poem because it doesn’t use a lot of poem techniques, such as oxymoron, assonance, similes, onomatopoeia and it doesn’t use a lot of metaphors. But what I do like about the poem is that it has easy vocabulary which allows me to get a better understanding,” an understanding which she then went on to display. Generally, simple identification of features, although it will probably never be eliminated, seems to be on the wane, and responses are the better for it, although there is still the occasional train spotting approach, as in the following, (contradicting the earlier quotation!) “I can easily see metaphors, similes, enjambement and I think an oxymoron.” Close and analytical readers did, however, explore the significance of the personification of the moon, the use of colour, and the repetition of “barred”, and a grasp of the message such as this was common: “The final lines reveal the meaning of the poem, Powell is comforted by the moon, as it is the same the world around though its importance is diminished here, and the city is foreign to her.” It was lovely to see candidates find such relevance and derive genuine enjoyment from their reading of the poem; any who still harbour concerns about the place of the unseen poem in a Literature examination would have them assuaged if they could read such responses.

FOUNDATION TIER

As always, this tier of entry represented a huge range of responses, but in virtually every instance, the individual script represented a real achievement for the candidate behind it, and, also as always, examiners commented on the confidence and commitment with which the questions were tackled. What tends to differentiate candidates here is not knowledge so much as the ability to write in detail and sustain responses, so this could be an area for development in some cases. As on the Higher Tier, *Of Mice and Men* is the runaway favourite prose text, but there is evidence of all the texts in Section A being studied to a greater or lesser extent. In Section B, more seem to study *An Inspector Calls* on this tier than was perhaps the case in the past, and that play, together with *Blood Brothers*, *A View From The Bridge*, probably followed by *Hobson’s Choice*, are the most frequently chosen, with the Shakespeare plays less commonly so, and *Under Milk Wood* very rare.

Section A

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings always elicits strong responses to the extract, and this was even more the case this year, with even those who answered on this text in error responding sensitively to Maya’s situation, with clear focus on the “speaks” as well as the “behaves” of the questions. One of the issues with this text is, perhaps because of its length, candidates tend to focus on its earlier parts to the expense of its later stages, and, with Q.1.(b), knowledge was often a bit hazy after the first two bullet points, although those who got that far were aptly rewarded. Question Q.1(c), of course, allowed them to choose, and was rather more popular for that reason.

Although *Pride and Prejudice* is a rare choice of text for candidates on this tier, those who answered on it clearly expressed their opinions of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth in the extract and of Lydia in the essay Q.2.(c). The Janes were a pleasure to read, with convincing voices and aptly chosen detail. I am sure that this is an instance where film versions have opened the novel to a wider audience, and fostered confidence to go on to read the text.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha works well for the relatively small number of candidates on this tier who study it, and who empathise strongly with the central character. They used the detail of the extract sensibly, in (ii), understanding the mother's importance to both Paddy and Sinbad. The essays were fairly equal in popularity, with the bullet points used to good effect to structure candidates' responses. There were some empathetic and thoughtful discussions of Paddy's father at the top of the mark range, whilst responses to Q.3.(c), as well as re-telling key moments from the text, also showed an appreciation of Paddy's developing maturity, through such details as his behaviour with Sinbad, including when he calls him Francis.

Silas Marner retains a relatively small, but significant measure of popularity, and candidates who had studied it were clearly familiar with the pivotal moment represented in the extract, with the better responses showing some understanding of its use of symbolism. Q.4.(b) was the clear favourite of the two essay questions, with the bullet points used to good effect, although only the best do much with the "speaks and behaves" of the last one. Answers on Raveloe tended to comment on its population, and general attitudes to outsiders such as Silas, which, if sufficiently developed and exemplified, was enough to get to grade C.

To Kill A Mockingbird, although found not as frequently on this tier as on the Higher, is studied by quite a number of Foundation candidates. The best answers on the extract tracked through, often discussing the dynamics of the relationship between Jem and Scout. A significant number were unclear as to its context, but, despite this, picked up on the general atmosphere of threat, and the references to Boo Radley. As on the Higher tier, relatively few addressed the ending, which was a pity. The bullet points for the question on Dill were helpful in directing candidates to key areas, and ensured that most did address the trial, which was not always the case on the bullet-less Higher Tier. Many of the voices adopted were convincing, showing an understanding of character - this combined with detailed reference would ensure high marks. The reason there were no bullet points in Q.5.(c) was that the structure was embedded in the question, and many candidates seemed to relish the freedom offered them, and wrote about quite a range of families - the Ewells and the Radleys were at least as often discussed as the Finches.

As one of my colleagues remarked, "What can you say about a novel that works every time?" which is indeed the case with *Of Mice and Men*. There was plenty of detail in the extract for candidates to pick up on, and many chose wisely, although, again, only the best organised their answer to include the ending of the extract. An impressive number discussed the animal imagery, even to the extent of making connections between the bear and the fish. There were some particularly interesting theories as to George's motives for not getting directly involved sooner, which reflected the real engagement candidates have for the novel. The way that the extract led into the essays was an advantage for many, but a disadvantage for those who wrote wholly on the extract in their essay. In Q.6.(b), some candidates reproduced a well rehearsed Curley's wife essay, virtually neglecting Curley's role elsewhere. Elsewhere, there were different interpretations of Curley's behaviour, particularly at the end, but so long as they were supported by apt reference, they were accepted by examiners. With Q.6.(c), the best responses were from those candidates who had read the question carefully, and addressed the final part, about the importance of the violent incidents to the novel as a whole. Practice at interpreting questions, identifying key parts and considering what could go in a response, is a useful part of examination preparation. Some candidates successfully showed how Lennie is a common element in many of the violent episodes, thus showing an appreciation of structure, whilst others linked the violence to loneliness and the cultural background of the ranch.

Stone Cold, whilst perhaps not quite as popular as in previous years, is still probably the second ranking prose text on this tier. There were some very engaged responses to the extract, with some being wholly supportive of Link, and critical of Gail, and others, more closely read, discussing the behaviour of both characters with thoughtfulness and sensitivity. A discriminator tended to be, as on the Higher tier, whether candidates grasped the tone of the ending. The question on Shelter was a popular choice, and the bullet points were usually well used, although some candidates were not wholly clear about the ending of the novel, and others were dependent on the television version (where Shelter is significantly different to how he is presented in the novel.) Responses to Q.7.(c) were sometimes overly narrative, and a bit unbalanced in writing more about Link's home background and early days on the street than on the novel's later events, although the best used well chosen detail from throughout the text.

There seemed to be more answers on *Anita and Me* this year, which was good to see. The better answers were highly tuned to Meena's changing emotions, and were clear as to the context of the extract, appreciating the emerging bond between Meena and Nanima. With Q.8.(b) there was something of a split between those who had clearly addressed the political/historical/cultural background of the novel, and so could tackle the first bullet point with some confidence, and those who were vaguer in their responses, although the other bullet points provided plenty of other areas for them to explore. As with the other more open questions, those candidates who chose Q.8.(c) embraced the freedom of choice: Sam and Anita were the most often chosen, but Tracey and Robert were also discussed, as was Nanima. Occasionally, the film seemed to be the primary source here, and as it is not a very loyal version in some respects, this is not too helpful.

Section B

Responses on *Under Milk Wood* are very rare indeed on this tier. Candidates who had studied the text were more confident writing about the extract, making straightforward but valid points about the characters. The essays were fairly equally popular, but the episodic and fragmented nature of the play causes difficulties for some candidates to write on it in a sustained way, and the majority do not find it particularly funny, it seems.

A View From The Bridge is much more popular, and candidates write confidently on it. The majority were able to select relevant detail from the extract, with the best making use of the stage directions and showing a clear awareness of the context. Q.10.(b) was the more popular of the two essays, and most of the characters were written about at one time or another. With the advice for the actor playing Marco, whilst there were some really engaged and aptly detailed responses, some could not get much beyond the chair lifting, even neglecting his killing Eddie, and really detailed answers were relatively rare.

An Inspector Calls seems increasingly popular on the Foundation Tier. The extract gave plenty of opportunities for candidates to express their opinions, and they did not hold back - as usual there were some blistering attacks on Birling, and, occasionally, Sheila, although most empathised with her. The best made sound use of the stage directions and addressed the "cliff hanger" at the end. The Gerald task was very well done on the whole, although a significant minority were still confused between him and Eric, believing Gerald to be the father of Eva's baby, for example. The responses to Q.11.(c) were always interesting, with a range of characters chosen and discussed with confidence. Examiners who were not familiar with one of the film versions were sometimes confused by references to hats, trams, and fish and chips, which are always a bit of a give away with this play.

The small number of candidates who answered on *The Merchant Of Venice* tended towards paraphrase and simple comment on the extract. Responses to the question on Jessica were engaged and empathetic, but were sometimes thin on specific detail, whilst those on prejudice occasionally turned into a character study of Shylock.

Romeo and Juliet is the most frequently studied Shakespeare text on this tier, as it is on the Higher. The extract proved accessible, with candidates more confident in their discussions of Juliet than they were with those on the nurse. Similarly with the essays, where the question on Juliet was the more popular choice, understandably, perhaps, considering how candidates relate to her character.

Although *Othello* is picking up takers on the Higher Tier, very few responses on it are to be found on the Foundation. Those who answered on it were quite clear in their responses to the extract, finding more to say about Iago than Cassio, although perhaps more could have been done with Iago's final soliloquy. In responses to Q.14.(b), Othello himself was the most popular choice, and, of course, he also cropped up in the responses of those who chose to write about jealousy in Q.14.(c).

Hobson's Choice remains one of the more popular choices of drama text, and candidates respond to it really well. Most strongly approved of Willie's firm hand with Alice and Vickey, although some also felt he may have gone too far with Hobson. The best, as on the Higher Tier, recognised that the real balance of power still lay with Maggie, through focus on the end of the extract. The question on Maggie was the more popular of the two essays; candidates seem to relish discussing her character. Although there were some good character studies of Hobson, the direction to look at "important parts in the play" confounded some, who resorted to more, or less, detailed narrative.

There was a full range of responses to the extract from *Blood Brothers*, from simple comments about degrees of poshness, to thoughtful discussions of class and opportunities. The best pinpointed its context and noted the closeness of the boys, despite their surface differences. Some responses to Q.16.(b) relied almost exclusively (or, in some cases, entirely) on the extract, and thus were self limiting, although plenty gave engaged and detailed advice - last year's extract, where Mickey was hunting for his tablets, proved useful for many here.) With the question on superstition, some were confused between "superstition" and "suspicion" (perhaps owing to the stage direction in the extract) and some didn't get much beyond shoes on the table and the single magpie (or mockingbird as one interesting piece of intertextuality had it!) Some, however, addressed superstition through the narrative of the play, and the best highlighted the role of the narrator.

Section C

A really noticeable trend through the life of this specification has been the developing confidence with which all candidates, including those of even modest abilities, tackle the unseen poem, and, once again, with *Autumn*, by Alan Bold, they did not disappoint. The poem allowed access at a variety of levels, and even the less able candidates could grasp its general meaning and pick up on features such as the dead leaves blowing in faces. Responses ranged from general discussions of Autumn, loosely rooted in the poem (one prescient soul remarked, "the trees and the weather will have been fantastic throughout the summer, well, maybe not in this country") to detailed discussions of the language. Indeed, lots of candidates grasped the robber imagery and went on to discuss the role of the wind as accomplice, which was the key to a grade C, and many also grasped the significance of "the green stuff". One astute and observant candidate noted how the poet "uses words as animation - it actually makes me think of a cartoon robber stealing leaves."

As has been mentioned before in this report, lack of stamina or inclination to develop ideas is what may let down candidates on this tier - there were some who, despite understanding the poem, did not write in sufficient detail to explain their understanding, so missed out on the higher marks.

In conclusion, then, it was again a real pleasure to see so many candidates of such a range of abilities responding so positively to what will be, for many of them, the culmination of their literature studies. They are a credit both to themselves, and to the teachers who have brought them to such a state of readiness.

SPECIFICATION B

The examination provided clear evidence of hard work by candidates and their centres. At Higher Tier there were very few examples of unfinished scripts and perhaps some evidence that candidates are starting to produce longer pieces for their three essays. On Foundation Tier there are still far too many incomplete papers and it is always the twenty mark essays which are not attempted with disastrous consequences for results. There were perhaps more rubric errors this year with candidates ignoring the line specifications of the extracts in their desire to repeat classroom tasks; two candidates completely ignored the extract and chose their own. My colleague on Specification A, feels that some students are finding it progressively more difficult to distinguish between the written text and DVD versions of it; can we all remind students that the written word is the focus of the examination?

There still appear to be problems in deciding on tier of entry; certainly I saw Higher Tier scripts which were in the E/F range of marks with the danger of failing to achieve any grad. Some of these students would have been better entered for Foundation Tier.

In the poetry section below I will refer to a major problem where centres are not studying the complete anthology and are guessing my intentions. Several candidates were let down in their preparation by having to answer on what was virtually "unseen material".

It is a requirement that the complete anthology is studied for the examination.

Section A

Q.1(a) Students found this task considerably more difficult than recent extracts which have examined relationships between characters. This year the focus was on the creation of atmosphere by the writer. On Higher Tier I asked for a focus on "excitement and wonder" but on Foundation used "atmosphere" supported by three bullet points. On Higher I was irritated by students who chose to ignore the stem of the question "excitement and wonder" in order to launch into their prepared essay on war and religious imagery. This was thoroughly unhelpful in their answers and several appeared to believe that a pre war turnstile was a particularly effective weapon of warfare; certainly the adversaries on the battlefield would have been bemused by the sight. The passage was rich in description; the technique as always was to select phrases and examine the effects achieved by the writer. Students who remembered that the persona is a young girl attending her first match were well placed to develop answers on "excitement and wonder". Using "sights and sounds" guided Foundation candidates in their choice.

Q.1(b) This was the more popular choice and was handled extremely well. Higher tier candidates were offered their customary free choice of text and Foundation Tier were steered towards "The Lesson". Companion texts were chosen sensibly with the most popular choices being "Bella Makes Life" and "The New Boy". I was surprised when "The Rain Horse" appeared though it did in fact work quite well. Those who attempted to use "Niagara Falls All Over Again" multiplied the difficulty level of the task enormously. Using that text was probably impossible without being able to demonstrate the isolation of small towns.

Q.1(c) I was disappointed by the responses to this task. I hoped for realisation in the sense of a personal breakthrough to a new level of understanding about a situation on the lines of an epiphany but of course I couldn't use that term without disadvantaging most of the entry. The effect on both tiers, but particularly on Foundation Tier, was to encourage students towards a narrative of the texts with the realisation often little more than an appendix. The saving grace for the question was that it allowed almost a free choice of text and most students found sensible things to say. Perhaps fewer students feel able to approach texts from a variety of viewpoints; an examiner commented on how depressing it was for Bella to be condemned for her actions by most students while Joe Joe escaped criticism except from one particularly fierce student who was much more open minded.

I was amazed this year by what I can only describe as very odd choices of characters. I think most of us would struggle to write at any length about such minor characters as Junebug, Rosie Giraffe, Flyboy or even Little Cough's father. I really couldn't understand these choices unless there had been some focus on minor characters. In short stories or extracts it is virtually impossible for minor characters to have been developed by the writers.

Section B

Q.2(a) "Sandman" had obviously not been studied in some centres which caused difficulties for their students who had to approach it as unseen material which is dangerous with this poem. Where the poem had been studied by centres there were few problems.

The poem does deceive on first reading as it does appear to be a description of a dead body on a beach. However lines 8&9, 14&15, 22&23 ought to have left readers in no doubt that the 'body' was made of sand. Engaged students then puzzled over why the wife in the poem is so disturbed by a sand sculpture and discovered the realisation that the sight of the sculpture has triggered many anxieties for the wife. Many students were completely lost in the poem and spent too long constructing elaborate scenarios explaining the 'death'.

I thought my stem "menacing" would be sufficient help for Higher Tier but retrospectively wish I had included some bullet points as guidance as I did on Foundation Tier. Most students were aware of the use of pathetic fallacy in the poem and the most capable readers were able to see how the poet used the device to prepare for the later parts of the poem. Phrases such as: "Cloud has scrolled"; "cold wind"; "gunmetal sea" were successfully examined to show the creation of atmosphere. Less attention was given to: "Four sets of footprints lead away"; "circling turmoil"; "sepia likeness"; "she left, reassured" and the ending of the poem except on Foundation Tier where a bullet point directed attention to the ending of the poem. Assured readers found considerable "menace" in the final lines and were able to connect to their opening statements on atmosphere to reach considered judgements on the poem. The poem is one of the longest I have used for question 2a and probably required students to be selective, rather than attempt to be comprehensive, in their answers.

Q.2(b) This question was less popular than I anticipated when I set the paper. I assumed that everyone would have studied "The Beautiful Lie" and that they would select "In Mrs Tilscher's Class" as the companion poem. I was wrong on both occasions; some students seemed to be reading the poem for the first time and more curiously "In Mrs Tilscher's Class" was rarely selected. I have started to wonder if some centres are only preparing students on some of the poets and that this year's selection of previously unused material confounded too many candidates. The most popular comparative text was in fact "Boy" which required manipulation in order to fit the stem of "childhood". Inexplicably many chose "The Good Teachers" and were quite unable to find illuminating comparisons.

Q.2(c) This task proved to be much more popular. An unexpected approach was to treat “Long Distance” as one poem rather than two poems which meant that some students compared three poems, which increased the difficulty of the task. Examiners were alerted to this possibility and asked to bear it in mind when they approached answers.

Responses on both tiers proved successful. Foundation Tier did not specify a poem as a starting point and this was equally successful as on Higher Tier. Students were able to approach almost all of the poems equally successfully and make statements about the relationships in the poems. Nuances of meaning were explored on both tiers with candidates displaying a welcome open mindedness which was lacking elsewhere in the paper. These poems have to be the area of greatest improvement over the lifetime of this anthology.

There is still a gap in understanding the contribution of poetic form to the success of the poems but while students are exploring words and their possible meanings it seems churlish to complain too loudly. Perhaps Higher Tier candidates ought to be more able to understand the poet’s mastery of verse forms?

Section C

Inevitably what follows is constrained by the number of scripts I have seen and also by the fact that the entry for Specification B is so small in comparison with Specification A. Certainly my colleague’s report will be more valid in reporting the trends in popularity.

For the first time I saw Foundation Tier answers on *Under Milk Wood* and they showed a thorough knowledge of the text in answering Q.3(b) on sad and funny parts of the play. In contrast I saw no Higher Tier responses on this play.

In my personal marking I saw most responses to *A View From The Bridge*. The “sympathy” question was routinely done well with students selecting all of the major characters for their attention. Perhaps Higher Tier students might have been more alert to the stem “Miller’s presentation” so that the dramatist’s techniques received more attention. Occasionally on Foundation Tier sympathy and reasons were buried under narration. One candidate reduced the play to a series of phallic symbols which only served to reduce its effectiveness as drama.

There has been a consistent improvement in responses to advice to an actor questions as a result of INSET highlighting some of the problems. Students still approach the task from two possible starting points but all would gain reward from a concentration upon the words spoken by the designated character.

I saw fewer responses to *An Inspector Calls* this year Q.5(a), “Imagine you are Gerald” produced consistently high quality answers, the best of which saw students adopting an appropriate persona through which to recount the events of the play. Several adopted a vocabulary and ideology in line with their persona.

“Who’s to blame” is always popular and much practised. The only problem is the muddling of the roles of Gerald and Eric by some candidates.

In the answers to *Hobson’s Choice*, I saw no advice to the actor playing Hobson which I thought might be the more popular choice. I was impressed by answers to Q.9(b), which was a demanding task.

Both the tasks on *Blood Brothers* were equally popular. As this text appears to be studied by the weakest students the problems tend to be magnified in the responses completed. Advice to the actor was often still locked in the worst possible response [“I’d like the actor to shout.”] I saw few students who saw Q.10(b) as an opportunity for discussion about possibilities. Even Higher Tier candidates failed to take the opportunity and considerably reduced the

amount of text they considered. There was significant evidence to suggest that the word “superstition” was outside the vocabulary of some students.

As mentioned above I saw very few answers on any Shakespeare play and none at all which seemed to represent a conscious entry policy decision by a centre.

As always I would like to thank all teachers for their hard work in preparing candidates for the examination and to our authors whose works provide the inspiration for all of us.



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