



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCE (NEW)
ENGLISH LITERATURE
AS/Advanced**

SUMMER 2019

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| Unit | Page |
|-------------|-------------|
| Unit 1 | 1 |
| Unit 2 | 7 |
| Unit 3 | 13 |
| Unit 4 | 18 |
| Unit 5 | 22 |

ENGLISH LITERATURE
General Certificate of Education (New)
Summer 2019
Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced
UNIT 1: PROSE AND DRAMA

General Comments

Many examiners were happy to comment on the quality of the responses across both Section A and Section B although, once again, *Jane Eyre*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Doctor Faustus* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* were, by far, the favoured texts. It was disappointing to see a very limited number of candidates responding to *David Copperfield* or *North and South* as these, albeit lengthy texts, are excellent novels and allow candidates many opportunities to address contextual factors and to explore the complexities of the Victorian period.

Overall, the quality of some responses was remarkable, especially as this is a closed-book exam: candidates are to be commended for their hard work and thorough exam preparation. Many centres had clearly responded to one of the recommendations in the 2018 Principal Examiner's Report and provided candidates with the opportunity to complete essays under timed conditions. This is to be further encouraged. Nevertheless, although many responses were perceptive and displayed a level of autonomy, it is important to remind centres that pre-rehearsed introductions and memorised essays are self-penalising as they frequently prevent the candidate from clearly engaging with the question and affect their mark for AO1.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Prose Fiction Pre-1900

Points for Consideration: Extract

AO1

- It should be remembered that AO3 and AO5 are not assessed for part (i) and responses that allude to irrelevant contextual information or alternative readings are self-penalising. Once again, it is important to reiterate that candidates must overtly engage with the extract. Some candidates lacked focused, critical engagement with the extract and drifted into a narrative retelling of the plot.
- As stated in the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 paper, it is advised that **20 minutes** is spent on Section A part (i). A significant minority of candidates spent too long on this question which affected the quality of their part (ii) response. This approach also has consequences for the time allocated for Section B.

AO2

- It is important that candidates clearly engage with textual detail and avoid simply embedding quotations with little or no analysis as this inevitably leads candidates into narrative. One again, it was pleasing to see many candidates comment on writer's techniques, in addition to the use of language, when exploring the ways in which writers create meaning.

Points for Consideration: Essay

AO1

- It was pleasing to see many candidates plan their responses beforehand which allowed them to organise their ideas and produce an effectively structured and coherent response to the question. It is important that teachers provide opportunities for candidates to complete timed essay practice under exam conditions so that they are accustomed to planning and then writing the essay in 40 minutes. It is vital to note, however, that examiners cannot award marks for planning, regardless of how detailed they may be. Indeed, at times, examiners found that detailed planning meant that the essays were underdeveloped and candidates had, on occasion, resorted to bullet-pointing the end of the essay as timing had become an issue.
- There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel: both are valid approaches to answering the essay question.
- Once again, as discussed at CPD, centres should inform candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their essay and that reliance on the extract is to be discouraged. Frequently, some candidates simply re-visited the extract with limited acknowledgement of other parts of the novel, implying a lack of confidence or understanding of the whole text.
- As accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar is assessed under AO1, some candidates' marks were negatively affected as these inaccuracies led to a lack of clarity.

AO2

- Examiners noted that many successful responses carefully selected key quotations rather than trying to cover the entire novel. Indeed, this broad approach often diluted the argument as candidates attempted to do too much in the time given.
- As mentioned at CPD and in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, centres should advise candidates that, although this is a closed book exam, they are expected to integrate and evaluate relevant quotations from across the novel.
- As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing how meaning is created, producing a narrative-driven response. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).
- Many candidates discussed the characters as constructs and commented on the ways writers shaped their presentations.
- Once again, it is useful to emphasise that many candidates used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5. Close textual analysis is often the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations.

AO3

- It is important to reiterate that although AO3 is heavily weighted, the most successful responses remained focused on the significance and influence of contexts, using relevant information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- Many examiners commented on the significant number of candidates that wandered away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of unnecessary contextual information which seemed pre-rehearsed. As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, contextual references, including biographical detail, cannot be rewarded for its own sake.

- Band 5 responses made effective use of specific contextual detail, as opposed to historical commentary, and linked it confidently to their chosen text. Indeed, candidates are, once again, advised to use the formula ‘task-text-context’ to ensure that context informs rather than drives their response.
- Unfortunately, some candidates did not acknowledge context at all. It is important that centres note the mark allocation for this AO and ensure that candidates understand the importance of alluding to relevant contextual details.

AO5

- Candidates must use other relevant opinion to **inform** their **own discussion** of the text and build a **personal response**. Indeed, the stronger responses used alternative views to create a sense of debate.
- As seen previously, lengthy sweeping statements from critics which are not fully integrated into the candidate’s argument did little to help them achieve the higher bands.
- Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:
 - **Engaging with** specific critical views (i.e. literary criticism)
 - **Engaging with** critical perspectives i.e. (Marxism/feminism)
 - Offering multiple readings of characters/events etc.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even use any tentative vocabulary (such as ‘perhaps’ or ‘suggests’). These candidates cannot be awarded any marks for this AO.

Notes on Texts

Q.1 Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

This novel is growing in popularity and it was good to see the ways in which candidates tackled the demand of this text. Indeed, there were many confident and sophisticated responses to both the extract and the essay question as many candidates used the extract’s presentation of Mrs Fanny Dashwood as a starting point for a wider discussion of Austen’s presentation of Regency social conventions. Overall, the accessibility of both questions was appropriate although a minority of candidates did not recognise the extract as concerning Mrs Fanny Dashwood, suggesting a lack of familiarity with this key moment in the text.

Q.2 Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre was, by far, the most popular choice of pre-1900 prose text and so a variety of equally valid approaches to the questions were seen. Indeed, candidates responded well to the demand of the setting and landscape essay question and examiners commented on the quality of many of the responses, suggesting that the questions were accessible for a range of abilities. The majority of candidates tracked Jane’s progress through her physical movement between the different locations although the less confident candidates focused predominately on Jane’s childhood trauma in the red room. It was disappointing to see some of the weaker responses only commenting on the red room with little to no acknowledgement of the wider novel: in such cases, AO3 and AO5 were also neglected. Nevertheless, the more successful responses confidently commented on not only the earlier locations of Gateshead and Lowood, but also on the significance of Thornfield, Moor House and Ferndean.

Many also drew attention to the changing depiction of Jane while confidently connecting close textual analysis to wider contextual details.

Q.3 Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

Too few responses were seen on this text to make adequate comment on candidate performance.

Q.4 Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*

Too few responses were seen on this text to make adequate comment on candidate performance.

Q.5 Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

The accessibility of both the extract and essay question was evident in the quality of responses seen. The vast majority of candidates seemed able to place the extract as the key scene in Henchard's tragic downfall and commented on not only the use of language, but also the ways in which Hardy structured the passage for dramatic effect. Likewise, the demand of the essay question was such that a range of approaches were taken by candidates. For example, some explored how Henchard's social status was affected by his past decisions while others chose to focus predominantly on the women in the novel, discussing Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane and the ways in which Victorian society helped determined their fates.

Section B: Drama

Points for Consideration

AO1

- As noted for Section A and in the Principal Examiner's Report for 2018, it is important that candidates pay close attention to timings. Indeed, it is advised that candidates spend **60 minutes** on Section B. Keeping to strict timings is, therefore, essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing underdeveloped responses for Section B.
- It is important that candidates remain focused on the question and do not wander into writing a different essay to the one set. Unfortunately, on occasion, some candidates seemed to merge the two questions, so it was not clear which they were answering. Weaker responses listed dramatic techniques with little comment on dramatic effect and the impact of lighting, props and staging. Such responses inevitably lacked precision and analytical detail.

AO2

- Many responses demonstrated a confident understanding of writers' use of language and dramatic features for effect, quoting confidently from the text. Indeed, some responses were impressive considering it is a closed-book exam. It is important, however, that centres encourage pupils to make full use of their knowledge of dramatic devices – such as staging, stage directions, music and props – and frequently refer to the audience(s).

AO3

- It is vital that centres encourage candidates to draw upon a range of specific contextual material and avoid generalised statements about the time periods. Some candidates were able to make thoughtful comments about the contexts of reception while others drifted into irrelevant biographical detail. While some biographical detail is important to understand a play's reception, it is important that candidates allude to the impact of biographical detail when analysing language or dramatic technique.
- Once again, centres are to advise candidates to use the formula 'task-text-context' to ensure that context **informs** rather than engulfs the response.

AO5

- As with Section A, candidates must use other **relevant** opinion to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:
 - **Engaging with** specific critical views (i.e. literary criticism)
 - **Engaging with** critical perspectives i.e. (Marxism/feminism)
 - Offering multiple readings of characters/events etc.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even use any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps', 'suggests' or 'arguably'). These candidates cannot be awarded any marks for this AO.

Notes on Texts

Q.6/7 Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

This is a challenging Renaissance play but the majority of candidates seemed to engage with the demand of both the task and text. There was an equal balance in popularity between the questions and many candidates explored the relationship between the text and context. It was reassuring to see fewer responses relying on irrelevant biographical information and anchoring the analysis in close textual references linked to relevant contextual detail. Similarly to the 2018 paper, candidates often engaged with the Question 6's demand for debate, exploring how 'Faustus' Renaissance ambitions are **primarily** depicted in a critical light." This helped candidates achieve the higher marks for AO5 as many addressed the complexities of the statement.

Q.8/9 Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

Once again, this text is growing in popularity and numerous successful responses were seen. Once again it is important to note that the most successful candidates followed the task-text-context formula and, indeed, there were many examples of candidates using textual analysis as a way in to a discussion of contextual influences. Overall, candidates spent less time exploring biographical detail and, frequently, when biographical detail was discussed it was used to illuminate close textual analysis. This was reassuring to see. On occasion, pre-rehearsed opening paragraphs focusing on London Society were included: centres are reminded that this approach is not helpful for the candidate and is to be discouraged.

Q.10/11 Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

A Streetcar Named Desire was the most popular choice of Section B text, as in previous years. The demand of the questions was appropriate and a range of responses were marked. Overall, however, candidates seemed to favour Q11 and the focus on the ways in which Williams presents a society where desire is **always** destructive. Although the more confident candidates were able to discuss the nuances of the question, it is worth noting that the less confident candidates simply agreed or disagreed with the question's statement and, in taking such a blanket approach, so prevented them from accessing the higher marks for AO5. It was pleasing to see many candidates use biographical detail subtly: Williams' background was often used as a means of interpreting the vulnerability of Blanche and her desires.

Q.12/13 Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

This play is growing in popularity which is good to see. Many candidates confidently connected contextual factors with the language of the play and were successful in exploring Churchill's range of dramatic devices. The questions were accessible with a balance of candidates choosing to respond to each question, discussing the impact of techniques such as the overlapping dialogue and irony for effect.

Q.14/15 Joe Orton: *Loot*

Too few responses were seen on this text to make adequate comment on candidate performance.

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UNIT 2: POETRY POST-1900

General Comments

Many successful and perceptive responses were seen in both Section A and Section B of the paper, with the most successful in Section B including brief but purposeful plans which kept the candidates on task throughout. Despite this, it was disappointing to see an increase in rubric infringements, especially in Section B which had a hugely detrimental effect on the marks of many candidates. Examples of specific rubric infringements, and how to avoid them in future, are detailed in the relevant sections. Handwriting continued to be a problem for some candidates, especially when approaching the latter stages of the exam. Centres need to provide more opportunities for timed practices to avoid rushed and undecipherable responses. More candidates began with Section B which, for the majority, worked effectively. However, some very brief Section A responses were seen due to this practice. Candidates are reminded that as Section A is worth 40 marks, a complete and sustained response is required.

Duffy/Larkin was again a popular pairing as was Sheers/Heaney. More responses were also seen on Hughes/ Plath but only a small minority of centres choose to study Thomas/Lewis and Lawrence/Clarke.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Critical Analysis

A range of responses was seen in Section A with the most successful being selective and fully engaged with not only the text but also the question focus. Some candidates lacked this clear focus and produced full analyses of the named poems which not only affected their timing (due to overlong responses) but also had a detrimental effect on their AO1 marks. The wording of each question provides a focus for the analysis and should lead to a more selective approach.

The most prevalent rubric infringement in Section A was the inclusion of AO3 and AO5, neither of which are assessed in this section. Indeed, contextual detail dominated a small minority of responses and clearly limited the candidates' AO2 and AO1 marks.

AO1

- A clear understanding of the named poem is essential for this assessment objective and many original and highly perceptive responses were seen. Some candidates, however, appeared unfamiliar with some poems, exhibiting only a cursory knowledge of the texts.
- Although the most successful responses made purposeful use of literary terminology, the frequent inclusion of linguistic terms by some candidates was not helpful or beneficial to their textual analysis.

- Many responses displayed a strong grasp of academic register with an appropriate formality which is the desired form of expression for a literary essay. Some candidates were, unfortunately, far too informal and personal. Candidates are discouraged from referring to the poets by their first names and an overuse of the first person does not adhere to fully academic register.
- Although examiners are advised to avoid penalising minor spelling and punctuation errors, many responses were unclear in their meaning due to some major errors in expression, which affected the quality of AO1.
- Providing a brief initial overview of the poem before launching into their analysis proved to be a successful approach for a considerable number of candidates, across all bands.

AO2

- The most successful candidates were selective in their choice of textual evidence when analysing the texts. Although the inclusion of an overview is good practice, many candidates attempted to cover the whole text when closer analysis of fewer quotations would have improved the quality of their responses.
- Feature-spotting was also, unfortunately, an issue. This was particularly the case with weaker candidates. This approach limits a developed analysis and, in some cases, can cause the response to become irrelevant.
- Candidates are reminded that AO2 addresses the analysis of techniques and their effect on the reader and implicit meaning. Stronger responses explored both aspects while some responses only referred to one element.

Notes on Texts

Q.1 Edward Thomas

Most candidates grasped the ambiguity of Thomas' use of 'sleep' and many successful responses were seen examining the effect of his use of the first person. Fewer candidates examined Thomas' use of spiritual allusions and there were some minor mis-readings of 'Here love ends' with some candidates linking the line to Thomas' personal circumstances. The use of AO3 in Section A is, of course, unassessed and cannot be rewarded.

Q.2 Alun Lewis

Some detailed and confident responses were seen with many perceptively exploring Lewis' use of imagery. Most candidates grasped the significance of the 'folded poppy' and some responded with perception to the imagery of the bat. However, there were some lapses in understanding when discussing 'the lovely bodies' with a minority of candidates asserting that they were war casualties. Again, there were many lengthy contextual references which detracted from the quality of analysis.

Q.3 D.H. Lawrence

A small number of candidates responded to this question and the more successful examined Lawrence's floral and sensual imagery with some confidence. Some candidates linked the poem to Lawrence's feelings towards his mother which was problematic in many ways: many of these responses were context-heavy and much of the imagery in the poem allude strongly to sex.

Q.4 Gillian Clarke

Very few candidates responded to this question but the most confident responses were highly selective in their choice of textual evidence and presented a very detailed and informed analysis of Clarke's use of the piano. These responses also grasped and appreciated the use of musical allusions and imagery.

Q.5 Ted Hughes

Although this was the least popular of the pairing in Section A, many detailed and highly competent responses were seen. Strong responses included a confident understanding of the men's resilience and the threat posed by nature or the weather. Fewer contextual references were seen in responses to this poem than any other in Section A and many candidates produced perceptive explorations of how Hughes utilised auditory effects.

Q.6 Sylvia Plath

The most popular choice of the pairing produced a wide variety of responses. The strongest analyses were fully engaged with Plath's use of imagery and structure and displayed a clear appreciation of the poem's expectant tone. Some less successful candidates listed the metaphors and only briefly commented on their effect. Others were convinced that the poem's theme was utterly pessimistic, focussing on how frightening clowns are to some. Many candidates from Band 1 to Band 5 linked Plath's observations to her experience of a pre-natal ultrasound scan which would not have been possible for either of her children.

Q.7 Philip Larkin

The pairing of Larkin and Duffy is the most popular choice of the examination although the responses to the depiction of the journey in 'Here' were, a little surprisingly, far less prevalent than responses to 'Oslo'. There was much to admire in many responses, especially when candidates linked the physical journey from London to outside Hull with Larkin's journey into solitude. Despite this, some candidates linked many contextual details to the journey, such as Larkin's lifestyle, post-war development and consumerism. AO3 is not assessed in Section A.

Q.8 Carol Ann Duffy

Some detailed and perceptive responses were seen to this highly popular choice. Stronger essays dealt with the secretive and insular nature of the traveller's experience of the city but also examined the effect of the final couplet on the experience. Many candidates did not comment on the last lines which may have affected their overall reading of the poem. It is recommended that candidates refer to the last lines of the poem as they are frequently crucial to the poet's ideas, particularly so in this case.

Q.9 Seamus Heaney

Very few candidates attempted this question in comparison to the Sheers option and some confident responses were seen by examiners. These were generally clearly engaged with the depiction of England through Heaney's use of imagery, particularly his frequent references to fire. There were some mis-readings seen which suggests that not every candidate had a secure understanding of the text.

Q.10 Owen Sheers

This question was a very popular choice which elicited a range of responses. Successful analyses not only examined Sheers' use of imagery but also his feelings towards the flag. Some candidates read the flag as being portrayed as a symbol of pride for the Welsh while others saw that it had been devalued due to its omnipresence, 'like wet washing'. Most candidates engaged well with the poem and were able to structure relevant responses. Christopher Logue's words in the epigraph were included successfully in the responses by most candidates although some over-analysed the quotation at the expense of Sheers' words. AO3 was an issue at times, as a minority included Sheers' Welsh background as part of the analysis. This AO is not assessed in Section A.

Section B: Poetry comparison

AO1

- The examiners' main concern this year was undoubtedly the large number of rubric infringements. The most prevalent infringement was the use of fewer than four poems which not only had a detrimental effect on AO1 but also on AO4. Centres are encouraged to remind their candidates of this requirement and to advise them to read the rubric carefully.
- As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, planning in this section is essential due to the required coverage of all five AOs. Many successful responses had been planned and structured precisely beforehand and candidates had obviously made good use of the ten to fifteen minutes of recommended planning time.
- Successful candidates expressed their ideas through an academic register, appropriate to a literary essay. However, fluency and informality continue to be a problem with many essays including very personal readings (with the use of the first person), grammatical errors and basic spelling errors.
- Centres should also discourage candidates from using linguistic terminology taken from the study of English Language as they often hinder literary analysis.
- Ineffective introductions continued to be a problem this year, with some candidates simply rewriting the question without engaging with it in any meaningful way.

AO2

- Stronger responses used AO2 as a way in to AO3 and AO5 through the use and analysis of specific and well-selected quotations.
- It is not recommended to analyse every aspect of the four poems as this frequently leads to a loss of focus with the set question.
- Some candidates included relevant quotations but, unfortunately, only described their meaning. This invariably led to a Band 1 or, at best, a Band 2 mark due to the narrative/descriptive nature of the response.
- There were many excellent responses to the poets' use of structure and form although some comments on enjambment and caesura were unconvincing.

AO3

- Although many candidates included detailed and specific contextual details, it is vital that they consider how closely linked their examples are to the text and the task.

- Yet again, it was pleasing to see a range of contextual details beyond the biographical facts of the poets. Many successful responses dealt with a range of literary contexts as well as social and historical links.
- Examiners commented that, in a minority of essays, contextual detail was very sparse. As AO3 is worth 20 marks, it's essential that candidates include focused and specific references to context.
- Candidates are advised to use the formula 'task-text-context' to ensure that context informs rather than drives the response.

AO4

- As AO4 is worth 30 marks in this section, planning how and when to connect the texts is essential. Well-planned essays not only retained their structure and focus throughout but also linked the texts regularly and thoughtfully.
- As last year's report stated, the strongest answers linked specific quotations/use of techniques/structure and discussed the differing effects on the reader.
- Sadly, many candidates still attempted to link four poems simultaneously. This is unwise as it almost inevitably leads to a superficial approach.
- Centres are reminded that linking poems by the same poet provides a limited scope for discussion.
- There were many examples of essays that named four poems but the final pairing was barely referenced due to issues with timing. This inevitably impacted on AO1 and AO4.

AO5

- More perceptive candidates dealt with this element with confidence and sophistication, weaving their critical discussion throughout their responses.
- Pleasingly, only a very small minority of candidates this year omitted this AO compared to previous years.
- However, examiners noted that some candidates were still being named critics and provided quotations from their sources without making use of the view by linking it to the poem/quotation.
- Despite this, some candidates responded with excellent critical discussions and provided sophisticated and autonomous readings of the poems.

Notes on Texts

Q.11/12 Thomas and Lewis

Examiners saw many thoughtful and well-structured responses, especially to Question 11 where a range of 'harsh realities' were explored. These responses dealt with the poets' experience of war, hardship in the Wales, England and India as well as their troubled personal lives. Responses to Question 12 examined a range of poems but some candidates overemphasised the poets' love lives as their contextual points. It is vital that centres teach only the prescribed list of poems as candidates cannot be rewarded for referencing poems not on the list.

Q.13/14 Lawrence and Clarke

A very small number of candidates studied these collections but many answers displayed a clear and generally well-balanced approach to the AOs required.

Both Question 13 and Question 14 were addressed successfully with candidates dealing with the themes of loss and hardship with some engagement. It is vital that centres teach only the prescribed list of poems as candidates cannot be rewarded for referencing Lawrence poems not on the list.

Q.15/16 Hughes and Plath

Candidates engaged well with both questions, dealing with either the concept of struggle or violence. The contrast between Hughes's depiction of violence in nature and Plath's portrayal of self-harm was explored particularly effectively in some responses. Although many candidates analysed and connected their chosen texts well, a recurring issue with this pairing is that some candidates over-emphasise the relationship between the poets when referring to AO3.

Q.17/18 Larkin and Duffy

Larkin and Duffy continued to be a very popular choice for centres and therefore a wide range of responses were seen by examiners. Question 18 was by far the more popular of the two questions with many candidates successfully exploring Larkin and Duffy's contrasting depiction of women in their poems. Yet again, sweeping statements about the poets' private lives were prevalent in some responses, especially Duffy's sexuality and Larkin's alleged homosexuality as "reasons" for their views on women.

Q.19/20 Heaney and Sheers

This is growing to be a popular pairing with many perceptive and well-developed responses seen by examiners. It was heartening to see more contextual references for Sheers, with some perceptive discussion of Wales' coal, slate and steel history, in addition to more literary context. There were some particularly strong responses that engaged with ideas of poetic inheritance, making references to the poetry of R. S. Thomas, and the parallels between him and Sheers.

Summary of key points

- Centres are encouraged to discuss the range of rubric infringements with candidates and to warn them of the repercussions of committing these.
- In addressing AO3, literary contexts are generally more successful than biographical contexts.
- Planning in Section B is essential as all five AOs need to be addressed.
- Candidates studying Lewis/Thomas, Lawrence/Clarke and Plath/Hughes should be reminded of the prescribed list.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

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UNIT 3: POETRY PRE-1900 AND UNSEEN POETRY

General Comments

First: there were more rubric infringements than usual this year. In Section B, some candidates did not discuss poem A, instead choosing their two poems for comparison from poems B, C and D. These responses were self-penalising. In Section A, a few candidates wrote about the wrong Donne poem in Q2(i) which was, once again, self-penalising.

Second: the majority of candidates successfully used their contextual knowledge to enhance their understanding of the texts while keeping their focus on the key words of the essay questions in Section A, for example, 'love' in Q5(ii). However, a significant minority of candidates struggled to achieve the appropriate balance of context and text. As a result, some responses neglected the focus of the questions (for example, 'beauty and wonder' in Q4(ii)) and concentrated on addressing contexts, so paying limited attention to the texts themselves. Or, the obverse, some concentrated on the question's focus and barely mentioned contexts, 'the Classics and other literatures' in the case of Q4(ii).

Third: a lack of accuracy in spelling and expression seems to be a growing trend. It was noticeable that most candidates used the terms Petrarchan and onomatopoeia appropriately but the majority were unable to spell these words correctly. Does spelling matter? It could be argued that inaccuracy leads to uncertainty, shaky grasp and clumsy expression. But more importantly, it has consequences when it affects understanding and so, inevitably, marks. Two examples from this year's paper. First, confusion over 'plane' and 'plain' led to some misunderstanding and uncertainty in the interpretation of poem A in Section B. Second: a number of candidates mistook 'goodly' for 'godly' in 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' in Q4(i), which sent them off on the wrong trail. (A more extreme, and unintentionally comic, example of inaccuracy was the reading of tigers for the river Tigris in *Paradise Lost Book IX*.)

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A part (i)

- Most candidates recognised that it was not necessary to analyse the poems or extracts line by line and adopted a sensible, selective approach.
- AO3 is not assessed in these questions, but it appeared in a number of responses. It is fair to say that where contexts are used to clarify meaning, they could be helpful.
- AO2 is the key assessment objective here. Descriptive or assertive approaches are unlikely to achieve a mark above Band 2. Candidates might like to think in terms of effects (tone, attitude) and how these are achieved. Language such as 'this shows' or 'this highlights' suggests the candidate is adopting a descriptive approach.
- The strongest responses to Q1(i) and Q3(i) started from a recognition of the narrative voices and their tones, so in Chaucer, the Merchant and the author behind him, and in Milton, Satan and the authorial voice of Milton behind him.

Section A part (ii)

- Some responses quoted critics, yet AO5 is not assessed on this paper. Might there be a small confusion here? Referring to the critical responses of Keats's contemporaries could be relevant in terms of addressing context. However, it is less likely that quoting an academic's view of Keats in the twentieth century could be viewed as a contextual reception.
- Quite a number of responses this year were weakened by lack of relevance. For example, instead of addressing 'relationships between men and women', too many responses to Q1(ii) concentrated wholly on marriage. Or instead of focusing clearly on 'attitudes to God' in Q2(ii), too many responses offered a more general discussion of Donne's religious beliefs.
- Approaches which in the first paragraph outlined the poems to be discussed and mentioned connected contexts usually went on to develop relevant and focussed responses.
- Another successful approach was to emphasise the key words of the question in the opening paragraph. So, prominent at the start of the response would be: 'relationships between men and women', 'attitudes to God', 'Eden', 'beauty and wonder' and 'love' - the key words of the questions. It seems obvious but it was surprising how often this focus was absent.
- One of the main weaknesses was to offer stand-alone (not linked to texts) discussions of contexts. Beginning a response with the biography of the writer was unlikely to be a helpful start.

Notes on Texts

Section A part (i)

Q.1 Chaucer

Candidates clearly enjoyed writing about this extract and were well prepared for it. Most commented on the salient simile, 'Stille as stoon', and went on to base their answers on the contrast between the different reactions to the wedding night of Januarie and May. Responses were often very detailed and engaged.

Q.2 Donne

Most wrote confidently about the musical and map imagery, recognising the wit and seriousness being displayed. Some interpreted the geography too literally. Candidates were less confident handling the religious imagery, especially the significance of the two Adams, and the paradoxical ending.

Q.3 Milton

Perhaps the least well answered in this section. Candidates who failed to recognise the importance of the speaker, Satan disguised as the serpent, could misjudge the tone of the passage. Nevertheless, most commented appropriately on Milton's use of language that appealed to the senses, especially taste and smell and sight.

Q.4 Keats

Keats was a popular choice. Many candidates responded enthusiastically and confidently to the passion with which Keats wrote about his experience of reading Chapman's translation of Homer.

The majority recognised the extended travel metaphor and many responses showed a clear grasp of the mechanics of the sonnet form and the way in which Keats uses it to maximum effect. Nevertheless, there were some who took a more literal approach, and talked about actual journeys and places and occasionally candidates who believed Keats had actually heard Chapman read his translation – perhaps a testimony to the power of his poem.

Q.5 Rossetti

Candidates often struggled with first four or five lines of this sonnet, but after the mention of the ‘rose/ Flushing and sweet’ in line nine, their responses became clearer and more engaged. The problem was the vocabulary; a surprising number didn’t know the meaning of ‘impoverished’, ‘curtailed’ and ‘shorn’ with the result that they failed to grasp the full significance of the darkness of the opening and so the contrast with the rest of the poem. The evidence suggests that some candidates had not read or studied this poem before. More informed responses confidently explored the ambiguity of the love Rossetti writes about in this poem.

Section A part (ii)

Q.1 Chaucer

Most of the responses were relevant, and well informed when it came to contexts, especially in relation to theological, Courtly Romance and Classical allusions. There was confident use in particular of the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden and the myth of Pluto and Proserpine. Strongest responses drew attention to the complexity of the male-female relationships in the Tale, arguing that despite the prevalent misogyny of Chaucer’s time, women in the shape of May in particular proved to be the dominant gender. Though references to the marriages of the merchant and Januarie were relevant, some candidates drifted towards writing responses focused almost exclusively on the narrower theme of marriage itself.

Q.2 Donne

Perhaps too many candidates fastened onto ‘religious beliefs’ rather than thinking more selectively and focussing on ‘attitudes to God’. The most relevant responses looked closely at three or four of Donne’s religious poems, especially the Holy Sonnets. There were also candidates who made relevant use of ‘The Relic’.

Q.3 Milton

The strongest responses referred to descriptions of Eden (plants and water), to Satan’s attitude to the Garden, to the gardener roles of Adam and Eve, and to the effect on Eden of the Fall. On the other hand, there were too many responses that seemed unsure about what Eden was, with the result that examiners saw rather a lot of answers on the characters of Adam and Eve and Satan, and on the political context of Milton’s life. Indeed, context often dominated answers to this question. Even so, not enough use was made of ‘Biblical and Classical knowledge’ despite the candidates’ edition containing the relevant chapters of Genesis. In many cases candidates seemed to shy away from engaging with the text itself.

Q.4 Keats

Some of the strongest responses focussed on beautiful women in discussions of 'La Belle Dame', 'Isabella' and 'The Eve of St Agnes', on the beauty of nature ('Ode to a Nightingale'), and the wonder of 'The Grecian Urn'. Very common and equally successful approaches were based on 'Imitation of Spenser' (literature), 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear' (literature) and 'Ode to Psyche' (Classics). Examiners accepted that 'Classics' could be interpreted to include Spenser and Shakespeare, though this approach sometimes led to a neglect of Greek/Hellenistic influences.

Q.5 Rossetti

Many of the most assured answers on the paper were in response to this question. Candidates wrote confidently about both secular and religious love and often displayed a detailed knowledge of the contexts of individual poems. Perhaps the knowledge gained from the study of the Victorian novel in Unit 1 proved beneficial here. Poems in which Rossetti explores her personal struggles with relationships, human and divine, seem to appeal to many candidates on this paper.

Section B

- The most popular combination was poem A 'The Trees are Down' by Charlotte Mew and poem D 'Spring' by Edna St Vincent Millay. Candidates seemed to delight in particular in Millay's cynical, offhand attitude to Spring, comparing her abrupt tone and brief statements to Mew's passionate, deeply engaged and more wordy defence of the trees and the season. John Ormond's 'Turning' was almost as popular; e.e. cummings' 'in Just-/spring' was more of a minority choice. All the poems seemed equally accessible. When candidates went awry it was when they misjudged the tone of the poem. However, candidates were more likely to struggle through a failure to address AO4 competently than because of misunderstandings.
- A surprising number of candidates failed to discuss Poem A, the poem the comparison had to be based on. This failure to follow the question's rubric caused some candidates to be self-penalising.
- Most candidates were well aware of the central importance of AO4 and sensibly began their responses with at least the outline of a comparison of their two poems. This helped to keep the focus on connections for the rest of the response.
- Once again there were many wonderful answers which showed great skill in handling lots of details from poems which had just been read for the first time while at the same time making connections which enhanced their (and our) understanding. For very many candidates, Section B was once again the more successful part of the paper.
- It was interesting to see how contemporary concerns affected readings of Poem A in particular. For many candidates, it was a poem about deforestation, and an environmental poem about how humans were destroying the natural world. And they linked it to environmental movements of the present day. Some argued that Mew's religious beliefs were a major influence over what they saw as more of a polemic than a poem.
- It was equally interesting, perhaps disappointing too, to see how the urban life of so many candidates influenced their reading and understanding. A significant number did not realise that 'plane-tree' was the name of a particular tree. This lack of knowledge might have led to some confusion when Mew refers to 'planes', a minority thinking that

she might be referring to aeroplanes. (Perhaps a less forgivable mistake was the one committed by candidates who confused 'planes' and 'plains'.

Summary of key points

- Candidates need to take time to read the instructions and the questions carefully in order to avoid making errors which will affect their overall mark.
- For Section A part (i), teachers need to ensure that the candidates have some knowledge and understanding of all the poems on the prescribed list for Donne, Keats and Rossetti.
- The balance of text and context is crucial for success in Section A part (ii). Candidates are given a context in the task itself and they should refer to it as they answer the question.
- In Section B, all candidates **must** write on Poem A.

ENGLISH LITERATURE
General Certificate of Education (New)
Summer 2019
Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced
UNIT 4: SHAKESPEARE

General Comments

This year it was good to see more focused responses across this paper. Although this is a closed-book paper, candidates generally selected pertinent material from the plays and there was slightly less of the narrative, descriptive type of approach which sometimes characterises weaker responses. It was also rewarding to see a more varied range of relevant contextual material and critical sources. Examiners were impressed with candidates' ability to quote freely from their Shakespeare play, and also their ability on occasion to quote verbatim from critical sources. However, there are still too many instances of responses where examiners have to search in vain for evidence of engagement with AO3 in Section B, and also for evidence of AO5. As AO3 is heavily weighted in Section B, worth 30 marks in total, it is vital that all candidates prepare for ways in which to address this key assessment objective.

Responses to Shakespeare extracts reflected an improved knowledge base and extended responses to Shakespeare essay tasks in Section B showed improved time management and a carefully planned approach in many instances. It was also very encouraging to see how some candidates appropriately balanced their coverage of the relevant assessment objectives in the extended writing tasks.

However, we remain concerned about the quality of written expression at this level. Candidates who write very long, one sentence paragraphs risk losing their focus and intelligibility, and this trend appeared to be more prominent this year. There is also a trend away from an academic style and register towards the vernacular, which needs to be corrected. In addition, many responses to the Shakespeare extract featured writing out large chunks of the extract for textual support, instead of brief quotations, and consequently there was a paucity of discussion or comment. Too many candidate scripts featured page after page of random comments with no structure or shaping as if their primary goal was to fill the answer booklet. Examiners are not impressed by quantity, but by quality.

Comments on individual questions/sections

King Lear and *Hamlet* remain the most popular texts, with *The Tempest* quickly building its popularity profile. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *King Henry IV Part 1* are less popular, but it is rewarding to see that both plays are clearly stimulating and rewarding for those candidates who study them.

Section A

In response to the Shakespeare extract, candidates were often clear in their knowledge and understanding of the chosen part of the play and were reasonably engaged with discussing the *presentation of Lear* or *Hamlet*/the *presentation of Cleopatra's thoughts and feelings/attitudes towards Prince Harry*.

However, there was some uncertainty regarding *ideas about Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand*, with a preference for describing characters rather than considering how *ideas about marriage* are presented by Shakespeare. It is important to be prepared for a variety of questions in relation to the extract task.

Q.1 *King Lear*

In responding to the *King Lear* extract, there was plenty of sound analysis of Shakespeare's use of language and imagery, but some failed to grasp that Lear is railing against injustice and corrupt authority. Some candidates saw the *rascal beadle* as some sort of aggressive animal and many ignored the references to *usurer* and *cozener*. There was a tendency in many responses to dismiss much of Lear's utterance as simply nonsense or the ranting of a madman. While there is some justification for the latter, it is important to engage with the expressed ideas. The stronger responses saw the importance of Edgar's contribution to the presentation of Lear and suggested this was key in understanding how Lear has gained wisdom through insanity.

Q.2 *Antony and Cleopatra*

The *Antony and Cleopatra* extract gave candidates rich material for discussing the presentation of Cleopatra through Shakespeare's imagery and rhetorical features. Stronger responses showed awareness of the contribution of Charmian and Iras in terms of choric function and many saw how Cleopatra is seen here as a complex, and also a tragic character. It is vital to engage with the question as set; unfortunately, some responses focused exclusively on Cleopatra's *feelings* with no discussion of her *thoughts*.

Q.3 *Hamlet*

In responding to the *Hamlet* extract, it was encouraging to see most candidates engaging with the situation of a suspicious Hamlet interrogating Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It was also pleasing to see many spotting that the whole extract is written in prose. However, there are too many unsupported claims made for the dramatic significance of verse/prose, for example that prose reflects madness, lower class, humour and even less important scenes. While there may be some evidence for some of these, candidates must reflect on the associated dramatic effects produced and the impact of the prose/verse on characterisation, themes and ideas. The most striking feature in response to this question was how most spent an inordinate amount of time and paper space on Hamlet's initial interrogation, neglecting the revealing long speech in the second half of the extract where Hamlet is elaborating on his melancholia in antic disposition or venting his true feelings.

Q.4 *King Henry IV Part 1*

It was very encouraging to see one centre take up *King Henry IV Part 1* this year, and there was clear evidence of engagement with this extract, most seeing the threat implicit in Vernon's glowing depiction of Harry, and Hotspur's hot-headed dismissal in his contrasting speeches. Attitudes noted included sound ideas about the Prince's transformation and candidature for kingship.

Q.5 *The Tempest*

It was encouraging to see a number of responses to *The Tempest* extract engaging with the idea of marriage being presented as a business transaction from the point of view of a canny and manipulative Prospero, intent on empire building.

The more discerning responses also saw the poignancy of Prospero's thoughts on the loss of his daughter, and his reverence for the sanctity of chastity in marriage.

The mythological/classical imagery in Ferdinand's reply at the end of the extract was discussed appropriately, with many seeing his desire to reassure Prospero that he is keen to endorse the view of marriage expressed by his prospective father-in-law. A few commented shrewdly and thoughtfully on the silence of Miranda in this extract.

Section B

In Section B, where candidates can choose one out of two questions, there was a fairly even distribution of question responses.

Q.6/7 *King Lear*

Question 6 on *King Lear* was popular, although it was interesting to note that a majority of candidates seemed to interpret *service* very broadly, frequently ignoring servants and instead focusing exclusively on the main characters and their 'service' to the kingdom or to each other. Many engaged with *loyal* but did little justice to *service* at all. The stronger responses paid attention to Kent and the Fool, and some wrote well on the misguided loyalty of Oswald. In response to Question 7, there was a tendency to seize on 'madness' and examine different representations of madness throughout the play, or just Lear as a prime example, but failing to discuss *attitudes towards/different ways/* and *bleak world*. It is vital to engage with all aspects of the given critical view in Section B tasks.

Q.8/9 *Antony and Cleopatra*

Both questions 8 and 9 enabled candidates to engage with key issues such as *different kinds of power* in *Antony and Cleopatra* and whether the chief protagonists are possibly *victims of their own excessive appetites for each other*.

Q.10/11 *Hamlet*

Question 10 attracted many responses which discussed Hamlet's *inadequacies as an avenger*, but showed less interest in whether *religion and the supernatural* are to blame. Those who engaged fully with the question analysed carefully the contribution of the Ghost to Hamlet's inadequacies and also discussed the crucial moment in the play when Hamlet delays his revenge in the belief that Claudius is praying for forgiveness. There was some good discussion of the impact of contemporary contexts in terms of religion, and also some comparative discussion of the traditions of revenge tragedy.

Those who attempted Question 11 did not always focus on *treatment by men* but looked generally at both Gertrude and Ophelia. There was a tendency to offload vague generalisations about contemporary attitudes towards women which had no foundation in fact but instead were misconceived clichés. However, there were some strong responses which looked closely at Hamlet's treatment of his mother and his lover, with a number drawing in close observations also of Polonius and Laertes in reference to Ophelia. *Dramatic importance* was often, sadly, ignored.

Q.12/13 *King Henry IV Part 1*

Question 12 was more popular than 13, as most who did this question embraced the opportunity to talk about Falstaff and his relationship with the Prince.

There were some detailed analyses of the scenes involving Falstaff, with the Prince's soliloquy promising redemption a key source in the debate regarding Falstaff's possible *irrelevance*.

Q14/15 *The Tempest*

Question 14 on *The Tempest* was more popular with most welcoming the opportunity to discuss the *influence of the past* on the various characters' lives. The stronger responses dealt in concepts such as oppression and revenge, and some produced lively debate on the impact of her father's past on Miranda and also the impact of colonial attitudes towards Caliban. In Question 15, magic was discussed in detail, with most agreeing that it is far from a *distraction* but instead a major catalyst for dramatic action and character development.

Summary of key points

- It is important to remember to read the set extract from Shakespeare as closely as possible, without attempting to respond immediately to the question.
- It is also important to engage with **all** elements of the essay questions, as they offer a critical view which must be addressed during the course of the response.
- Too many essay responses are over-long and consequently unstructured, with some barely coherent. Expression is often severely compromised when candidates are rushing to pour out all their knowledge, sometimes irrespective of the question. This should be discouraged. Examiners frequently saw 6-8 pages written in Section B, and this is unnecessary. Please remember that it is quality not quantity which is valued.
- Where bad handwriting impedes the legibility of a response, it makes awarding a mark very difficult. Many responses this year might have fared better if they had been word processed. WJEC has clear advice on applying for this facility.

ENGLISH LITERATURE
General Certificate of Education (New)
Summer 2019
Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced
UNIT 5: PROSE STUDY (NEA)

General Comments

There was a great deal to admire in much of the work seen by moderators, and most candidates had been well prepared for this challenging unit. Unfortunately, this was not the case in all centres. There was a significant proportion of centres where the same problems raised in the last two reports once again adversely affected candidates' chances of success. There were frequently examples of talented candidates who were disadvantaged by their approach to studying the texts and by the question they were attempting to answer.

The focus of the Principal Moderator's report, and individual moderators' feedback to centres, is always to offer guidance on the best ways to support candidates, to give advice based on good practice seen in literally hundreds of different responses read during the moderation process. Rather than repeat issues which have already been covered at length, the aim of this report will be to offer advice through outlining some examples of successful and less effective approaches witnessed this year. However, it is strongly recommended that centres revisit the detailed advice given in the Principal Moderator's reports for 2017 and 2018 as a helpful adjunct to the guidance offered here. Included in last year's report, for instance, were the key indicators of a successful centre, specific problems relating to each assessment objective and advice on effective assessment procedures.

As in previous years, the main issues affecting candidates' achievement in 2019 were:

- a lack of **detailed knowledge and secure understanding of the texts** affecting the quality of support and convincing development of claims
- limited knowledge and understanding of the **conventions and features of prose writing**, specifically narrative devices used by novelists and how these differ from poetic and dramatic techniques
- **text combinations** which limited candidates' opportunities to meet higher band criteria
- **task setting** which led to a reductive view of the texts, placing an emphasis on context or issues, such as gender politics or class divisions, rather than on the texts
- the **wording of titles** which encouraged a descriptive rather than a discursive, analytical approach or which led candidates away from a literary perspective on the writers' presentation of the topic
- ineffective **planning and organisation** of material into a clear line of argument
- **over-reliance on web-based study sites** leading to commentary style writing rather than analysis and limited engagement with more worthwhile critical material.

Unfortunately, there were still far too many centres whose assessment was overly generous and therefore insecure, making adjustment to marks necessary.

The main problems in assessment arose when:

- **annotation** was sparse or limited to merely AO markers without brief accompanying comments or descriptors to indicate clearly when and why credit was being awarded
- **marginal comments** or reference to assessment criteria did not accurately reflect the candidates' achievements
- primary markers had not adhered closely enough to the **standards established in the exemplar materials** in order to make the crucial distinctions between the bands:
 - **Band 2:** *attempt; some understanding*
 - **Band 3:** *clear; sensible; appropriate*
 - **Band 4:** *sound; secure; accurate; purposeful*
 - **Band 5:** *confident; perceptive; mature; autonomous*
- there was limited evidence of **internal moderation** or dual marking of responses or of dialogue between markers which leads to more secure assessment.
- assessment was not **effectively standardised within the centre** leading to inconsistency across the sample and/or cohort.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Comments on different approaches

As suggested above, it might be helpful this year to give some examples of different approaches from centres which highlight both good practice, which could be emulated, and some problems which can hopefully be avoided.

1. Teaching one text:

In one very successful centre, the decision was made to **teach one text and to offer candidates a choice in their second text**. This was by no means the only approach which served candidates well and is not intended as a blueprint for all centres. However, there were useful indicators of good practice worth considering for all centres when reviewing their own approach to this unit:

- The candidates had been taught the post-2000 texts in detail, in this case McCarthy's *The Road*, so that they had a **solid understanding of the novel form** which they could then apply when studying the other text. The majority then chose this as their post-2000 text although more confident readers were given the opportunity to select a different text, such as *The Circle* by Dave Eggers or Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure*.
- A clear emphasis had been placed **on rereading the novels and studying them in the same way as their exam texts**, rather than reading them only once or relying on extracts. This allowed even the less confident candidates to select more relevant support and to develop ideas convincingly. In the best candidates there was evidence of the Band 5 creative engagement which can only arise out of thorough knowledge and understanding.
- Candidates were able to **demonstrate some independence** by choosing their pre-2000 text from a small range of appropriate novels. Most chose either *Frankenstein* or *Brave New World*, but *A Handful of Dust*, *Beloved*, *Slaughterhouse V* and *The Remains of the Day* were also tackled.

It was especially helpful to candidates that they were **not confined solely to texts in the ‘dystopian’ genre**. They often discussed its importance in relation to *The Road* but did not fall into the trap of viewing either text solely as an example of the genre; their responses did not become a checklist of generic features as can happen when the emphasis is placed on the genre per se rather than the specific texts.

- Having studied *The Road* **as a whole text**, rather than solely from one perspective, the candidates could choose a focus which genuinely interested them, offering more opportunity to demonstrate independence. A wide range of topics was considered: parent and child relationships; lost innocence; brutality/violence; betrayal; despair/hope; religious faith; guilt/redemption; the flawed hero; etc.
- **The actual titles were carefully worded by the teacher**, in negotiation with the candidate, in order to ensure that all the AOs were targeted. The emphasis was firmly on a literary perspective, rather than one which would mean that context or an ‘issue’ drove the response. Although the titles were suitably varied, there was a consistent approach to the wording:

- All titles included the term **‘present’ or ‘presentation’** to remind the candidate to focus on the writer behind the ideas and how his or her conscious choices shaped reader response
- All titles included a statement as a shaping element to narrow the focus and help the candidate structure a tight literary argument. The most successful of these were **specific literary views of the texts**, usually crafted by the teacher, rather than general statements or aphorisms, and included a contentious element with which the candidate could engage in order to make a case. For instance, two candidates responding to *Beloved* and *The Road* had very distinct statements to help them develop individual arguments:

‘Although both writers force us to witness the full horror of man’s inhumanity to man, they do allow us a faint glimmer of light in all the darkness.’ With this view in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which the writers present hope in the texts.

‘In both texts the conventional portrait of the loving, nurturing parent is not just challenged but turned on its head.’ With this view in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which the writers present parent-child relationships in the texts.

- The candidates seemed fully aware that they were writing **literature essays** and that the emphasis should be on how the writers had shaped meaning, on analysing and evaluating the effects of the writers’ choices of language **and** other prose devices. There was discussion of range of prose devices suggesting a secure sense of genre, including narrative viewpoint, imagery patterns, symbolism and motifs, structural decisions in the progression of ideas and character arcs, the importance of setting as well as openings and endings, use of dialogue and even chapter headings. In the most effective responses, these were all securely linked to the task and fully developed as the candidates knew the texts well enough to provide apt support for each claim.

- They had obviously been reminded to **balance AOs 2 and 3** carefully (TASK – TEXT- CONTEXT), so that the best responses demonstrated a confident understanding of the relationship between the texts and the various factors which might have influenced its writing and reception.
- **Connections between the texts were used as scaffolding for the argument** and clearly outlined in topic sentences, then developed with detailed consideration of both texts. At the top of the range, candidates made effective use of paragraphs as building blocks for their argument and were able to show how studying one text had informed, or *illuminated*, their understanding of the other.
- The candidates had been steered towards **high quality critical opinion of the texts** where possible and away from over reliance on the kind of online study guide material which can be helpful in the early stages but is no substitute for thorough textual knowledge. This was made easier as all the pre-2000 texts chosen had attracted mainstream critical attention which could then also be applied to more recent works. The most confident candidates were able to engage with these views, using them to discuss alternative ways of interpreting the texts.
- This was a relatively large centre with a wide range of ability and several different teaching groups but **internal moderation was robust**. All the scripts in the sample had been marked and annotated by at least two teachers and there was evidence of dialogue between them explaining how marks had been fine-tuned within the band. One primary marker was more generous than the other two but had been brought in line through negotiation so that the rank order was secure and the final marks across the range accurately reflected the centre's standards.
- Following **advice in the previous report** about generosity of marking at the upper end of the range, the centre had made specific reference in summative comments to the standardising exemplar materials as benchmarks for assessment.

Obviously, not all the candidates met higher band criteria and the range of ability was accurately reflected in the marking. At the lower end, the candidates tended to adopt a more descriptive, commentary approach with less secure focus on the writers' technique. However, none had seemed disadvantaged by the centre's emphasis on literary appreciation of the texts and the more confident candidates had been given every chance to meet Bands 4 and 5 criteria.

2. Allowing fully independent text choice:

In other centres, allowing candidates a free choice of text in both categories worked well when this was underpinned by a **structured programme to support study of prose fiction**. Some candidates clearly relished the opportunity to study independently and had been well grounded in the necessary skills and knowledge of the novel writing process. Naturally, this was most successful when the candidates were confident readers.

This approach proved less successful and made it more difficult for candidates to achieve marks in Bands 4 and 5 when the candidates were working without sufficient support and teacher in-put.

The approach was commendable in theory but in practice many candidates were given more independence than they could comfortably handle.

This was the case in one centre where the candidates had been allowed to choose their own text combinations, the topics they wanted to pursue and the wording of their titles. Most struggled with this level of independence, having only studied one prose text at AS.

Some **unhelpful text combinations** posed problems when deciding on a suitable focus and making connections:

- Quite often candidates had made their selection with **AO3 and AO4 more firmly in mind than AO2**, choosing their texts to fit a common 'issue'. For instance, *The Color Purple* was paired with *The Help* but the focus on racial intolerance led to a response driven by context or the 'issue' rather than literary appreciation of the texts. Although set in quite distinct eras, the contextual backgrounds tended to be conflated and generalised and the texts were largely used as illustrations of the evils of racism. The candidates were often writing about the 'issue' rather than the texts; one candidate actually wrote: '*Celie is a representative of women in the period.*'
- Female repression was a popular focus but pairing *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Pride and Prejudice* with *The Power* or *A Thousand Splendid Suns* made it difficult for the candidates to see beyond their concern with gender politics in order to appreciate the individual texts as literary works. Such a **focus on a single issue led to some distortion** of the writers' meaning; one candidate confidently stated in her introduction: '*Female repression is undoubtedly at the very heart of all Jane Austen's novels*' while another made exactly the same claim for *Brighton Rock*.
- Atwood's novel was also linked with other dystopian texts, such as *Never Let Me Go* and *1984*, but candidates often limited their focus to little more than a **description of the repressive regimes**. Focusing on the genre rather than the novels in their own right often led to a checklist of dystopian tropes, a reductive approach also seen in candidates writing about *Wuthering Heights* and *The Little Stranger* where the focus was solely on typically 'gothic' features.
- Some text pairings made it difficult to make more than **superficial connections**, especially for less confident candidates linking *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Shutter Island* in a consideration of madness or boarding school life in *Villette* and *Never Let Me Go*.
- Some candidates tried to **pair a novel with a non-fiction text** such as *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*, *The Wolf of Wall Street* or *Stuart: A Life Backwards* which proved very problematic, especially when the candidates referred to both texts as novels and treated them in the same way.

When also given the responsibility to **craft their own titles**, candidates also floundered:

- Some tried to cover too much in **wide, unmanageable topics** such as 'gender', 'power', or 'women' without any narrowing of focus. One even tackled 'the meaning of life'!
- The titles often encouraged a **contextual bias** as if using the texts to prove a sociological or philosophical point, such as 'the dangers of dictatorship', 'the challenges of adolescence' or 'women will always be the repressed minority: discuss'.

- Most precarious of all, however, was the very popular **topic of ‘identity’** which is fraught with problems when linked to literary fiction. Such an abstract topic has so many possible meanings, especially to the young people of today, who are perhaps understandably very drawn to this when choosing a focus. Unfortunately, few had decided which definition of ‘identity’ they were exploring before writing: some seemed to be exploring agency or self-autonomy while others took it to mean freedom or independence and some defined ‘identity’ as self-knowledge or even individuality. Firmly deciding on any one of these more precise terms would have helped the candidates struggling with this amorphous term, underlining the reason why **previous reports have strongly recommended that it is best avoided.**
- Titles written by candidates sometimes sounded very impressive but made little sense and rarely helped them structure an argument. As a result the candidates often wrote descriptively with little opportunity to engage creatively or simply ignored their title and focused very loosely on the topic. The candidate tackling this awkwardly worded title encountered some difficulty in sustaining a literary approach:

‘The transition between time periods and the conflict between social convention and the passion and desire of young people, as seen in the novels *The Go-Between* and *The Sense of an Ending*.’
- This struggle with task setting was hardly surprising; it is a very tall order to expect candidates to craft titles with the same challenge and clear focus on the AOs as exam questions. This is why feedback to centres has consistently emphasised that **the wording of titles should not be left to candidates and must be the responsibility of the teacher.**

Even when the text selection and wording of titles were less problematic, the candidates seemed unsure **how to approach the study and critical appreciation of prose texts** and demonstrated limited appreciation of the techniques and conventions of novel writing. Working independently, without a secure grounding in prose study, they often fell into common pitfalls:

- **Reading the text only once and then relying more on study aid material** to help them understand the texts and gather their material. As these guides are often little more than commentaries of meaning, with relatively sparse textual support, they did not help the candidates avoid writing descriptively rather than analytically.
- Many candidates actually **quoted from such study aids** as if they were critical views of the texts which present an alternative reading rather than explaining key ideas as simply as possible. At times candidates seemed uncertain how to distinguish between their words and those taken directly from such sources, taking them dangerously close to plagiarism.
- **Quoting support without clear context** in the novel and ‘stabbing’ at the text with limited acknowledgement of where the quoted phrase had appeared
- Giving limited attention to prose techniques but **approaching analysis of language in a similar way to poetry**, selecting one quotation and subjecting each word to micro-analysis as if the novel’s meaning could be pinned on one sentence rather than developing the point with more evidence. **Good points were often weakened and made unconvincing by a lack of support.**

Candidates often showed their lack of confidence in tackling prose works by focusing on phonological devices, especially alliteration and sibilance, making overblown claims for their effects as if discussing poetry or drama.

- Referring to the characters as if they were **real people** with limited focus on the ways their creators had crafted them and why. Some candidates barely mentioned the writers behind the characters.
- Making frequent, even exclusive, use of **linguistic terms**: determiner; declarative; adverbial clause and basic word classes such as adjective, noun and verb. While these did not necessarily detract from critical appreciation they rarely contributed very much of value either, and candidates would have been on safer ground focusing instead on literary terminology.

When it came to **assessing the work of candidates given so much independence**, teachers to some extent rewarded their *efforts* rather than their *attainment*. While this was perhaps understandable, it is not appropriate: the work can only be assessed using the criteria and weighed against the established standards. When competing with candidates with a more confident understanding of the genre and more developed study skills, the work was often generously marked.

While independent study is valued in this unit, and centres are free to choose this approach, it is worth restating that candidates must be allowed an appropriate level of autonomy. **It is not the intention of the specification that they should be expected to work without teacher guidance.** As emphasised in previous reports, this approach can be extremely rewarding for candidates but must be undertaken as part of a structured study plan whereby teaching covers the vital knowledge and skills candidates need for critical appreciation of prose works.

3. Teaching both texts:

Finally, in a significant number of centres, all candidates responded to the same two texts. This is a perfectly acceptable approach and can help candidates gain a more secure understanding of the genre and how to write about it, although it is vital that there are opportunities to demonstrate independence.

In one particular centre where *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was successfully combined with Toibin's *Brooklyn*, all fourteen candidates tackled **different topics** including: the importance of physical journeys; how the protagonists had been shaped by external forces, the silent protagonist, secrets and lies; watching and being watched; isolation; doomed love; lost innocence, etc. Their **individual titles had been carefully worded** in discussion with their teacher to help them structure their material and address the AOs. The use of diverse tasks allowed the candidates to demonstrate independence, not solely in their choice of title but also in the considered selection of textual evidence; their confident knowledge and understanding of both texts allowed them to make and support convincing individual arguments.

In some centres, however, studying the same two texts was less successful as the candidates were effectively **all writing about the same topic**, an approach which is definitely not advised. The texts had often been selected in order to focus on a **single theme or issue**, such as the very popular female repression or class division, and teaching seemed to have centred almost completely on this one aspect.

Previous reports have frequently warned against this reductive approach which does not help candidates develop a strong understanding of how novels work. Sadly, it seemed that many candidates had gained the idea that novelists write in order to espouse – or simply illustrate – one idea, as if fictional prose is mainly a polemical rather than creative process.

Moreover, imposing the same topic left little scope for candidates to pursue something which genuinely interested them and might well have **stifled enthusiasm** for the texts. Helping candidates to plan and structure their own independent response to a task can also build confidence for the exam units where they meet unfamiliar questions without the support of a framework.

In one centre *The Great Gatsby* was paired with *Atonement*, a popular combination, and it is clear to see why teachers would opt for texts with such evident literary weight. However, both these complex and multi-faceted works are hard to pin down to one idea, and difficult to study quickly or partially. Perhaps as a way to make the texts more manageable, the most popular task centred on social divisions, primarily class hierarchies, a slippery concept for 18 -year-olds trying to define subtle nuances in both texts. Many focused exclusively on Robbie and Gatsby as lower class outsiders or on the Buchanans and the Tallises and Paul Marshal as ‘upper class’ autocrats, focusing on a few key incidents, sometimes only dealing with Part One of *Atonement*; some made scarce reference to Parts Two and Three or even mentioned Briony as the central character. In both cases, the emphasis was often on context with the characters viewed almost as stereotypes or representative figures illustrating social attitudes, an approach positively invited by one candidate’s title:

What do the texts tell us about attitudes to social class in their respective societies in the years between WWI and WW2?

In another centre where *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were the common texts, **the tasks initially appeared varied**, with different statements related to the topic intended as a shaping element and starting point for AO5. However, these were **not literary views of the texts**, but had often been sourced from sites such as Brainyquotes, and aphorisms or famous quotations from Nietzsche, Betty Friedan, Michelle Obama, Jung or Marilyn Monroe tended to take the candidates away from critical appreciation of the text and towards a focus on the ‘issue’.

What was more concerning, however, was that the candidates were all in essence **writing about the same topic**, even using the same extracts for close focus, the same quotations and the same contextual and critical material. This common ground in all responses made it difficult for the candidates to demonstrate independence or for the teachers to assess their work accurately. In centres where this approach, teaching to one topic, had been taken, it was quite common for the rank order of candidates to be insecure.

As emphasised from the outset, there is **no hierarchy of approach** in this unit and moderators saw both very good responses and less impressive work in centres where the candidates had worked independently, where one text had been taught and where both texts were studied by all the candidates. The same text combinations worked very well for some centres but produced disappointing results in other.

Whichever approach taken or texts selected, the two factors which made the most difference in candidates' chances of success were:

- the level of detailed knowledge and understanding of the texts
- sustaining a solidly literary perspective by focusing primarily on the texts and the writers' presentation of the topic rather than on the topic or 'issue' in its own right.

Summary of key points

- Text selection should allow candidates to choose from a range of different topics, ideally one which reflects their individual interest. Teaching to one theme or 'issue' is a reductive approach and should be avoided.
- Candidates selecting their own texts and tasks will need to be supported by a programme of study skills targeted on prose fiction/the conventions of the novel, planning and redrafting, etc. They cannot be expected to meet Band 4 and 5 criteria without structured guidance.
- In centres where both texts are taught in common, candidates must be given an appropriate choice of topic and task.
- Candidates should be encouraged to reread and study the texts in detail to develop secure knowledge and understanding.
- The emphasis from the outset should be on literary appreciation rather than viewing the texts as vehicles to discuss context or 'issues'.
- Task setting and the wording of titles should not be the sole responsibility of the candidates and teachers can consult WJEC when reviewing approaches to this vital component.
- Candidates must be made aware of the pitfalls of relying too heavily on web-based study support materials
- Primary markers of the candidates' work should revisit the latest standardising materials from WJEC before assessing their own candidates' work. Wherever possible, at least some of the candidates' responses should be marked by another teacher and judgments on the work discussed by both markers.
- Centres should be willing to review decisions and practices in light of specific and general feedback on performance.

It is acknowledged that the NEA component does put a lot of pressure on teachers who rarely have the time or opportunity to see other centres' approaches. Once again, this report is longer than intended and while this is not ideal, it arises out of a genuine desire to pass on to those tasked with delivering this unit some of the good and bad practice gleaned from more than eighty centres' work. Hopefully the report will have included some ideas which will help both candidates and their teachers in preparing effectively future submissions.



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