



GCE Examiners' Report

English Language and Literature
AS/A level
Summer 2024

Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

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Executive Summary

Overall, the papers functioned as expected with questions being accessible to all and also challenging enough to differentiate between candidates. There was a significant change in the mean mark on Unit 1 and some of the reasons for this is outlined below.

The Principal Examiner noted that the focus on birds in Question 1 of Unit 1 meant that candidates were unable to use some material which they wished to discuss from the set poem from the *Anthology*. A large proportion of candidates wrote about nature rather than birds which meant that they did not necessarily answer the set question. Those who did answer the question, however, made use of the whole poem and made pertinent and perceptive points on the whole poem. In general, candidates struggled to make productive use of context with a very narrow range being considered and not often integrated very well into the reading of the text. In Section B, candidates engaged well with the creative pieces and there were some lively pieces of writing. Some candidates did not have a sound grasp of the nature of spoken language. At times, the commentaries lacked a range of terminology and this was also an issue in the essay in Section A. Candidates should also be reminded of the importance of embedding connections throughout the response in Section A and in the commentary.

In Unit 2, the Principal Examiner was pleased to report that many candidates wrote successfully on their set texts. Although performance was not as strong as in previous years, there were a significant number of responses which were highly analytical, developed a strong line of argument, had a range of accurate and sophisticated terminology, and were able to fully integrate relevant textual discussion into their responses. Where centres had thoroughly prepared candidates along these lines, there was a strong performance across their responses. Examiners also encountered a high number of responses which fell prey to the typical pitfalls in this paper, namely a lack of terminology, rubric infringements, irrelevant and in some cases fictitious contextual points, and a failure to answer the set question.

The Principal Examiner for Unit 3 noted that candidates found plenty to say about each extract in Section A, although more detail could have been explored by candidates. Writing stamina seems to be an issue. As with other units, some revealed little knowledge of their set text in Section B with some relying on a modern translation of Shakespeare's work. This was obviously problematic at this level and impacted on the qualities required for this integrated course. Overall, candidates engaged well with their set text and with the questions set on the paper. Almost all would benefit from discussing of a *range* of literary and linguistic terminology, however, as there was a reliance on sentence moods and word class. Terms tended to be repeated and lacked sufficient range and also need to be applied with accuracy and precision. For Section B, stronger responses saw contextual knowledge being *applied* meaningfully to the Shakespeare text. Weaker responses often provided a generic contextual introduction and made generalized references to context within the essay.

The question in Section A of Unit 4 asked candidates to compare and contrast the presentation on motherhood across three texts. The Principal Examiner noted that the candidates who spent time reading all three texts before starting to write, were the most successful. Too many candidates seemed too focused on word class while an understanding of poetic form could have been stronger. A minority of candidates lacked a sound knowledge of the whole text in Section B. Reading the set text should be the minimum required at this level. It was also disappointing to see that candidates were not always addressing the double-weighted AOs, AO4 on Section A and AO3 on Section B. Some of the best responses revealed a deep knowledge and understanding of their studied text.

In the vast majority of centres for Unit 5 (NEA), assessment was deemed to be accurate with teachers applying the assessment grid in a reasonable manner. The Principal Examiner noted that centres are now giving candidates more independence and flexibility in terms of the genre and the texts studied. In the creative pieces, there was excellent engagement with genre and the use of writing podcasts for this section were usually successful. The most successful genre studies were able to weave together all four AOs assessed. The Principal Examiner reminded centres that as candidates can edit and draft the non-examination assessment, the expectation is that they will draw upon a wide range of terminology and make close reference to the texts themselves. For Band 5, candidates are expected to engage with language on a phonological, word and sentence level. Weaker responses tended to lapse into a narrative retelling of the texts or did not support their observations on meaning with appropriate evidence or terminology. There are some growing issues with slightly more generosity in assessment, poor administration at times and some concerns regarding the use of AI, yet most centres deliver the NEA successfully and it remains an essential part of A level study for this subject.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Candidates need to keep in mind that AO4 accounts for half the marks in Question 2 (iii) and the exploration of connections should be embedded throughout the commentary.	Connecting Texts	This blended learning resource contains interactive self-study content covering connecting texts. The resource is designed to complement traditional face to face teaching with an online learning pack that allows students to learn at their own pace.
Centres should prepare their candidates with a wide and broad understanding of the social, political, historical and cultural context of their chosen text. These should be meaningfully applied and embedded into the candidate's response.	Integrating Context in Unit 3	This PowerPoint presentation from the autumn 2017 CPD series contains material supporting the teaching of integrating contexts in Unit 3, Section B (slides 31-36)
The organisation of the response in Unit 4, Section A should be based on relevant, meaningful connections.	Developing Connections Between Texts in Unit 4	This PowerPoint presentation from the autumn 2022 CPD series contains material supporting the teaching of making connections between the unseen texts in Section A of Unit 4 (slides 135-153).

<p>Across all five units, linguistic and literary terminology must be wide-ranging and applied with precision.</p>	<p>Terminology Tree</p> <p>Glossary of Terms</p>	<p>The Terminology Tree can be found on the 'Training' tab on the subject-specific website. Click on the 'Materials from previous events' tab to access the resources and download the autumn 2022 materials. There are accompanying resources in the PowerPoint and in the delegate booklet.</p>
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 1: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CREATIVE WRITING

Overview of the Unit

In Unit 1, candidates have two questions to answer, one a comparative analysis of a poem and an unseen text in Section A and one a creative writing question in Section B which has three strands to it. Effective planning of time is essential to be successful in this unit. Most candidates answered every question on the exam paper and, in most cases, easily met the rubric instruction to write approximately 200 words for 2 (i) and 2 (ii) and 400 words for 2 (iii). Time management and completion of the entire paper was not an issue for the majority of candidates, and it was clear in the successful responses to the questions that centres had prepared their candidates to write in timed conditions.

Technical accuracy and the quality of written expression is assessed in AO1 for Questions 1 and 2 (iii) and in AO5 for Question 2 (i) and (ii). Candidates are reminded on the exam paper that assessment will take into account the quality of written communication used in their answers. The responses showed that candidates were aware of this and that it had been taken into consideration in their Section B, 2 (i) and (ii) responses. There was a small minority of candidates whose handwriting was a challenge to decipher and although each script was given due time and attention, it is essential that candidates make every effort to write legibly.

It is vital that candidates are equipped with a wide-ranging set of technical terms before attempting this exam, in particular for Questions 1 and 2 (iii). The best responses used a range of combined technical terms confidently (AO1), explored approaches meaningfully (AO2), addressed the influence of contextual factors (AO3) and made thorough comparisons and contrasts between the texts (AO4). Weaker responses struggled to use technical language, with many using just one or two basic word level terms. Some candidates mostly focused on the first two stanzas of the poem, describing the setting and therefore not addressing the question of the presentation of birds. This made it difficult for the examiners to award marks in the higher bands.

A close focus on the question was also a notable feature of successful answers in term of the comparative analysis; many candidates made sound comparisons between the poem and the unseen text in Section A and then between their own texts in Q2 (iii). In the least successful answers, candidates did not focus on the specific question in Section A and on the unifying focus in Section B. There are online CPD resources available on the WJEC website to assist with the teaching of terminology as well as frameworks for supporting comparative responses and it is clear that many centres are making full use of the resources on offer to best serve the interests of their candidates.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Comparative analysis of poetry and unseen text.

Candidates had to write about the poem 'The Darkling Thrush' by Thomas Hardy, taken from the WJEC *Anthology*, and a choice of unseen text; they could write either about an extract from the novel *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf (1931) or a transcribed extract from a voice over by David Attenborough from the television documentary 'The Wonder of Son' (2022). All three dealt with the presentation of birds and candidates were asked to compare and contrast their presentation in the poem and one of the unseen texts. More candidates chose to write about the novel extract than the transcript but there did seem to be more certainty amongst the candidates to compare the spoken text and the poem than last year. It was obvious that they found confidence in their familiarity with David Attenborough and his style of presenting through his voice-overs. The best responses that used Text C made analytical reference to the use of intonation and stress to capture Attenborough's obvious admiration for the birds.

The candidates who kept a close focus on the question and the presentation of birds wrote well about 'The Darkling Thrush', a poem towards the end of the *Anthology* that places the thrush as a symbol of hope as the 19th Century draws to a close. As the thrush does not appear in the poem until the third stanza, some candidates spent too long analysing the landscape and surroundings rather than focusing on the thrush and the effect it had on the poetic voice. Some candidates chose to concentrate solely on the supernatural elements of the poem focusing on references to the 'spectre-grey' and 'Century's corpse' in the first two stanzas. These responses were interesting and well-developed in terms of their analysis of symbols and motifs but unfortunately did not develop this sufficiently to make the connection with the second half of the poem and the appearance of the thrush. In a similar vein, a large proportion of the candidates focused wholly on nature and although birds are a feature of the natural world, the lack of emphasis on the question meant that candidates could not be awarded for their analysis.

The most successful candidates were able to shape convincing arguments and show a clear understanding of integrated study. Analysis of the use of imagery was pleasing in the stronger responses as was the range of terms used in the discussion of the individual texts and their connections with each other. There was a feeling amongst examiners that whilst responses focused well on word level analysis with frequent references to pre-modifiers and abstract nouns there wasn't enough attention given to form, structure and poetic voice. In the responses that did offer some analysis of metre, there were several who mistakenly identified the poem to be written in iambic pentameter with others who stated that the poem was a Petrarchan Sonnet. In the extract from *The Waves* many candidates mistakenly commented on the use of adjectives instead of the tripling of the dynamic verbs 'escaping, pursuing, pecking'. There remained some confusion with syndetic and asyndetic listing as noted in last year's report.

The embedding of contextual factors throughout the answers was mostly successful with the best responses offering both a range of biographical and social contextual factors. There were some candidates who did not include any contextual references; if a candidate makes no contextual references, then they will only be able to achieve marks for AO3 for overview and summary. There were many references to Hardy as a Romantic poet or writing in the Romantic era; he was a Victorian poet and author despite being heavily influenced by Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth. There were several references to the Industrial Revolution and more precisely the Second Industrial Revolution by many candidates; this was used especially convincingly to analyse the way that the thrush represented Hardy's love for the countryside and natural way of life. Many candidates also interpreted the thrush as a symbol of optimism in a time of mourning that followed the death of Prince Albert; many candidates also noted that the preoccupation with grief was captured in the original title of the poem 'By the Century's Deathbed'. There was also some insightful analysis of the effect of the Boer War on the zeitgeist of the time the poem was written. The best responses did not limit themselves to one or two contextual features but instead offered an understanding of a broad range of factors that influenced the creation and reception of the poem.

Some candidates restricted their responses by choosing two or three comparisons between the texts instead of exploring a wider breadth of similarities and differences. These responses tended to be rather short and as a result self-penalising. The examiners felt that some candidates focused on the more descriptive connections instead of analysing how meaning was created. An understanding through teaching of Form, Grammar, Lexis, Imagery and Sound, is advocated at the beginning of the AS course and as the underlying mechanism for analysis and comparison for every type of text encountered on the course. There are some excellent Blended Learning resources on literary and linguistic terminology on the WJEC website that can be used both in the classroom and independently by candidates as revision.

Section B: Creative writing and commentary

(i) and (ii) Creative writing.

As previous reports have stated, the key to success in this section relies on effective time management and planning in order that detailed links are embedded in the two written pieces so that pertinent connections can be made in 2 (iii) at relative speed. Candidates needed to pay careful attention to genre, audience and purpose in the written tasks and should have made sure that they were producing the text type that they have been set. It would be useful for centres to reinforce to candidates that examiners are, for AO5, looking for evidence of awareness of genre, audience and purpose, as well as register and voice. Quality of written expression is also assessed under AO5.

Question 2 (i) asked candidates to write a descriptive extract from a novel in which nature poses a threat with Question 2 (ii) also using nature as a focus, asking candidates to imagine themselves as a tour guide and writing an extract from their talk entitled 'A nature-spotting haven!'. In the novel extract, most candidates had recognised the need to use descriptive techniques in their writing and there were many responses that used a wide range of features and imagery to create the sense of threat posed by nature. There were many instances of bears, wolves and even the odd stray cow that had scared the protagonist in the novel extract. There were several journeys to distant rainforests where the roots or tendrils of the trees came alive and devoured the narrative voice. In addition, seemingly innocent camping trips became tales of horror and misfortune. Most contained a secure sense of audience and purpose and candidates showed themselves to be familiar with writing a descriptive narrative. The most successful descriptive extracts used a wide range of stylistic features whilst engaging the reader fully with a convincing narrative voice. A few candidates wrote the extract almost in a journalistic style or as a recount; some were successful in doing this and created an almost dystopian atmosphere in their writing. Others were less convincing with the writing lacking the threatening atmosphere caused by nature. Some responses contained many technical errors such as the disagreement of subject and verb, some accidentally slipped between past and present tense, and others where common errors were frequent in the writing. Some responses were successful but were too brief, under 100 words in some instances. However, these were in the minority and the examiners felt that the candidates had engaged well with the task and as a result, written creative and appealing responses.

The talk extract also elicited a wide variety of responses from local beauty spots to world renowned destinations such as New York's Central Park. Some candidates had chosen an urban landscape such as the centre of Cardiff and had included the spotting of nature in their talk. In a few instances, some candidates had set out their talk either as a play script or as a transcription; it is important that candidates read the instructions as the time wasted on unnecessary transcriptions would be better off spent elsewhere. There was a clear sense of personal voice in this task with many candidates using non-standard lexis effectively to capture the improvised nature of a talk. As with the extract from the novel, technical accuracy was an issue in some instances; it may benefit some candidates to write as close to 200 words as possible instead of writing overly long responses. This should allow time for them to read through their work in order to eliminate basic errors such as the use of a capital letter for the singular first person pronoun 'I'.

There was evidence this year of candidates deliberately choosing features in both pieces which matched for purposes of comparison in 2 (iii) and it was pleasing to see this element of forward-planning.

(iii) Analytical commentary

There were several different approaches to the analytical commentary. Most candidates successfully compared the use of stylistic techniques by focusing on the use of narrative voice, word and sentence level analysis, imagery and sound. This approach was most productive where the candidate focused on a sustained comparison of how meaning was created in both texts, also important for awarding marks in AO1 and AO2. As it has been noted in previous reports, it is sensible to suggest to candidates that they should prepare and plan for these links by including similar and different features in their two pieces. Some candidates struggled to find points of comparison and offered long descriptive passages paraphrasing the content of their writing instead of analysing the choices they had made. Whilst there are many approaches that could be taken in this question, those who opted to analyse and compare a broad range of both linguistic and literary features were able to successfully address the three Assessment Objectives for this component of the exam. Whilst terminology (AO1) is worth only 5 marks here, it seems that the use of a range of terms is crucial to their analysis of language choice and impacts too on AO2 (10 marks), which in turn has an impact on the quality of links in AO4 (15 marks). In a few instances, candidates wrote about both texts separately and then wrote a paragraph comparing their writing at the end. It is important to make candidates aware that half of the marks for the analytical commentary are for AO4 and therefore meaningful links should be made and sustained throughout.

Summary of Key Points

Section A

Successful responses:

- addressed the question throughout the response with a close focus on the presentation of birds
- used a range of terms from across the language framework accurately and applied them sensitively in order to comment on meaning
- embedded references to context throughout their response, offering a range of factors to show an understanding of the influences on the poet and on society at the turn of the century
- ensured relevant coverage of the poem avoiding lengthy discussions of the sections that were not relevant to the question focus.

Areas for improvement:

- Avoid long opening paragraphs that focus wholly on context. This needs to be embedded throughout the response.
- Candidates need to use of a range of terminology from integrated study. To demonstrate 'clear evidence' of terminology, candidates need to make sure that they have a combination of both linguistic and literary terms.
- Explore detailed connections which consider that whilst two texts might be discussing a similar topic the presentation of birds may offer very different interpretations of what they may represent.

Section B

Successful responses:

- demonstrated a clear engagement with both creative tasks
- exhibited a secure awareness of genre, audience and purpose in 2 (i) and 2 (ii)
- Included a wide range of linguistic and literary features in both creative tasks and used them to make productive and discerning links in the commentary 2 (iii)
- wrote with a high degree of technical accuracy in all three tasks, making sure that basic errors were eliminated, and that agreement of tenses was secure.

Areas for improvement:

- Responses in Question 2 (i) and 2 (ii) should adhere to the word limits. Short responses do not allow for the development of ideas and overly long creative writing will self-penalise by not allowing sufficient time for the analytical commentary in 2 (iii).
- Candidates need to keep in mind that AO4 accounts for half the marks in Question 2 (iii) and the exploration of connections should be embedded throughout this component of Unit 1.
- There should be a wide range of linguistic and literary techniques used in 2 (i) and 2 (ii) to demonstrate confident and ambitious creative control. This will also aid the exploration of productive and insightful connections in the analytical commentary.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 2: DRAMA AND NON-LITERARY TEXT STUDY

Overview of the Unit

In a highly time-pressured examination, it is always very encouraging to see the high quality of work some candidates are capable of producing for this paper. Whilst not as many as in previous years, there were a significant number of responses which were highly analytical, developed a strong line of argument, had a range of accurate and sophisticated terminology, and were able to fully integrate relevant textual discussion into their responses. Where centres had thoroughly prepared candidates along these lines, there was a strong performance across their responses. Unfortunately, examiners also encountered a high number of responses which fell prey to the typical pitfalls in this paper, namely a lack of terminology, rubric infringements, irrelevant and in some cases fictitious contextual points, and a failure to answer the set question.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Post-1900 drama

The most popular text in this section by a long way was again *A Streetcar Named Desire*. This section consists of a choice of two two-part questions which address a specified extract (AO1 and AO2), and then an issue from the extract elsewhere in the whole play (AO1, AO2 and AO3). Pleasingly, there was very little evidence of candidates wasting time discussing context in Part (i) of the question, but there were still too many responses which were overlong, or far too brief. For this question, two pages of A4 is ample space for them to track through and discuss language in detail. With three essays to write in 2 hours, this unit is time sensitive, and candidates should spend time preparing themselves under timed conditions and writing to a certain length, even if they try this at home. However, if candidates do not write more than one page of A4 for this essay, then they are self-penalising as they will not have given themselves the opportunity to demonstrate their analytical skills.

As reported last year, there was a significant increase in rubric infringements in Part (ii) of this section, and unfortunately, this did not appear to be on the decline this year. In fact, there were centres where a large proportion of candidates limited their marks through discussing the extract from Part (i) in their response to Part (ii), or discussed quotations which were not in the specified extract in their response to Part (i). There were a number of candidates who were unable to be rewarded for their work simply because they had already been assessed on that section of the play. The guidance in the question is very clear and emboldened on the paper. Candidates are self-penalising if they return to the specified extract from Part (i) of the question. Part (i) should be a relatively brief response of approximately two pages of A4, but candidates need to try to *extend* the range of terminology which they use, as too many still rely simply on stage directions and sentence mood. There were a number of cases where candidates had used an appropriate quotation and identified a term, but did not specify where in the quotation this term was, or identify which word they were discussing. There was still the odd occasion where candidates noted some poetic terminology, such as caesura, appearing in discussion of a modern play, and the use of the word 'novel' to identify the play in question.

Contextual discussion in Section A, Part (ii) is heavily weighted, and there was a more successful approach to AO3 in this section compared to Section B. As part of their preparation, candidates could create multiple essay plans on a range of characters/themes, based on different episodes from the play. This should ensure that they have a wide enough scope from which to draw when they sit the examination, and should help them avoid limiting their response, and ultimately their mark, in the examination. Candidates do need to be warned again, however, about using pre-prepared essays which do not answer the set question. This year there were too many instances of essays simply not engaging with the question.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

Streetcar continues to be a text which candidates enjoy and there were some spectacular responses. Of the two questions available, more appeared to respond to Question 1 on Stella, and there were a significant number of candidates who used the question stem to guide their response, successfully analysing her role as a possible bridge between Stanley's world and Blanche's. However, this also led a large number of candidates to lose focus on the actual question, and far too many ended up writing an essay which solely focused on Stanley and Blanche, almost ignoring the fact that they were supposed to be writing about Stella. This failure to fully read or remember the question was also in evidence in some responses to Question 2, where a few candidates misread 'deception' and wrote an essay about 'description' in the play, which would never appear as a question on its own.

Peter Shaffer: *Amadeus*

Very few responses were seen on this text.

Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard: *Shakespeare in Love*

This text continues to be popular with centres, and candidates clearly enjoy studying this screenplay. Both questions were popular with candidates and a range of responses was seen, although those who responded on 'the difficulties of being a woman' tended to perform better when integrating context into their response. On Question 5, there was very pleasing analysis of Viola's disguises and deceptions, but better responses also branched out to discuss other examples, such as Henslowe's deception of Fennyman. Question 6 responses tended to focus on Viola and her lack of rights, but there was pleasing analysis of the role of the Nurse, and even acknowledgement of the difficulties Queen Elizabeth faced.

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Very few responses were seen on this text.

Diane Samuels: *Kindertransport*

The majority of candidates wrote about the presentation of Faith from Question 9, and there were some mature responses which clearly articulated how Samuels presents her across the play. Candidates selected episodes which allowed them to demonstrate how Faith comes to various realisations in the play, but also discussed her desire to belong and her intrigue about the past and its impact on her. When responding to Question 10, candidates focused on parental love, most obviously of that between a mother and daughter. The more successful responses developed their argument to discuss the range of examples evident in the play, rather than the narrower focus of just discussing Evelyn and Faith.

Key points:

- Only discuss the set extract in part (i).
- Avoid discussing the set extract in part (ii).
- Linguistic and literary terminology must go beyond identification of sentence mood.
- Part (ii) carries more marks than part (i) and this should dictate the amount of time spent on each essay.
- Answer the set question.
- Specify the terminology being discussed.

Section B: Non-Literary text study (open book)

In this section, *In Cold Blood* was again the most popular text, followed by *Once in a House on Fire*.

Candidates are required to select one essay question from a choice of two, and in their response demonstrate knowledge of the whole text, whilst addressing AO1, AO2 and AO3. It is therefore essential, as with Section A, Part (ii), that context is an integral aspect of their discussion, and sweeping generalisations should be avoided. This seemed more in evidence this year, with some candidates, especially when responding to the Ashworth text, making up information. For example, if candidates wish to use facts about unemployment rates, then they need to be accurate or at least consistent across a centre. In one centre, unemployment rates in the UK during the 1970/80s ranged from 11% to 25%, with one candidate writing that there were 500 million unemployed at one time. There is also a tendency in this section, for candidates to slip into narrative, or simple description of the events in the text which relate to the question. Again, unless discussion is grounded in analysis of language, then candidates are self-penalising.

Candidates who perform well in this section tend to follow a fairly basic structure of overview, three to four episodes from the whole text, followed by a brief conclusion, ensuring that they have integrated all of the AOs throughout their response, and there were many examples of this. Once again, examiners noted a number of responses which tried to encompass the whole text in their answers, and this prohibits candidates from discussing the language in any real detail and leads them into a descriptive response which does not answer the question. Candidates should be encouraged to select three to four well-chosen episodes from their text, and spend some time considering *how* their selection helps them answer the question. In order to reach the top bands for AO2, candidates need to demonstrate sustained and perceptive analysis of language. The very best responses internally contextualise the episodes they discuss and begin their analysis with topic sentences which clearly establish their point, and relate their discussion to the question.

Andrea Ashworth: *Once in a House on Fire*

This text continues to be popular with centres and candidates, and on the whole, they respond with maturity, real empathy, and passion regarding the content. Of the two questions on offer, more candidates responded to the presentation of poverty (Q 12) rather than loyalty (Q 11). Responses to Question 12 unsurprisingly saw candidates predominantly discuss how poverty can lead to violence and the impact this can have on individuals, but more successful responses had a wider range, with some candidates developing their discussion of education as a way out of poverty, and some lovely consideration of how food or meals with other people impacted Andrea's own understanding of her life. When responding on Question 11, the choice of episodes was especially important. Successful responses selected Andrea's relationship with her mother, siblings, and friends, with some discussing Lorraine's loyalty to the men in her life and the problems which ensued. However, there were some less successful choices of episodes, including the one candidate who decided to discuss Lorraine's loyalty to smoking, indicating that she 'liked to grind every last breath out of her cigarette'. It is clear, that candidates really need to spend some time thinking about the set question and carefully selecting episodes which are going to enable them to successfully address all of the Assessment Objectives.

Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood*

Work on this text continues to be of a high quality, and candidates clearly enjoy Capote's non-fiction novel. There was a wide range of responses on both questions. For Question 13 on motherhood, most candidates opted for the triple argument of different approaches to motherhood as seen in Bonnie, Flo, and Mrs Hickock, and this allowed them to develop a clear line of argument and reach a purposeful conclusion. Others were able to interestingly discuss Marie Dewey, and even Mrs Meier as a substitute mother for Perry. When responding to Question 14 on the presentation of Dick, a few candidates were able to effectively use the question stem which referenced his criminality. This enabled them to produce an essay which explored his childhood and other influences which may have had an impact on his behaviour, compared to whether his violent nature was something entirely inherent. Less successful responses tended to incorporate too much discussion of Perry, with a very few even ignoring Dick as a character entirely.

Dave Eggers: *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*

Candidates who study this text cope very well with some of the difficult content, and also the postmodern style of writing. For this text, Question 15 was more popular than Question 16. Candidates quite rightly tended to focus on how Eggers copes with the deaths of his parents, and his struggles in looking after Toph. The very best candidates also expanded their response to include consideration of how Eggers tries to have some time for himself amongst all of this, and how some of the more minor characters, such as Shalini or John, cope with challenges. When considering the importance of friendship in Question 16, there was interesting discussion of how Eggers behaves as a friend to others, but also his fear of Toph not making friends.

Robert Minhinnick: *Watching the fire-eater*

Very few responses were seen on this text.

George Orwell: *Down and Out in Paris and London*

There were more responses to Question 19 on supportive relationships, than Question 20 which asked about courage and/or bravery. Responses to Question 19 relied heavily on his experiences with Boris in Paris, and then with Paddy and Bozo in London, but some candidates thoughtfully considered the difficulties faced in establishing and developing relationships considering the circumstances. On occasions, this led candidates to lose focus on the question and they spent too much time commenting on the poor living conditions. Whilst discussion of this could be relevant, candidates lost marks when they did not return to the original question in detail. When responding to Question 20, there was some interesting discussion of Orwell's courage to endure his conditions when he could end it at any time, the bravery required to undertake begging, and a consideration of the special courage of women living under these conditions.

Key points:

- Spend a short period of time selecting the three to four most effective episodes for discussion.
- Answer the set question.
- Avoid narrating/describing the text, follow S/E/A and include at least one term for each quotation.
- Ensure that context is used in a meaningful and productive manner, and is referenced throughout the response.
- Internally contextualise episodes and begin paragraphs with a topic sentence which establishes your point and answers the question.
- Aim for sufficient coverage of the whole text without feeling it necessary to discuss everything.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 3: SHAKESPEARE

Overview of the Unit

This unit requires candidates to respond to a given extract on the set Shakespeare play they have studied and to write one essay (from a choice of two) on the same Shakespeare play. All set texts were attempted, with *King Lear* remaining the most popular Shakespeare text studied. For both Section A and Section B, the strongest responses integrated literary and linguistic features (AO1) with detailed analysis of how meaning was created (AO2). As with previous seasons, some responses, however, lacked a range of terminology and there was a need for more precise application of terminology in both Sections A and B. For Section B, stronger responses saw contextual knowledge being *applied* meaningfully to the Shakespeare text. Weaker responses often provided a generic contextual introduction and made generalised references to context within the essay.

AO1 is weighted heavily for both Section A and Section B on this paper and terminology needs to remain at the forefront of teaching this unit in preparation for the 2025 series. Candidates would benefit from discussing of a *range* of literary and linguistic terminology as this year there was heavy reliance on sentence moods and word class. Terms tended to be repeated and lacked sufficient range. Terms also need to be applied with accuracy and precision. This year, for example, there was widespread misuse of the term vocative and most proper nouns are now being incorrectly deemed as vocatives by candidates. Stative / dynamic verbs continue to cause confusion while the term declarative is randomly being attributed to any part of a sentence.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Extract Analysis

For Section A, candidates are required to respond to an extract on the set text which they have studied. This extract is printed on the paper itself. The advice is to spend 45 minutes responding to Section A. Responses were seen on all the texts on the specification, with *King Lear* the most popular.

The majority of candidates engaged with their chosen text *and shaped their response* to address the requirements of the question asked. Candidates who ignored the question and just provided a general discussion scored poorly. Some candidates wrote extended introductory paragraphs which were often context driven. This did not aid candidates and this approach was in fact a waste of the candidate's time. At most the introduction to Section A needs to be a sentence, briefly offering internal context on the given extract. Stronger responses focused closely on the extract provided, selecting relevant material and providing detailed analysis of *how* meaning was created. There was, however, an issue with some candidates selecting quotations which were mismatched / disconnected with comments made about them. Less successful responses were descriptive / narrative in approach. This year, there was an increase in the number of candidates offering irrelevant contextual detail at the expense of close focused analysis of the extract itself. AO3 is *not* assessed in Section A and therefore this approach does not aid the candidate. Time would be far more wisely spent analysing the language within the actual extract. This year saw a significant increase in the number of candidates referring to other parts of the play. For Section A, candidates need to be reminded that their focus should be on the *extract* printed in the examination paper. They should avoid digressing and discussing other parts of the play.

AO1 is heavily weighted for this question and a *range* of literary and linguistic terms need to be correctly identified. Best responses saw a wide range of terminology being purposefully applied and used to explore *how* meaning was created in the text studied. Weaker responses contained little or no evidence of terminology. Imprecise use of terminology continues to be an issue. Declaratives, once again, were used incorrectly with candidates citing part of the whole sentence as support. Candidates also cited a quotation without specifically identifying the term they were analysing (e.g. citing the whole sentence for a possessive determiner, plosive alliteration, modifier, etc.)

Writing stamina was once again problematic this year. A significant number of responses were less than two pages. Work that is too brief is self-penalising. For a 45-minute response, examiners expect to see a substantial amount of writing and to see coverage of the *whole* extract. Analysis needs to be *sustained* with candidates covering a *range* of points and exploring language/meaning *in detail*.

Antony and Cleopatra

Very few responses were seen. Candidates offered some relevant observations on Shakespeare's presentation of Antony and Caesar. Better responses were selective in their choice of material and clearly focused on the question.

King Lear

There were some very insightful responses exploring how Shakespeare presented Lear at this point in the play. Stronger responses had a clear overview of Lear's pain and suffering, with candidates effectively discussing Lear's characterisation in the context of the tragic ending of the play. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description or state that Lear had gone mad. Some candidates ignored the question and just wrote about the presentation of all the characters.

Much Ado About Nothing

Very few candidates attempted this question. There were some very insightful responses exploring how Shakespeare presented the characters and situation at this point in the play. Better responses had a clear overview of the extract, and candidates were able to select relevant material to support their readings. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description and demonstrated only basic understanding.

Othello

There were some very insightful responses exploring how Shakespeare presented Iago. Better responses had a clear overview of the extract, and candidates were able to select relevant material to support their readings. The very best responses had a clear grasp of Iago's manipulative and deceptive nature. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description and became narrative.

The Tempest

There were some very insightful responses exploring how Shakespeare presented the Prospero at this point in the play. Better responses had a clear overview of the extract, and candidates were able to select relevant material to support their readings. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description and demonstrated only basic understanding.

Summary of key points

- Read the question carefully and *answer the question that has been set*.
- Include a *brief introductory sentence* placing the extract in the context of the play or immediately begin addressing the question by avoid long-winded opening paragraphs.
- Terminology must be *wide-ranging* and applied *precisely*.
- Avoid description / narration. Candidates need to analyse *how* meaning is created.
- Avoid irrelevant contextual detail.
- Avoid writing about other parts of the play.
- Provide candidates with timed examination practice to develop writing stamina.

Section B: Essay

For Section B, candidates need to produce one essay from a choice of two on the same text that they used for Section A. Candidates are expected to demonstrate wider knowledge of the text as a whole.

The best responses constructed a clear argument which addressed their chosen question. Descriptive / narrative approaches tended to score poorly across the AOs. Brevity was an issue with some candidates producing essays of less than two pages for Section B. Writing stamina is an area of focus and should be built into teaching of this unit for the 2025 series.

AO1 is heavily weighted in Section B. Candidates need to learn a sufficient number of relevant quotations and then apply a range of literary and linguistic terms to access the marks available. Some excellent responses were seen which incorporated a range of sophisticated terminology. However, there was a significant increase in the number of students misquoting or making up quotations. Students citing Shakespeare in translation and providing quotations in modern language remains a problem. The analysis of made-up quotations or Shakespeare in translation cannot be credited. Candidates also need to be reminded that they should not quote from the extract provided for Section A and they will not be awarded marks for doing so.

As with Section A, some candidates needed to be more precise in identifying language. Unfortunately, some candidates used little or no terminology at all in their response to Section B. Candidates who were unable to offer supporting quotations struggled as this impacted on the marks that could be awarded for AO1 and AO2.

Context (AO3) is essential in Section B. Stronger responses applied context meaningfully and embedded it to support the argument. The very best responses used contextual detail to illuminate their arguments. Generic contextual introductions were not helpful, and candidates would have benefitted from embedding this detail throughout the essay.

Antony and Cleopatra

There were a limited number of centres studying this text. Question 6 required candidates to discuss how Shakespeare presented betrayal. Very few responses were seen. Question 7 focused on Shakespeare's presentation of different attitudes to love. Candidates engaged meaningfully with the text and had ample to say in relation to this question.

King Lear

Question 8 – sibling rivalry – was a popular choice. Candidates selected a wide variety of detail from the play and were able to produce coherent arguments. Some responses, however, tended to focus heavily on Act 1 Scenes 1 and 2, failing to show understanding of the play as a whole. Question 9 – the presentation of blindness – was also well received and several insightful essays were seen. The best responses were able to consider metaphorical as well as physical blindness.

Much Ado About Nothing

There were a limited number of centres studying this text. Question 10 focused on the presentation of masculinity. Very few responses were seen. Question 11 was the more popular and focused on Shakespeare's presentation of different attitudes to romantic love. Some responses were character driven and largely narrative. However, there were some insightful responses which covered a range of valid points and effectively used context to shape the argument.

Othello

Question 12 asked candidates to discuss how Shakespeare presented different attitudes to marriage. This was a popular question, and the best responses established a clear argument, embedding the relevant contextual factors and clearly addressing the question. Weaker responses were narrative driven. Question 13 asked candidates to the presentation of Cassio. Most candidates were able to select a range of material and consider how the character linked to personal/social issues. Again, weaker responses were narrative driven.

The Tempest

Question 14 asked candidates to explore the presentation the relationship between Prospero and Miranda. This was a popular question, and the best responses established a clear argument, embedding the relevant contextual factors and clearly addressing the question. Less successful responses were character/narrative driven. Question 15 asked candidates to examine the presentation of deception and trickery within the play. There were some insightful responses which covered a range of valid points and effectively used context to shape the argument.

Summary of key points

- Answer the set question.
- Avoid using the extract set for Section A.
- Responses need to be shaped into a coherent argument.
- Terminology needs to be *wide-ranging* and applied with *precision*.
- Candidates need to learn a *range* of quotations from the play and cite them *accurately*.
- Candidates should be encouraged to analyse *how* meaning is created and avoid description / narration.
- An overview of the text is essential.
- Centres should prepare their candidates with a wide and broad understanding of the social, political, historical and cultural context of their chosen text.
- Context should be meaningfully applied and embedded into the candidate's response.
- Centres should also encourage candidates to consider how their chosen texts can be interpreted in contemporary and modern societies.
- Examination practice needs to be embedded across the year in order to build writing stamina.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 4: UNSEEN TEXTS AND PROSE STUDY

Overview of the Unit

This is the sixth report on Unit 4 and regular readers who recognise its messages will be in centres which have benefitted from advice in previous reports. Perhaps our readership is not as wide as we would hope. While there were a few outstanding and many competent responses this year, there were far too many candidates whose answers were marked by those shortcomings which feature every year in these reports. Some disappointing marks were caused by inadequate work on the double-weighted AOs, AO4 on Section A and AO3 on Section B. On the paper as a whole, however, the most important concern remains the range and quality of linguistic and literary analysis. The quality of written expression remains another cause for concern. It is reassuring to see some centres where clarity and accuracy are prioritised.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Overview

The texts proved accessible although there were many superficial readings, especially of the poem. There was plenty for the most observant to explore and the most successful candidates were able to discuss a range of key techniques in all three texts. Although the comparative requirement of the question was too often neglected or mishandled, the variety of comparative angles available was remarkably wide. Motherhood was central in all three texts and there was no excuse for irrelevance, although one candidate complained that mothers were only mentioned once in Text A. Several objected to Bill Burr's treatment of motherhood in Text C. Some analysed his language to show casual, dismissive or simplistic attitudes, offering informed and focussed comment. Less successful critics digressed into attacking him for ignorance, offering opinion which cannot be rewarded, instead of analysis.

AO1

Use integrated linguistic and literary approaches

Apply terminology purposefully

Organise and write coherently

Planning, shaping and organisation

The important first stage of reading, re-reading and planning connections is often not undertaken thoroughly enough. A clear understanding of what all three texts have to say on the topic is necessary before meaningful links can be chosen. The most successful responses select a wide variety of relevant features from each text in order to use a range of different terms and approaches when supporting connections made.

A relevant introduction shapes the response (AO1) and starts to address the question by focussing on the topic (AO2) and making meaningful connections (AO4). We see far too many unhelpful opening paragraphs. No reward can be given for copying out the text descriptors or expressing an intention to answer the question. A relevant conclusion should conclude, not repeat points already made. The best conclusions are brief and draw on knowledge gained during analysis to produce an informed comparative overview.

Linear responses can be productive if connections with the other texts are meaningful and supported but working methodically through each text is not the most effective way of addressing the comparative requirement. Using connections between texts as an organising principle is recommended. The most successful responses were organised by firm links introduced in topic sentences focussing on what the texts had to say about motherhood.

Terminology and expression

Candidates should paragraph their writing, use topic sentences and aim for technical accuracy. Misspelling of writers' names and of key terminology all affect achievement on AO1. We expect proper nouns to have capital letters, as shown on the examination paper.

In some centres, the range of approaches was disappointingly narrow. While most acknowledged spoken delivery which is shown by the key on the question paper, some used no poetic or literary terms at all. In these centres, there was often over-reliance on word classing, often inaccurate and sometimes unproductive. Word class labels are difficult to master and easy to get wrong. Effective close analysis requires some accurate word classing but can take up time and space better occupied by widening the range of linguistic and literary approaches. It would be possible to attach word class labels to every word on the page, so purposeful selection is important. Although it is rarely useful to class each word in a quotation, a few centres seem to have encouraged this.

While sentence moods are always worth attention, the declarative is the most common and it is unproductive to use the term repeatedly. Examples given are often not full sentences and therefore inaccurate. It is usually more useful to look for other sentence moods.

The most common errors

- **Connotation** is widely used incorrectly. 'Connotation' means an *additional* tone, idea or feeling suggested by a word or phrase, as well as its literal meaning. For example, in Text A when 'young mothers assemble', the verb has connotations of duty and ceremony.
- **Lexical sets** are connected by *meaning*, not by word class, and correct use of the term requires quotation of relevant words from the same **semantic field**. A lexical set must be *of* something e.g. a lexical set of relaxation 'pyjamas', 'cartoons' and 'naps' in Text C.
- Different texts cannot **juxtapose**, which refers to the close placing of two elements *within* a text e.g. 'putting DVDs into DVD players (.) going to war pinned down by a sniper' in Text C.

AO2

Show understanding of meanings

Show awareness of how meanings are created

Explore linguistic and literary features

There were some confident readings of Larkin's poem but this text was the one most often misunderstood. There were several superficial readings which seized on 'Summer', 'swing and sandpit' and claimed that this was an idyllic portrait of motherhood, leading them to struggle with the rest of the poem and with accurate connections. Problems occur where part of the text, usually the beginning, carries undue weight without reaching a clear overview. Several thought that the children were returning to school although the poem does not indicate this. More thoughtful accounts considered 'Summer is fading' as part of the life cycle of young mothers and identified implications of regret and decline, leading to more secure readings. There was interesting work on 'Behind them, at intervals, / Stand husbands in skilled trades' and on the closing sentence of the poem.

Texts B and C were more readily understood and there were some enthusiastic accounts of Moran's memoir. The asyndetic list of chores was recognised by most and more detailed responses examined and reflected on its contents. The impact of the Coleridge allusion was well explored by some. Most took the enthusiasm in the last section at face value but a few assured readings detected a more sardonic tone. Bill Burr's misogyny in Text C was easily recognised, sometimes deplored and, by the most confident candidates, forensically dissected.

AO4

*Explore connections across texts
Identify similarities and differences
Discuss reasons for these*

Several candidates realised that the publication dates and gender of the writers were useful factors in determining attitudes to motherhood. Occasionally the dates in particular led to digression into contextual discussion which is not rewarded in Section A but more often time and gender were useful starting points for connections. Successful responses organised connections around different views of the demands, complexity and status of mothers' work. Other useful angles included the roles of men in the texts, the presentation of children and of paid work. There was also discussion of the tones adopted by Larkin, Moran and Burr and of the different purposes of the texts.

Simply asserting an accurate connection is a basic skill; supporting evidence needs to be chosen and analysed to move into the higher bands. This year only a few attempted technique-led approaches e.g. looking at examples of sibilance in all the texts. This approach is usually unsuccessful because looking for a particular feature does not start with meaning and leads to superficial, tenuous connections.

Summary of advice for Section A:

- Careful and thorough reading of the texts must come first.
- Do not write out the text descriptors or the question.
- Include question focus and at least one connection in the introduction.
- Organisation should be based on relevant, meaningful connections.
- Aim to use a wide range of linguistic and literary terminology.
- Use word classes only for the most significant words.
- Avoid repeating previous work in the conclusion.

SECTION B

Overview

Texts and questions

Most candidates had studied *The Color Purple* or *The Handmaid's Tale*. A few wrote on *Tess of The D'Urbervilles* or *Great Expectations*. There were no responses on *Emma*. The most popular questions were on male-female relationships or freedom and restriction but there were also some responses on work, turning points for the protagonist or influential characters.

Planning and Organisation

In several centres, the opportunity to address the AOs in the introduction was wasted. Contextual awareness should be shown throughout the response to address the double-weighted AO3 so it is wise to include one or two key contextual factors in the opening paragraph. Some competent introductions also show evidence of planning by setting out areas of the novel chosen to address the question and indicating an argument in response.

For both of the most popular questions an enormous range of material was available. The selection of episodes is a key skill and the most successful responses chose from different parts of the novel aiming to support a balanced argument on the topic. Three or four episodes can provide sufficient coverage although the most able will often cover more. For example, on the more manageable topic of work, one successful response covered the division of tasks between Harpo and Sofia, Shug's career and Celie's business.

The structure of *The Handmaid's Tale* does not invite chronological approaches, but this remains a problem for some responses on *The Color Purple*. While Celie's experiences will feature in any discussion of the novel, those starting with the first letter often spent far too long on it and ran out of time when Pa married her off. This method also risked becoming repetitive because of the nature of these early experiences. With more ambitious planning, some successful responses dealt with the opening briefly or not at all. For the question on male-female relationships some used an episode from Celie's marriage and moved on briskly to her leaving Mr _____. This left room to consider very different relationships such as Harpo and Sofia or Shug and Albert, as well as the beliefs of the Olinka. The later friendship between Celie and Albert was also well observed in some successful responses. It can be wise to resist an impulse to start at the beginning. As well as causing timing problems, a chronological approach is more likely to include pieces of narrative which are not answering the question.

AO1 and AO2

Regular sharp focus on well-chosen episodes from the novel is key to success. This was sometimes missing altogether. For example, the question about turning points for the protagonist invites the selection of three or four important events. Some responses however offered a general outline of Celie's life and development without stopping to analyse relevant material.

As usual, there were some responses which used no terminology and attempted no analysis, offering only narrative and some relevant discussion. As this text has been studied, the size of this minority in some centres was surprising. Relevant quotation without analysis shows knowledge of the novel but is not evidence of integrated study. In another type of unsuccessful response, AO1 evidence of study was limited to word-classing, often inaccurate or unproductive or to superficial comments such as alliteration spotting. Again, the term 'declarative' was repeated too often by some to little effect, even when examples were accurate.

The close study of key episodes should include selecting the most illuminating terms and approaches. For example, it is less interesting that Celie's business 'Folkspants' is a proper noun than to consider the semantics of the morpheme 'Folks' which is both vernacular and ungendered. A literary reading could then also consider the symbolism of Celie making trousers. Atwood's use of names was well discussed in some successful responses and it was encouraging to see some precise application of terms such as patronym and preposition to discuss the naming of handmaids.

Of course, there are fewer literary than linguistic terms. A valid literary reading often only needs one key term. Work on the difference between metaphor and symbolism would be helpful as a revision exercise and act as a reminder to include literary approaches.

AO3

Although there were few responses with little or no reference to context, several offered only very brief references or a narrow range. Imprecision on time factors e.g. 'when it was written' or repeating one point e.g. 'patriarchal society' limited achievement in weaker responses. In some centres it was clear that a range of factors including critical opinions had been thoroughly incorporated into the work on the novel. The most successful responses showed evidence of independent study which should always be encouraged. This could involve historical or political research and investigating the views of the novelist as well as reading other works in the genre. In many centres, candidates routinely included genre terms 'dystopian', 'epistolary', 'slave narrative' or 'Bildungsroman', according to the text but these were often left unexplored. Familiarity with at least one other work in the genre turns a basic point into more developed awareness.

Study and revision of the novel should include advice on integrating contextual material while analysing selected episodes. It is always concerning when candidates, especially those who have clearly understood and appreciated the novel, receive only modest marks because the AO3 requirement is not thoroughly addressed.

Summary of advice for Section B:

- Include at least one contextual factor in the introduction.
- Integrate a range of contextual ideas throughout the answer.
- It is not essential to begin with the opening of the novel.
- Choose three or four relevant episodes to focus on.
- Make sure that you can find key episodes quickly.
- Aim to use a range of *different* linguistic and literary terms and approaches.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 5 (NEA): CRITICAL AND CREATIVE STUDY

Overview of the Unit

Non-examination Assessment: 2500-3500 word folder

Unit 5 is internally assessed and externally moderated. It gives opportunities for learners to independently select an aspect of prose study that interests them and to study one text (chosen from a list in Appendix A) provided by WJEC within that genre. In addition, learners are given the opportunity to select wider reading to inform their studies in this unit and to reflect on the learning that has taken place. In reflecting on their studies, learners will then be required to produce original writing related to their chosen genre.

AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4 are all assessed within Section A. AO1 and AO4 are marked out of 15. AO2 and AO3 have a double weighting of 30 marks each. AO5 is assessed within Section B and is worth 30 marks.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Tasks

Section A: Genre study

As always, moderators saw a broad range of texts and genres within the work submitted for moderation. The most common approach to the genre studies is to offer candidates flexibility in selecting texts and genres which are of interest to them. This has again resulted in some very interesting, and challenging, work. A minority of centres had prescribed genres and texts offering their candidates limited independence in their study and leading to responses which were very similar in content. Where practicality requires common texts to be used, it is best practice to offer candidates a range of tasks from which they can choose.

The most popular genres this year were Gothic, Dystopia and Romance but moderators saw very little work in the Journalism, Adventure and Life Writing genres. Certain texts from Appendix A continue to be popular, for example *1984* within dystopia, *The Great Gatsby* within romance and *Dracula* within the Gothic genre. Text selections within the genres were nearly always appropriate with candidates choosing wider reading texts from a range of different eras. Texts from Appendix A proved popular for wider reading, and this is, of course, a very sensible approach in terms of ensuring that texts chosen for study are of a suitable academic standard. However, moderators also saw some interesting selections beyond the Appendix which worked very well. These included *The Song of Achilles* in the Historical Fiction genre and *My Sister, The Serial Killer* in the Crime genre. In a minority of cases, texts selected for wider reading were not of an appropriate level for A Level study. It is crucial that candidates are challenged on their text selection when texts such as *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* are proposed as part of the genre study.

The most successful genre studies were able to weave together all four AOs assessed in this section. Stronger responses applied a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology (AO1) with precision and purpose. It is best practice to apply terminology to all quotations from the texts. The selection of evidence from the texts was thoughtful and enabled candidates to engage perceptively with how writers' language choices created meaning (AO2). As candidates can edit and draft the non-examination assessment, the expectation is that they will draw upon a wide range of terminology and make close reference to the texts themselves. For Band 5, candidates are expected to engage with language on a phonological, word and sentence level. Weaker responses tended to lapse into a narrative retelling of the texts or did not support their observations on meaning with appropriate evidence or terminology. It was pleasing to see that most candidates had clearly planned their responses, using topic sentences to organise their ideas into comparative paragraphs. For the most part, candidates were able to use an appropriately academic register. In weaker responses, candidates tended to lapse into an informal, first-person writing style.

As always, AO2 continues to be an area of strength in the NEA. Across much of the work seen with candidates engaging well with the key ideas explored within their selected texts. The strongest responses tended to use the Statement/Evidence/Analysis (SEA) approach to very good effect, linking terminology to meaning to progress their arguments. Weaker responses tended to lapse into description, failing to provide adequate textual support for their points.

As has been the case in previous years, AO3 is the area which candidates seem to struggle the most within. The double weighting of this AO means that candidates must be purposeful in their application of contextual points, ensuring that they are used to illuminate their analysis of their chosen texts. A consideration of how context can be used productively must form a central part of the planning process in order to ensure that candidates can access the full range of marks within this AO. Where contextual detail was handled well, moderators saw candidates explore the conventions of their chosen genre with confidence. A fruitful approach is to select texts which occupy different sub-genres within the genre or which were published within different historical periods. Candidates who had read a range of texts from different eras within their chosen genre were, perhaps, better equipped to address this as they were able to consider the changes that had taken place within the genre. Candidates should explore a range of contextual points but they must be relevant to the question. Sections of biographical or historical detail which are not relevant to the essay's focus should not be credited for AO3. Reference to reader responses and critical readings of the texts also proved very useful when used to illuminate the argument. Contextual points should be fully integrated into the argument - effective task setting helps with this.

Successful responses were able to make clear connections between the texts chosen for study. In the most successful responses links were made from the outset and interwoven through the entire genre study. Fully integrated links between the core text and wider reading resulted in some very fruitful veins of argument. Perhaps more so this year than in previous years, some candidates struggled to ensure that connections were relevant to the task, sometimes lapsing into general links between the two texts which had little to do with the question they were trying to answer.

Section B: Related creative writing

For the second part of the non-examination assessment, candidates must produce a piece of creative work which demonstrates the knowledge they have gained through their genre study. This writing piece can be either literary or non-literary.

Narrative writing, including short stories and opening chapters, remains the most popular writing type chosen by candidates. This is an entirely appropriate genre and enables candidates to demonstrate their understanding of their chosen genre. It is pleasing, however, to note that most centres are now offering candidates the flexibility to write in a genre of their choosing. In terms of literary writing, moderators also saw dramatic texts for performance such as playscripts and monologues.

Non-literary tasks tend to be less popular but are certainly no less effective in conveying understanding of genre. This year, moderators saw speeches, TED talks, podcasts, reviews, articles and travel writing. All of these text types work best when candidates have a clear idea of the intended audience and purpose. With regards to texts for performance such as speeches and TED talks, candidates need to demonstrate their understanding of the spoken elements of these texts. That is not to say that they need to apply prosodic markers, but there should be a sense that these texts are often performed to a live audience. Giving candidates access to rich examples of different writing styles and forms allows them to fully understand how writers' language choices can impact meaning.

Less successful responses were characterised by a lack of clarity over features of the chosen text type. For example, monologues and playscripts should include appropriate stage directions.

The main issue within this Section this year was technical inaccuracy. Moderators saw quite a lot of work which was littered with errors, particularly in terms of punctuation of speech and use of capital letters for proper nouns. Drafting and proofreading are key elements of the non-examination assessment process and candidates need to ensure that they give appropriate time to this element.

Task marking

Annotation on the work submitted for moderation was generally very good and referenced the appropriate Assessment Objectives and band descriptors. In a minority of cases, annotation on the work was brief or entirely absent. Summative comments should appear at the end of all pieces of work and the cover sheet should be completed in full. Where internal moderation had taken place, this was made clear by the centres and it was helpful to see the professional dialogue between markers where differences occurred. However, the final agreed mark was not always made clear on the pieces of work.

A number of centres did not supply the Non-examination Assessment Checklist again this year. Administrative issues were more of a problem this year than in previous years - the Checklist is a useful tool for centres to use to avoid this in future. A number of marks were incorrectly totalled on pieces of work and incorrectly input onto IAMIS. A minority of candidate and teacher signatures were missing from the cover sheets provided with folders. It is a requirement of the specification that all work is authenticated by both the teacher and the candidate.

In terms of assessment, much of the work seen by moderators was fairly and accurately assessed. As this specification has been in place for a number of years now, it is clear that Centres are comfortable with the demands of Unit 5. Moderators noted some generosity in the assessment of the writing pieces this year where technical inaccuracies had not been taken into account enough. In terms of Section A, where generosity occurs this is often most notable in AO3, although generosity in AO4 was evident this year.

Conclusion

Moderators found much to enjoy in the work seen this year and it is pleasing to see new tasks, texts and writing topics emerge year on year.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4292

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Qualification webpage: https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/english-language-and-literature-as-a-level/#tab_overview

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