



GCSE Examiners' Report

English Literature

GCSE

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

In general, candidates on both tiers of the examined units impressed with organised and informed approaches to the questions set, and there was plenty of evidence of success at all levels. Responses on the texts studied often showed real engagement with the themes, characters and contexts addressed in them by candidates at all levels.

Extract question responses demonstrated some detail and understanding across the board; essay questions were generally well-handled.

Successful essays on a studied text combined the discussion of a range of specific incidents and events from the text with detailed, specific discussion of contexts, where relevant. Less successful responses were usually brief and, whilst showing some understanding of them, discussed relevant themes or characters in a generalised way without the close reference to specific detail, incidents or events.

There was evidence of an increased emphasis on the teaching and learning of AO2 and the effects of language choices made by the writers, which was good to see and appeared controlled and appropriately applied in most cases. This is always best when linked to AO1 in order to demonstrate an understanding of meaning as well as technical effects, with candidates suggesting how the two are linked together.

Much of the non-examined assessment seen for Unit 3 was interesting and varied. The requirement for candidates to 'show appreciation of the whole Shakespeare play' – in order to access all available marks – was encouraged by most tasks set. Some centre assessment was generous as a result of this requirement being ignored. Many candidates, however, wrote with admirable thoughtfulness and in detail in response to their studied play.

The poetry comparison in Unit 3 presented moderators with detailed investigations of language, structure and form, and genuine and thoughtful personal responses. Successful work offered close examination of the poems, combining thoughtful discussion in relation to content and theme with close examination of language in order to fully achieve in relation to AO1 and AO2. Those candidates who elected to prioritise AO3 with a wholly comparative essay sometimes neglected to offer specific and detailed examination of the individual poems. There have been significant improvements with moderators seeing detailed and thoughtful connections made between poems. Candidates have clearly been encouraged to comment on links in content and theme as well as style, language and structure.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Time management to ensure all examination questions are attempted	Exam walk-throughs	Practical hints and tips on how to effectively approach questions in the examination papers. The PPT with audio help and audio script in the notes will walk you through a mock examination paper, helping you revise and practise useful exam techniques.
Developing and sustaining a response	Developing critical analysis	A blended learning resource guiding learners through skills such as making close textual references meaningful, exploring viewpoints, expanding thoughts and feeling.

Linking AO2 to an understanding of the text (AO1)	Exploring literary presentations	A blended learning resource guiding learners through how writers create meaning in prose, poetry and drama texts.
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WJEC GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

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UNIT 1: PROSE (DIFFERENT CULTURES) AND POETRY (CONTEMPORARY)

Overview of the Unit

As usual on both Higher and Foundation Tiers, *Of Mice and Men* was the most popular text by a considerable margin. The number of candidates studying *Chanda's Secrets* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* remained steady. Over the last couple of years, there has been a slight shift upwards in the number of candidates studying *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, particularly on Higher Tier. Responses on all these texts often showed real engagement with the themes, characters and contexts addressed in them by candidates at all levels.

As in January, a substantial number of candidates addressed questions on novels which they had not studied. In many of these cases, every extract on the question paper was read and answered as an 'unseen' text. A significant number of candidates even attempted to answer essay questions on texts they had not studied, attempting to base their responses on details from the extract. This rubric infringement remains a serious problem for those candidates, limiting their chances of a grade commensurate with their abilities. The time wasted often results in thin, under-developed responses on the text that the candidates have actually studied. A number of candidates on both tiers – but particularly Foundation Tier – did not respond to the poetry at all, making it impossible for them to achieve the grade they could have. Some candidates on both tiers wrote about *Anita and Me* mistakenly thinking that was the 'unseen poetry' and referring to the novel as a poem.

Responses to the extract questions posed few specific problems for candidates who were all able to write about the characters in question with some detail and understanding. The vast majority tried to track through the extract focusing on specific details and making sensible comments. Better answers increasingly focused on the writers' choices of language and imagery and wrote about the characters with some insight and clear understanding of subtext. A minority of candidates wasted time attempting to address contextual factors which are not assessed here.

Essay questions were generally handled well and none of the questions caused specific problems. The majority of candidates seemed clear on which assessment objectives needed to be covered. Successful essays on the studied text combined the discussion of a range of specific incidents and events from the text with detailed, specific discussion of contexts relevant to the task set. Less successful responses were usually brief and, whilst showing some understanding of them, discussed relevant themes or characters in a generalised way without the close reference to specific detail and specific incidents or events. Comments on context in these essays were also usually more sweeping and general.

In the poetry comparison, most candidates understood the need to cover both poems and the comparative element for AO3. However, as last year, there was a significant number of candidates on both tiers who explored the poems without comparing them or who only wrote about one of the poems. This had a damaging effect on their overall achievement, particularly considering the weighting of the different assessment objectives for this task. Again, this is an issue that applies more significantly on Foundation Tier where a significant number of candidates either did not write a poetry response at all, wrote no comparison, or only wrote about one poem.

Examiners noted that there were an increasing number of responses that were extremely difficult to read and, in some cases, sadly illegible.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Extract questions

The *Of Mice and Men* extract question focused on how Steinbeck presented the character of Crooks to the reader. Successful responses paid attention to both assessment objectives to address the question on Steinbeck's characterisation of Crooks and the language choices which revealed his thoughts and feelings. More successful responses tracked through the extract with close reference to specific detail, discussing Crooks' initial fear of the reaction he has provoked in Lennie, his attempts to calm Lennie down and then his revelations about his loneliness. Most talked about the racist ways he had been treated through being isolated/forced to live alone and his awareness of the ways this isolation had affected his mental health. Successful candidates understood the extent of the ways his loneliness had affected him, and some explored the meaning of the imagery of the window at the end of the extract. More sensitive responses understood that Steinbeck was presenting Crooks in a sympathetic light here, as a character who wanted company and empathy and who was genuinely remorseful about his earlier behaviour. Some candidates got caught up in discussing the events that had preceded the extract such as Crooks' taunting of Lennie and trying to gain power over him at the expense of focusing on the details included in the extract itself.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* the portrayal of Caroline Fisher was generally well handled by candidates on both tiers. Some candidates saw her as a sweet, naïve character who seemed to care about the children in her charge but was simply out of her depth and getting things wrong. More sophisticated responses saw her as a newcomer who knew nothing about the lives her pupils had in Maycomb and who was superior and patronising. Most candidates wanted to explore the meaning of Caroline's 'faint distaste' at discovering Scout could read and were affronted by her attitudes to Atticus and his parenting skills. Some saw the irony in the fact that as a teacher she regarded the fact that Scout could already read as 'damage'. Again, better responses tracked through the extract making focused use of the detail and discussing language choices and their effects on the reader.

The discussions of Maya's mother in the *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* extract were similarly interesting, and candidates had a range of well-supported views. Most showed their understanding that she was an unusual and vibrant character with an exuberant personality. Much was made of her genuine interest, love and care for her children as well as her infectious sense of fun. Higher level responses also saw her rebellious nature, her refusal to be anyone's 'kitchen bitch' and the power her beauty brought as well as the high esteem her children held her in.

The *Chanda's Secrets'* extract gave candidates plenty of opportunities to comment on the complexities in Esther's character and in Chanda's attitudes towards her. Most tracked through the extract showing their understanding that Esther's angry and accusatory attitude was born of a combination of possible shame, desperation and frustration. They understood the subtext, how Esther was making her money and the dangers she was confronting, but that this was nevertheless a sympathetic portrayal of a desperate girl whose parents had died and was trying to get her family back together.

Text Essay Questions

Examiners needed to take account of the extent to which candidates had addressed the different assessment objectives relevant to each question. In most essay responses, some references to contextual factors were given to show an understanding of how they influenced characters' lives, behaviour and aspirations. Most candidates used their contextual knowledge thoughtfully to inform their response to the essay questions, although there were some responses on both tiers where there was limited reference to context, and a small number of candidates included no contextual comments whatsoever. For a minority of candidates there also remained some confusion about where on the paper context is assessed with some still trying to discuss context in their extract responses.

The *Of Mice and Men* question on Curley encouraged candidates on both tiers to look at Steinbeck's characterisation of Curley with particular focus on how he was used to highlight aspects of American society in the 1930's. Most were able to refer to a range of incidents and events from across the text that showed his personality, characterisation and relationships with others, as well as discussing what he showed about racism, misogyny, status, violence, masculinity and even dreams in that era. More successful answers zoomed in on incidents like his first appearance in the bunkhouse, the fight scene, his behaviour after the death of his wife and his attitude at the end of the novel. Candidates explored the presentation of his appearance in detail, as well as his status on the ranch, his power as the boss's son, and his lack of real friendship with the other workers. Good answers also discussed what was shown about his relationship with his wife, both through his own behaviours and through what his wife revealed to others. On Higher Tier, more able candidates discussed how Steinbeck used the character to illustrate key themes and as a vehicle to criticise the social beliefs and values of the time.

The second question on how 'no one is capable of kindness' in the world Steinbeck creates proved equally popular on Higher Tier, with only a very slightly larger number of candidates choosing the 'Curley' option. In essay questions like this it is possible to argue for or against the statement in the question or provide a balanced response and all approaches are equally valid. A common approach here was to primarily agree with the statement discussing a range of incidents and examples that showed Steinbeck had indeed created a harsh, hostile, violent and unfriendly environment, before moving on to discuss examples that showed the statement was not exclusively true. Successful responses used a range of examples like the racist treatment of Crooks and the sexist treatment of Curley's wife with reference to specific details such as Candy's rant at Curley's wife's dead body and Curley's wife threatening to get Crooks lynched. Popular areas for discussion also included Curley's initial aggressive reaction to George and Lennie before he even knows them, the fight scene and, of course, the shooting of Candy's dog and the consequent effect on him. To prove there was at least some kindness, most discussed George's relationship with Lennie and the brotherly love/care he gave. The majority also focused on the way Slim looks after and treats people like George, Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks with respect, care and concern as shown by the way he says 'I swear you hadda' to George at the end of the novel. Again, more insightful responses explored what Steinbeck was trying to show and do. Less effective responses on both tiers tended to be more general than specific, and while context was usually addressed to some degree, the commentary was simple and general.

For those who studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*, both tasks elicited responses across the mark range on both tiers with the question on Boo Radley proving the more popular of the two. This question was addressed with some evaluation at the top of the mark range on Higher Tier and most candidates chronologically tracked through the sequences of the novel where Boo was important. Better responses discussed in depth how Boo was used as a vehicle to illustrate the prejudiced attitudes of Maycomb and how he was used to criticise the strict conformity of society and the rigidity of its values at that time. Better responses showed a thorough, detailed knowledge of the text and candidates made apt selections showing him befriend the children and proving the falseness of his evil reputation. The games played around the Radley house were discussed in detail to show how the children gradually learned to develop empathy towards Boo, culminating in the final scene where Boo saved their lives. Most candidates wanted to discuss him as a 'Mockingbird' figure and explored his importance in the children's 'education'. Context was covered well and better candidates were aware of how Lee had created sympathy for Boo. Less successful responses tended to refer to fewer incidents and events and discuss more generally, paying less attention to Boo's importance to the novel as a whole.

The alternative question on the theme of courage gave candidates on both tiers some choice and freedom of which characters and events to write about. Most chose to answer the question through the prism of discussing Atticus, Tom Robinson and the trial, but many also chose to widen the scope of their responses and there was some effective discussion of characters like Miss Maudie, Mrs Dubose, Boo Radley and Calpurnia as well as the shooting of Tim Johnson and consequent exploration of the idea that courage is not 'a man with a gun in his hand'. Most candidates had plenty to say on the theme; more sophisticated answers explored how characters had to be courageous to stand up for their rights and included focus on how Lee was trying to use the theme to highlight injustices in 1930s America and use the idea of courage as a way of criticising American society in the 1930s. At a lower level, candidates concentrated on illustrating examples of courage in the novel with straightforward commentary.

Most candidates who had studied *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* selected the first question which invited them to discuss which character influenced Maya the most as she grew up. The most popular choice of influence was Momma, Maya's grandmother, and candidates were able to identify many ways that she was able to act as a positive and strong influence and role model with a good range of textual evidence to support their views. Incidents such as her standing up to the dentist and how she dealt with the 'powhitetrash' children's provocative behaviour in the yard were used to good effect, but candidates also discussed her religious convictions, her strictness, her discipline, her strength in running the store as the hub of the community throughout the great depression and her being a strong female role model and force for good. Other popular choices to write about were Maya's mother and brother.

For the second question on prejudice candidates were equally well prepared with interesting and memorable events to discuss such as Bailey's shock at the incident with the body in the pond, Maya's growing understanding of racism and having to hide Uncle Willie from the Ku Klux Klan. Again, the incident with the dentist was a popular resource as was Maya's rebellion against Mrs Cullinan calling her Mary. For this question, candidates also ventured further into the second half of the book with many keen to discuss Maya's experiences fighting to become the first black ticket 'conductorette' on the San Francisco streetcars. On both tiers events selected were well chosen, focused and pertinent, helping candidates make meaningful comments on contexts. As with the other texts, better responses incorporated a wider range of textual discussion with increasingly detailed commentary and analysis, combined with more focused discussion on the writer.

Most candidates on both tiers who had studied *Chanda's Secrets* chose to answer the first question on the presentation of Chanda's mother and often showed a thorough knowledge of her whole story. Higher ability candidates were able to talk in detail about the background behind her original marriage and consequent fallout with her family in Tiro as well as tracking through and exploring her various ill-fated marriages and relationships with men. They were very familiar with the many injustices she encountered in her life and her courage and determination in fighting for her family. Most candidates saw her in a very sympathetic light, discussing her as the victim of a society which did not protect women and children or those suffering with AIDS and where the stigma of AIDS and the shame and superstition surrounding it affected her profoundly. Better responses discussed her willingness to sacrifice herself to spare her children the terrible shame of AIDS.

The second question on superstition was only tackled by a very small number of candidates and these essays were generally far less successful as although they discussed characters affected by superstition, they often included very limited focus on the 'superstition' aspect of the question and some ignored it entirely. Regarding context, some Higher Tier responses to both questions on the novel included a range of statistics about the prevalence of AIDS, prostitution or violence against women and girls to show an understanding of contextual factors but these were not always directly connected to the question set. As with other texts, contextual knowledge was shown more successfully by candidates who were able to apply their understanding to the question that had been asked.

Poetry

Higher Tier responses to the poems about the poets' pleasure in noticing people doing ordinary things varied in their interpretations but most candidates were aware of the requirement to address both poems and to compare them. As mentioned previously however, there was a substantial minority who lost marks by not comparing the poems, even when their commentaries on one or sometimes both poems showed good understanding. Since the comparison element is heavily weighted in the assessment, this inevitably had a detrimental impact on some candidates' achievement.

On Higher Tier, candidates understood the narrative of the poet watching the newspaper boys walking up the road at dawn, happy in each other's company. More able candidates commented on the sense of nostalgia and explored the narrator's thoughts and feelings, discussing why this evoked a sense of happiness in the poet. Some showed awareness that this may perhaps show an absence of easy close relationships or friendships in the poet's own life and at the top end candidates wrote with insight about the transient and fleeting nature of happiness and the power of happiness as an emotion. Most explored the symbolism of the weather imagery and the way light breaking created an atmosphere of optimism and hope. In the second poem candidates saw the contrasts and understood that this was essentially a poem about individuals following their own pursuits and taking pleasure in their own individual tasks, jobs or hobbies. Candidates explored the symbolism and multiple meanings of making paths and saw that the poem was indeed essentially 'a song of praise for those who live at the forgotten edge of things' arguing that these people deserved more credit and appreciation. They showed good understanding of the poet's gratitude for the small things people do that are unsung. Much was made of the use of nature and 'the outdoors' in both poems and the obvious contrast that you can find happiness through friendship or individual solo pursuits. Some candidates made a great deal of the fact that 'death' and 'the dead' were mentioned in both poems and this focus perhaps took some away from what were arguably the more central themes of the poems. This was exacerbated for a handful of candidates who misread the word 'copse' as 'corpse' in the final stanza of the second poem. As ever, examiners rewarded a willingness to interpret ideas and images even where the overall interpretation was slightly unconvincing. In the best responses candidates tracked through both poems closely exploring a wide range of detail

with focused commentary on how writers had used language and imagery to create effects. They offered insightful and sensitive commentary on the themes and meanings of both poems and a confident range of comparisons were made.

On Foundation Tier, first a reminder of points made earlier in this report; a significant number of candidates do not attempt the poetry response and many more either only write on one poem or forget to include a comparison. Some write about *Anita and Me* mistakenly thinking that the extract from that text is their poetry resource. For these reasons it is strongly recommended that pupils are reminded how to navigate the whole exam paper as close to the exams as possible as a very significant number of candidates have fallen into this category in the last two exam series and these factors have a very detrimental effect on pupils' grades.

The first poem, 'Three Good Things' was, on the whole, fairly well understood by candidates. Many wrote about the overwhelmingly positive atmosphere, the ideas of lying in bed thinking of three good things you did that day helping you get a good night's sleep and waking up with a positive mind-set the next day. Better responses tracked through the detail of the poem exploring what had made the central character happy and why. Many commented on the positive effects of nature and being outdoors and others noted that it was seemingly written from a child's perspective with great enthusiasm about playground games, juice, films and parks. The second poem was seemingly more complex in theme and content, and it was good to see how many noted the contrasts as well as the similarities. The majority saw that this poem was about a character who was struggling to go outside and feeling unmotivated and perhaps lonely and depressed. They also saw that this poem was essentially motivational and inspirational- an attempt to encourage, persuade and alter a negative person's mindset in a positive way. More able candidates understood essentially that there was a subtext, and the poem was about more than going outside and playing in the snow. Many compared the appreciation of nature in the two poems and noted the contrasting seasons; they drew connections between the positive atmospheres and encouragement towards a positive mental attitude and the benefits that brings. Good responses even saw the contrasting central personas of both poems. Answers achieving higher marks at this level tracked through both poems commenting on a range of detail and began to explore some uses language and imagery and finding several points of similarity and difference between the poems.

Summary of key points

- Read the questions very carefully and remember which assessment objectives are being assessed in each.
- In text essays, refer to events and details to support your ideas and make sure focused contextual points are linked to the question set.
- In poetry questions, figure out what is happening in each poem first and look for evidence in the poems to support each point you make.
- Think about what the writer or poet is trying to express about the characters, themes, events and ideas in their text.
- Do not answer questions on texts you have not studied and make sure you understand the layout of the whole exam paper to avoid missing the poetry question and answering unnecessary questions on extra novels.

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UNIT 2

Overview of the Unit

This is the third session in which this unit has been assessed since the break caused by the Covid pandemic. As usual, all four papers were available. Unit 2A Higher and Foundation Tiers, as well as Unit 2B Higher and Foundation Tiers.

For 2A, on both tiers, the dominant texts remained *An Inspector Calls* and *Heroes*. There were a good number of responses to other texts on Higher Tier, notably *About a Boy*. The range of achievement was comparable on different texts showing that all remain accessible.

For 2B, *Blood Brothers* and *A Christmas Carol* continued to dominate, with *Lord of the Flies* and *A View from the Bridge* taking a good share on Higher Tier. Some of the other texts were also represented in reasonable numbers on both tiers.

As last year, fewer candidates addressed questions on plays and novels which they had not studied. This was good to see but does still remain a problem for a minority. Examination technique has now recovered since the two-year break in exams.

Potentially illegible handwriting continues to be a sizeable problem. Typed responses are assessed to the same levels as those that are handwritten and there were cases when this would have been a better medium for the candidate where this is their usual way of working.

Assessment objectives were generally handled well. AO4 Context was addressed where appropriate, and candidates seemed generally well trained in the application of their knowledge to the appropriate essay question. *Blood Brothers* remains a text for which context is sometimes included when it is not helpful.

There was evidence of an increased emphasis on AO2 and the effects of language choices made by the writer. This was generally good to see and appeared controlled and appropriately applied in most cases. Of course, this is always best when linked to AO1 so that the candidate demonstrates an understanding of meaning as well as technical effects and is therefore able to suggest how the two are linked together in the text.

In general, candidates on both tiers impressed with an organised and informed approach to the questions set and there was plenty of evidence of success at all levels.

Comments on individual questions/sections

2A Higher and Foundation

For *An Inspector Calls* the extract covering Mrs Birling's conversation with the Inspector worked effectively. Candidates were asked to write about the Inspector as well as Mrs Birling and those that covered both at some length did particularly well. On Higher Tier, good use was made of quotations, including reference to stage directions such as the use of the adverb 'sternly' used to describe the Inspector's tone at one point in the extract. Although AO4 is not assessed in this question, many candidates made use of some context in accounting for the attitudes demonstrated by Mrs Birling and that was helpful when linked to specific details and words from the text. In this way they were able to enhance their responses in terms of AO1 on this occasion. More successful responses sometimes suggested that The Inspector's loss of calm control was perhaps a deliberate tactic to force Mrs Birling into a corner. This was sometimes supported to reference to the stage direction which says that she is 'cowed' and also by reference to his dismissive treatment of Mr Birling when he attempts to interrupt the interrogation.

On Foundation Tier many offered valid responses, discussing their thoughts and feelings about how Mrs. Birling's attitudes and the Inspector's interrogation techniques reveal key aspects of their characters. In this section, candidates focused on Mrs. Birling's superior and dismissive demeanour. They discussed how her refusal to accept responsibility and her condemnation of Eva Smith demonstrate her lack of empathy and rigid adherence to social class. Many responses highlighted how Mrs. Birling's statements expose her deep-seated prejudices and her belief in her own moral superiority. Most were able to discuss how Mrs Birling tries to place blame on others including Mr Birling and the father of Eva's baby who they generally knew was Eric.

The Inspector's role in this extract was another focal point, with candidates examining his calm yet authoritative questioning style. The Inspector's insistence on social responsibility and his moral faith were key points of discussion, with candidates exploring how his lack of patience with the Birlings comes through.

On both tiers a few candidates insisted that this was Mr rather than Mrs Birling. This was unfortunate and required a second look at the question and the character prompts in the extract before making assumptions.

Both of the Higher essay questions proved to be popular choices. Responses to the task about Eric were generally well informed and relevant contextual points were included. The best essays also included his actions during the play and his relevance to the death of Eva Smith. The better answers gave some sense of his progression as a character through the play enabling candidates to better meet the idea of how he is presented 'throughout the play' as asked. This also allowed candidates to access more contextual issues concerning his role as part of the younger generation.

On Foundation Tier, many candidates chose to explore Eric's culpability in Eva's demise, focusing on three main aspects: his irresponsible drinking, his theft of money, and his inability to support Eva. More insightful responses connected these behaviours to Eric's sense of guilt and his eventual acknowledgment of his moral failings and how he eventually took responsibility. There were many instances on Foundation Tier when candidates wrote about 'Eric' but based their entire essay on events linked to Gerald in the play.

The alternative essay question on Higher Tier about Gerald and Sheila was also well attempted by most who chose to answer it. The contextual focus of the question helped to keep AO4 at the forefront of many responses. Some of the better responses built a discussion around the change of power that is exhibited from Sheila's initial subservience to the point at which she is able to make an independent decision about whether to accept the ring back. Some then linked this to societal developments after 1912 with some success. Less successful responses sometimes focused almost entirely on the opening of the play, offering contextual comments only in a narrow range.

For Foundation Tier, essays on Sheila and Gerald's relationship often centred on their differing reactions to the Inspector's revelations. Candidates discussed Sheila's growing self-awareness and moral development, contrasting it with Gerald's attempts to justify his actions and his lack of genuine remorse. Many focused on the impact of the revelations in the play on their engagement, highlighting Sheila's newfound assertiveness and Gerald's persistent evasion of responsibility. A number of responses for this question struggled to move beyond discussing what happened to each character in the play and a number discussed the sibling relationship between Sheila and Eric (despite using the name Gerald).

The extract question for *Heroes* asked candidates to respond to an account from Francis of the first time he saw Nicole Renard. On Higher Tier, there was generally a successful focus on mood and atmosphere. There were many opportunities to address language use throughout the extract and good use was made of phrases such as 'pledged her my love' and 'a knight at her feet'. Some made insightful comments about individual words such as 'forever', pointing out in this case that this is unrealistic and adds to the mood and atmosphere of fantasy in his account of these events and his feelings at the time. Most candidates worked their way through the piece methodically. There was very little confusion caused by the typographical error towards the end with sensible comments about his final sense of disappointment and confusion and how these add to the mood and atmosphere.

Foundation Tier candidates responded well to the extract, at the top end discussing their thoughts and feelings about how the initial encounter is filled with innocence and hope. Most were able to place the extract and discussed their thoughts and feelings well. Some incorrectly attributed the narration in this part to Larry La Salle but understood what it showed about the relationship between Nicole and the narrator.

Both of the *Heroes* Higher Tier essays were popular choices. Discussions of the importance of Larry La Salle focused on relevant details and events from throughout the book. In the lower bands, these responses tended to focus solely on events, pointing out that without Larry there would be no plot and no reason for Francis to go to war. There were plenty that moved onto a better overview, showing how Larry's manipulation was a factor throughout the novel, for instance. The detailed knowledge that was demonstrated was generally impressive and responses were mostly methodical and effective.

For Foundation Tier, the question on Larry La Salle was popular, with many candidates focusing on his dual nature. Responses often highlighted his charm and talent as a youth leader, contrasted sharply with his predatory behaviour and ultimate betrayal. The deception surrounding Larry as a celebrated war hero was a focal point, as candidates discussed how his façade of respectability and heroism masked his true nature. There were a significant number of rubric infringements on this question with candidates discussing Larry but describing events relating to Francis.

The essay about war being the most destructive factor in *Heroes* provoked a range of responses and approaches on Higher Tier. The evaluative element was approached in different ways. Many chose to show how much war had affected various characters, with the most successful going to a wider range than Francis and Larry to include Arthur, Enrico and even Joey. Others compared the factor of war to others such as love, devotion and betrayal. Both of these approaches were successful at times, dependent on the accuracy and depth of the arguments presented. AO2 was dealt with in many ways, mostly through attention to language and through the structuring of events through the novel to maximise their impact.

For Foundation Tier, the importance of war in shaping the novel's characters and events was discussed. For Francis, war was a defining aspect of his identity, with responses discussing how he is perceived as a hero despite his own feelings of guilt and unworthiness.

Candidates examined how war altered the characters' lives, creating heroes who often felt undeserving of their titles. The brutal realities of war and its aftermath were explored, with discussions on how these experiences affected the characters' perceptions of themselves and each other. As with the Larry question, there were times when the narratives of Francis and Larry were confused.

The extract for *About a Boy* was successfully attempted in good numbers. Will was judged in many ways, mostly negative, as might be expected. The vast majority remembered that Paula and Ned are not real. Responses for this text showed real engagement and understanding of the writer's skills and intentions at times. The same was true for both essay questions.

For *A Taste of Honey* there were some insightful comments about Helen and Geof and the dynamic between them. Helen's overbearing nature was explored in detail, with attention to the ways she tries to assert herself over Geof and establish a kind of ownership of Jo, by dismissing Geof's efforts. Phrases such as 'my grandchild' and 'my own daughter' were explored as further evidence of this.

For the Jo essay, well-chosen sections of the play were used to explore her character and her relationship with other characters. For the alternative question, a variety of characters were used in order to explore the ways people look for security and stability in the play. There was a really impressive knowledge of the detail and characters from the play.

Never Let Me Go was another text that was dealt with effectively, albeit in small numbers. It was also good to see some informed and thoughtful responses to *Resistance*.

2B Higher and Foundation

For *Blood Brothers*, the extract question was effectively handled by many candidates. They tracked the extract well, considering how the brothers interacted in this scene. Many responses highlighted the tension and underlying jealousy in Mickey's behaviour, contrasting with Eddie's excitement and naivety. Lower performing candidates described the characters' speech and actions linking it to the difference between the classes.

The question about Linda's importance allowed candidates to discuss her role throughout the play. Responses often highlighted her influence on both Mickey and Eddie, noting how her presence exacerbates the divide between the two friends. Many candidates discussed Linda's loyalty and her struggles, especially her relationship with Mickey and how it deteriorates due to his unemployment and dependency on pills. Higher responses examined how Linda's character is used by Russell to demonstrate the impact of societal pressures and economic hardship on personal relationships.

The thematic question about characters never having a chance to escape their fate was well handled by most who chose it. Candidates offered a wide range of responses, often focusing on how the destinies of Mickey, Eddie and Mrs. Johnstone were sealed by their social and economic circumstances. Many discussed how Russell portrays the characters as victims of a predetermined fate due to the class system and lack of opportunities. More insightful responses considered the play's tragic elements, highlighting how even well-intentioned actions lead to inevitable and dire consequences, reinforcing the play's message about the impact of social inequality.

A View from the Bridge was a popular choice this summer. The extract question was effectively handled by many candidates. They successfully placed the extract and demonstrated a good level of understanding of the importance of this scene. Many responses highlighted Eddie's increasing desperation and obsession, contrasted with Alfieri's calm and rational demeanour and the consequences of what was being said by each character.

The question about the most interesting relationship allowed candidates to explore various dynamics within the play. Responses often centred on the complex relationship between Eddie and Catherine, noting how Eddie's overprotectiveness borders on possessiveness and how this creates tension and conflict. Some candidates also found the relationship between Eddie and Beatrice compelling, discussing how it deteriorates due to Eddie's fixation on Catherine and Rodolfo. Some responses which focused on the relationship between Eddie and Alfieri often relied too heavily on the extract and candidates covering these characters often struggled to develop their points.

The thematic question about whether love is the most powerful force in the play was well handled by most who chose it. Candidates offered a wide range of responses, often focusing on how different forms of love drive the characters' actions. Many discussed Eddie's intense, albeit misguided, love for Catherine as the catalyst for the play's tragic events. Some candidates also explored the love between Catherine and Rodolfo, and how it symbolises hope and a future beyond the confines of their current lives. More insightful responses considered how love, while powerful, is intertwined with other forces such as honour, pride, and societal expectations, and how these elements collectively lead to the play's dramatic conclusion.

For *A Christmas Carol*, candidates were generally more successful than last year with regards to placing the extract from Stave 3, where the Ghost of Christmas Present and Scrooge walk the streets on Christmas Day. Many were able to pick out key aspects of the extract and consider the contrasting positives and negatives. Some excellent points were made about the sharp contrast between the dreary physical conditions of the town and the cheerful demeanour of the people. However, some groups of candidates focused heavily on labelling techniques and features without thoroughly analysing their effect and how they contributed to the mood and atmosphere. The extract was rich with imagery and deliberate use of language, and it was encouraging to see many confidently discussing this.

The question about Bob Cratchit sparked varied responses, with many candidates exploring whether he is the character we admire most. Numerous responses highlighted Bob's unwavering kindness, patience, and optimism despite his challenging circumstances. Candidates discussed his role as a loving father and husband, emphasising his positive outlook and gentle nature. Higher responses delved into how Bob Cratchit represents the hardworking, underpaid lower class and serves as a foil to Scrooge's initial cold-heartedness. Some candidates, however, argued that while Bob is admirable, other characters such as Scrooge, due to his significant transformation, or Tiny Tim, with his innocence and resilience, might also vie for the title of the most admirable character. These were often confident but there were instances of candidates responding to Scrooge in this question with very little focus on whether he was admirable or not and these seemed to be pre-planned essays on Scrooge's character on a more general level.

The question about the most interesting relationship in the novella led to many confident responses. The relationship between Scrooge and the Cratchit family was a popular choice, with candidates discussing how their interactions reflect broader themes of compassion and redemption. Some also found the relationship between Scrooge and his nephew Fred intriguing, noting how Fred's persistent kindness and warmth serve as a stark contrast to Scrooge's initial bitterness. There were some interesting takes on the question with some candidates discussing the relationship between Scrooge and his past, particularly how events seen in Stave 2 shaped Scrooge and led him to become the man we see at the beginning of the novella. Some choices of relationships made by candidates were self-limiting, for example, Fezziwig and Scrooge. These candidates struggled to develop the responses enough for the highest marks. Context was used well in these answers, with candidates exploring the importance of family and human connection in the Victorian era.

For *Lord of the Flies*, the extract was analysed well, with candidates closely examining the mood and atmosphere created. Candidates noted the contrast between the serene environment and the underlying tension as the boys approach Castle Rock. Top responses effectively discussed how Golding's use of imagery and careful attention to detail build a sense of anticipation and dread through aspects such as the remnants of the storm and the charred sticks from the tribe's dance. There was a lot of instances of successful close language and technique analysis in these responses with candidates exploring how these created mood and atmosphere.

The question about the most interesting relationship in the novel saw varied responses, with many candidates finding the dynamic between Ralph and Jack particularly compelling. This relationship encapsulates the central conflict of the novel, with Ralph representing order and civilisation while Jack embodies savagery and primal instincts. Candidates explored how their initially cooperative relationship deteriorates as Jack's thirst for power and dominance grows, leading to a split among the boys and escalating violence. Some responses also highlighted the relationship between Piggy and Ralph, noting how Piggy's intellectualism and Ralph's leadership complement each other and how Piggy's death signifies the complete breakdown of order. At the higher end, candidates delved into the complex interactions between characters, reflecting broader themes of power, control, and the human condition.

The question on power over others was popular, though some candidates missed the nuance of power dynamic / power over others, discussing power in general terms instead. Successful responses analysed how power over others is a central theme, highlighting the ways Jack exerts control through fear and intimidation. Candidates discussed the transformation of the boys from disciplined children to savage hunters, driven by Jack's manipulation and the allure of power. The conch, as a symbol of democratic power, and its eventual destruction were frequently mentioned to illustrate the shift from structured society to chaos. Some responses referenced Roger's sadistic tendencies and his role in reinforcing Jack's dominance through violence. Higher tier essays considered the broader implications of power struggles on the island, drawing parallels to Golding's commentary on human nature and societal collapse.

Summary of key points

- Be careful to check the exact wording of questions and the names of the characters involved.
- When AO2 is being assessed, relate points to an understanding of the text (AO1) to enable access to discussion of the writer's intent.
- Avoid choosing minor characters as the only focus for an essay response as this can be limiting.
- The most successful responses show a detailed knowledge of the text and characters, but also the ability to adapt this knowledge into an engaged response to the question set. This can be practised.

WJEC GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2024

UNIT 3 NEA: SHAKESPEARE AND WELSH WRITING IN ENGLISH

Overview of the Unit

Unit 3 is comprised of two separate non-examination assessment tasks:

- Section A directs candidates to a thematic response to a Shakespeare play and assesses both AO1 and AO2.
- Section B requires a thematic response to a pre-released set of Welsh poems written in English and assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3.
- Task setting was largely appropriate and most marking was accurate.
- Where marking was generous this was most often in the assessment of AO2 in both Section A and Section B.
- In Section A, the requirement to demonstrate appreciation of the whole play was sometimes overlooked.

Comments on individual questions/sections

The majority of centres chose to use the sample tasks offered by WJEC or adapted sample tasks for use with a different text. An increasing number also seemed to use common tasks across the year group. Whilst there are some concerns with this approach, particularly in relation to ensuring task suitability for the full range of abilities, it did seem to aid in providing a reliable rank order and encouraging more detailed internal moderation. Occasionally moderators were concerned that a whole centre approach to task setting may have led to some similarity in approach, particularly where multiple learners in a centre focused on the same evidence, in the same order and made very similar points about it. Centres are reminded that notes and pre-annotated texts are not permitted, and candidates should be encouraged to engage personally with tasks set and reading materials.

In **Section A** tasks could be based on the theme of 'Change' or the theme of 'Dishonesty'. There was evidence available for both thematic choices but the most popular by far was the theme of 'Change'. As ever, the most popular text choices were *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*, and the work produced on both of these texts was interesting and varied. The sample task, based on the character of Juliet, was widespread amongst the moderation samples and it was clear that careful and thoughtful teaching had taken place in relation to this character and her development in the play. It was interesting to see the different ways Juliet was perceived across the cohort and there was no shortage of personal response in these considerations. The sample task based on 'Change' in *Macbeth* asked candidates to consider how 'the murder of King Duncan changes everything'. There was some evidence of responses to this task but more often centres chose to pose a question more similar to the one set for Juliet where candidates were asked to consider how the character of Macbeth or Lady Macbeth changes during the course of the play. This may have been to encourage an appreciation of the whole play and, if so, it was largely successful.

For those candidates who produced work on the theme of 'Dishonesty', moderators reported evidence of responses to the set task on 'Juliet's dishonesty' and occasionally the use of the 'Othello' set task which provoked some detailed focus on the character of Iago. There were also several examples of titles which explored Macbeth or Lady Macbeth's dishonesty. Although these tasks were often well done, in some cases it was reported that the tasks became a little lost as the work became more of a generic character study rather than specifically focused on the theme of dishonesty.

Last year's Principal Moderator report, reminded of the requirement for candidates to 'show appreciation of the whole play' and most task setting seemed to try to encourage this. Moderators still expressed concern that there were some samples from centres which did not address this with sufficient commitment. In some work on *Macbeth*, for example, there were essays which did not show any consideration of events after Act II. This was the case in tasks set on both 'Change' and 'Dishonesty'. In order to access all available marks, candidates must address this requirement and demonstrate that they have studied the whole play. Some moderator marks were lower than those submitted by the centres as a result of this requirement being overlooked.

Text choices were quite narrow. Overall, very few moderators reported seeing work based on plays other than the *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. There were rare sightings of *King Lear*, *Othello*, *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice* but it seems increasingly uncommon to find work on other texts. This is not unexpected and there is no doubt that both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* provided clear opportunities in relation to the set themes. It is also important to remember that whilst teachers and moderators may have encountered these plays on too many occasions to count, it is the first time that most candidates will have done so. It is always pleasing to see the enthusiasm and commitment that is shown when discussing Shakespearean characters and themes. Many candidates wrote with admirable thoughtfulness and in detail in response to Section A.

In **Section B** the set theme for the poetry study for 2024 was 'Relationships'. Moderators reported seeing all 15 of the set poems represented across the samples of work. Some poems were more frequently seen than others and it will be of no surprise that 'My Box' and 'A Marriage' was again a popular combination. As with 2022's study of the theme 'Marriage', this poetry combination led to some very thorough and detailed work on 'My Box'. This was also the case with 'A Marriage' which has perhaps proved less accessible in the past. Moderators reported seeing detailed investigation of language, structure and form in relation to this poem and really genuine and thoughtful personal responses. This was by no means the only pairing for either of these poems and they were represented in many combinations across the moderation samples.

Other interesting combinations included a study of dysfunctional or unhappy relationships in a combination of 'Antonia's Story', 'Jugged Hare' and 'Eclipse'. All of these poems were also seen in combination with the two already mentioned above and 'Portrait of the Artist Hans Leo Richter'. Other types of relationships, such as parent/child relationships, saw decent coverage with 'My Mother's Perfume', 'The Student House' and 'To My Father' often being used in combination. It was interesting to note the personal engagement often present in this work.

In order to be eligible for all aspects of the marking criteria, Section B requires careful organisation. Successful work must offer close examination of the poems, combining thoughtful discussion in relation to content and theme with close examination of language in order to fully achieve in relation to AO1 and AO2. Those candidates who elect to prioritise AO3 with a wholly comparative essay sometimes neglect to offer specific and detailed examination of the individual poems. Clearly these poems offer so much more as a piece of writing than just a possible link or connection with another piece of writing. Most candidates worked hard to achieve balance in their work, and this should be encouraged.

The requirement to make links and comparisons seems to be widely regarded as the most difficult aspect of Section B but, over the years of this specification, there have been significant improvements with regard to the commitment to this element and the detail of commentary. Moderators reported seeing detailed and thoughtful connections made between poems. Candidates have clearly been encouraged to comment on links in content and theme as well as style, language and structure. This has led to some quite diverse and interesting content, perhaps creating the potential for more original commentary.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

The administrative aspects of NEA were generally completed with admirable professionalism. Covering letters often accompanied samples and offered helpful context to the composition of the samples and clear explanation where changes had occurred. The vast majority of cover sheets were fully completed and contained authorising signatures from teachers and learners. In a few cases, signatures had not been obtained but most centres acknowledged and explained this, with the most common explanation being learner absence, before forwarding on the necessary information at a later date. Moderators reported there being fewer instances of needing to follow up on missing signatures. Please be aware that signatures can be completed electronically.

The most convenient way to present NEA is to secure each individual folder with a treasury tag and organise the folders in descending rank order. Most centres adopt this approach, and it is greatly appreciated.

The majority of centres produced accurately marked NEA. Moderators were able to confirm accurate rank orders from most centres and there was much agreement with marks given. It was clear that in the majority of cases great attention had been paid to providing detailed supporting annotations with clear references to the relevant Assessment Objective and Assessment Criteria band. There was plenty of evidence of internal moderation with many centres evidencing this through clear annotation. At times, this was effective in bringing marks into line with the rank order of the sample although this was not always the case. Moderators were sometimes confused by the fact that internal moderation was evident but not acted upon when final marks were awarded.

Marking annotations were occasionally limited to the identification of a particular AO in the margin of the work. This is not a helpful way to demonstrate achievement, and in some cases revealed that AO2 was being credited inaccurately. For example, selecting relevant textual details is an AO1 skill and it is inaccurate to record simple textual selections as AO2.

Where moderators disagreed with assessment it was generally because marks were too generous. This was most often the case with AO2 where there was not the evidence that candidates demonstrated appreciation of how meaning is conveyed through language, structure and form that their marks seemed to suggest. Where moderator marks were lower than those of the centre for this aspect, it was generally because candidates were being credited with high marks for quite limited skills such as the spotting of devices or giving a basic description of structure. To justify some of the most inflated AO2 marks, in both Section A and Section B, far greater appreciation of how language creates meaning would have been required. In a minority of cases, there seemed to be a desire to match AO1 marks with AO2 marks, irrespective of whether the content enabled this.

AO1 tended to be more accurately assessed and it was clear that the majority of students have been taught to track carefully through their selected texts and demonstrate careful focus on the set task. Where generosity occurred in relation to this aspect, it tended to be because candidates were given credit for thoughtful discussion and evaluative skill that was not apparent. Band 3 of the Assessment Criteria refers to candidates who 'begin to select relevant detail' and 'display some understanding of main features'. If skills are not sustained or only appear in a limited or fleeting way then this should be reflected in the band given. For work to be given Band 4 and Band 5 for AO1, there is an expectation that the ability to discuss thoughtfully, probe the subtext and evaluate ideas is shown with some consistency.

AO3 is assessed in Section B and moderators reported that in the majority of cases this was marked reasonably accurately. It was clear that most centres sensibly prioritise this aspect of the work and most candidates are aware that they must spend time responding appropriately. There were very few examples of candidates not committing a reasonable proportion of their time to addressing this aspect of the assessment.

In a minority of cases, there was evidence of generosity in the marking of AO3. Moderators were most likely to disagree with centre marks where links and connections seemed vague and lacking in focus and/or the exploration of evidence. Some candidates, for example may have found one or two overview connections, in relation to theme or a point of content, but then seemed credited multiple times for making the same point in quite a repetitive way. In some cases, candidates were credited for making the same connection that they had been given in the wording of their task but with no further links or comparisons stated. These were in the minority though, and it was clear from most of the work submitted that students had been taught to look for and explore interesting points of connection between their poems of choice.

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 4291

Email: gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/english-literature-gcse/#tab_keydocuments

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

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Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

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