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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**JANUARY 2023**

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## General Certificate of Secondary Education

January 2023

### PROSE (DIFFERENT CULTURES) AND POETRY (CONTEMPORARY)

#### Executive Summary

Most popular text choices:

1. *Of Mice and Men*
2. *To Kill a Mockingbird*
3. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Both tiered papers performed comparably with those from previous series, with candidates taking the opportunities to show what they had learnt and the literary skills they had developed. They were able to make apt selection of short, specific references to support the points they made, many responses indicating a clear grasp of subtext. Similarly, many showed analysis of how the writers had conveyed their messages through characters, imagery, relationships, language and events.

Candidates must:

- know and address the assessment objectives tested in each question; many essay responses contained no reference to context (AO4) or a lack of comparison (AO3) in the poetry responses
- keep to the focus of the question set; many extract responses diverted into other aspects of the novel studied
- demonstrate a thorough coverage of the text under analysis, be it the extract, whole text or pair of poems
- ensure a thoughtful selection of supporting references rather than giving general impressions
- practise locating ideas, mood and meaning in the language used by the writers.

## General comments

On both Higher and Foundation Tiers, *Of Mice and Men* was by far the most popular of the texts, as in previous years, with *To Kill a Mockingbird* also quite popular on Higher Tier with some entries for Foundation Tier. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* also featured this year, making a welcome return for candidates who knew the text well and showed considerable engagement with this autobiographical novel. A small number of candidates had studied *Chanda's Secrets*. This report will focus on these texts but the summaries of features of successful responses and how performance could be improved apply equally to all texts.

Although much more prevalent on Foundation Tier, a substantial number of candidates on both tiers addressed questions on novels which they had not previously studied. In many of these cases, every extract on the question paper was read and most were answered as an 'unseen' text. This rubric infringement remains a serious problem for candidates whose teachers will have guided them through the study of one of the texts over a long period of time. For weaker Foundation Tier candidates whose reading ability may be limited, this enormous waste of time and effort is particularly damaging, but a significant number of Higher Tier candidates also wasted much time and energy which should have been focused on the texts they had studied to achieve a higher mark.

Examiners are instructed to take account of the extent to which candidates had addressed the different assessment objectives relevant to each question. In most essay responses, some detailed and focused understanding was shown of how society at the time the novels were set affected characters' lives, behaviour and aspirations. There were few responses on Higher Tier where there was no explicit commentary on the context of the novel studied, although it was sometimes a perfunctory reference or a sweeping generalisation on Foundation. Most candidates on both tiers used their contextual knowledge thoughtfully to inform their response to the essay questions, although there remains some confusion about where on the paper context is assessed. Sometimes in the extract question, for example, responses to the question on the scene from *Of Mice and Men* sometimes strayed towards comments beyond the range of the extract and discussed Curley's wife's behaviour before she was killed, or some were concerned with the status of women in American society at the time. A more common weakness in this examination was the misunderstanding of Candy's outburst in the scene. Some candidates misread his words as being addressed to George, or sometimes to Lennie. Others thought that Candy's words were spoken by George and commented on Slim's actions at the end of the extract as somehow romantic or even sexual towards Curley's wife. These were serious misreadings of character and although the question focused on mood and atmosphere, such errors inevitably limited the understanding that was shown of what was happening in the extract.

The poetry comparison question was generally handled with an understanding of the need to cover both poems and the comparative element for AO3. However, 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. The effect of this on their overall achievement was inevitably serious, particularly considering the weighting of the different AOs for this task. Strong responses, as always, looked closely at the language and imagery used in the poems for AO2, and focused more on meaning and interpretation for AO1, rather than simple identification of devices. On Higher Tier, candidates sometimes offered unconvincing interpretations, but a willingness to engage with meaning and ideas will always be better rewarded than counting rhymes or spotting alliteration without reference to meaning. Some tended to miss the subtext of the poems, reading them as essentially about shoes or snails, although many commented more productively about how the relationships between older and younger family members were conveyed in different ways. On both tiers, however, there were many responses which showed a sensitive, close reading of the poems as well as an understanding of how the marks for the different Assessment Objectives are awarded.

## **Extract questions: Characteristics of successful responses**

### *Of Mice and Men*

The Steinbeck extract question gave candidates on both tiers plenty of opportunities to comment on the effects created in this scene in which the reactions of various ranch-hands to the killing of Curley's wife are given. Successful responses focused on the details and the language used to convey the emotional twists of Candy's reactions, interpreting both his 'sorrow and his anger' and the pitiful way he recalls the details of his failed dream in language which itself reflects his fragility at this precise moment. Successful responses also covered the different reactions of the other men, and the use Steinbeck makes of noise and silence in the last section of the extract. These higher scoring responses tracked the changes in mood and atmosphere and could locate in the language of the extract where the shifts in mood occurred.

For marks in Band 4 in Higher Tier responses for both AO1 and AO2, a careful tracking of mood and atmosphere, a clear grasp of how characters' emotions contributed to these shifts in mood and detailed reference to the language used to signal these shifts were required. On Foundation Tier, a clear understanding of characters' reactions and how Steinbeck uses language to convey those reactions allowed examiners to award marks in the higher bands.

### *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Candidates on both tiers were generally able to comment in detail on the dramatic events of the extract. While most responses on Foundation Tier were from candidates who had not read the novel, those who had studied it were often able to identify some key aspects of the scene, including the early confusion of the children as they were woken, their horrified realisation as the fire takes hold of Maudie's house and the reactions of some of the characters, notably Atticus' calmness, and the sense of jeopardy created at the end by the sight of Mr Avery in the burning house. A wide coverage of the extract, with a range of details referenced, often resulted in Band 4 marks. Successful Higher Tier responses looked carefully at some of the ways in which Lee uses Scout's point of view to create tension by delaying the reason for the commotion. There was also some careful reference to the language used to describe the ferocity of the fire which was 'spewing' and 'devouring' the house and to highlight the heightened drama when the fire truck did not arrive. At the highest level, candidates were able to see through Atticus' rather deliberate calmness to his use of hurried short sentences such as 'Run now' and the string of imperatives with which he directs Jem.

### *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Among many responses from candidates who had not studied this novel, there were some on Higher Tier from those who clearly had, and who had a sound understanding of Bailey Junior's character and could comment in detail on how he is presented in this extract. Many saw the explicit and sometimes implicit contrast by the writer between herself as a child and her view of her brother as 'the greatest person in my world.' His beauty, as perceived by Maya, was commented on in more successful responses, as well as its meaning and significance for her. His behaviour in defence of his sister is described in some detail in the extract and its savage humour was commented on as well as his fierce loyalty and courage in challenging the elders. 'In a voice oilier than the one before' was often used to show Angelou's portrayal of Bailey as able to navigate the adult world of criticism and judgement better than she could and the warmth and trust between them was also the focus of better responses. From the last section of the extract, candidates wrote about Bailey as a 'golden child' who could charm his way through life but was dedicated, responsible as well as mischievous.

A range of ideas from across the extract, with a focus on Angelou's characterisation of Bailey here rather than what he looks like and how he behaves, often resulted in high Band 3 and sometimes Band 4 marks.

### *Chanda's Secrets*

Genuine responses to this novel were few in number but some were quite successful in commenting on the turmoil in the relationship between Chanda and Mrs Tafa at this point in the novel. Chanda's early efforts to patch up the rift between them were mentioned, as were Mrs Tafa's reactions to them which candidates generally saw as spiteful, cruel and rather immature, particularly in contrast to Chanda's more conciliatory attitude here. Chanda's own stubborn loyalty to Esther was noted as was the language describing the atmosphere between the characters as 'tense' and 'uncomfortable'. Mrs Tafa's deliberate cultivation of the children, especially Iris, elicited some useful comments, particularly the damage inflicted on Chanda as shown by her reaction in 'I thought I was going to die.' Some saw Chanda's reactions at the end of the extract as resignation and concession to Mrs Tafa in 'I can't compete', while others commented on Mrs Tafa's malicious bullying of a child as part of her need to 'be the boss.' A focus on the relationship between Chanda and Mrs Tafa here, rather than a more simple tracking of events through the extract, meant examiners sometimes awarded marks higher in Band 3.

### **Successful responses to the extract questions tended to show:**

- clear and sustained focus on the specific extract, not the context of the novel or storylines
- apt selection of short, specific references to support points made
- clear grasp of subtext, what's 'really' going on in the extract.

### **Ways in which performance could be improved:**

- clear knowledge of the assessment objectives being assessed here
- more thorough coverage of the extract and more careful reading of what's happening
- more selection of supporting references rather than general impressions
- don't answer questions on novels you have not read.

## Essay Questions: Characteristics of successful responses

### *Of Mice and Men*

The question on Curley's wife and the extent to which her actions could be deemed 'foolish' was a popular one on both tiers. On Higher Tier, successful candidates often approached the question from the standpoint of context and examined how Steinbeck used the character of Curley's wife to offer a critique of his own society's ingrained misogyny towards women. On Foundation Tier, the most successful responses considered not only Curley's wife's behaviour at different points in the novel but how she was treated by the men on the ranch and, sometimes by implication but often more explicitly, how this treatment reflected the sexist attitudes of 1930s America. Many candidates, on both tiers, were able to see how the reader's view of Curley's wife is framed by Steinbeck's use of other characters' prejudice against her, even before she appears. Some insightful responses on Higher Tier looked at how her marriage to Curley was doomed from the start, not only because of Curley's jealous restriction of her but because the society in which she lived expected men to behave in this way. The paucity of opportunity for young women with few means and limited education was clearly understood to have contributed towards her unrealistic Hollywood dreams and some saw her beauty and her flirtatious behaviour as her only asset, however misunderstood it was by a cowed, fragile group of men. Her vile subjugation of Crooks was also seen as the inevitable backlash of a powerless woman whose new husband had already abandoned her for the brothel and whose life of loneliness and restriction stretched before her. These highly rewarded responses showed that the candidates could see beyond the confines of the ranch and the characters and relationships within it to the wider society beyond which drove their actions, attitudes and aspirations.

Better responses on Foundation Tier to this question tended to link contextual factors to character in specific ways rather than relying on a more general knowledge of the Great Depression or simple assertions about the racism and sexism prevalent at the time. Reference to specific events and descriptions involving Curley's wife characterised responses given marks at the top of Band 3 and Band 4. Curley's wife's misguided need to be noticed by the men on the ranch, with some understanding shown that there was no other way for her to be recognised, often helped to nudge marks into Band 4 on this tier, and these comments were often linked to some clear observations on how her final conversation with Lennie revealed more of her real frustrations. A clear, specific connection between her behaviour and the prevailing attitudes towards women at the time, rather than simple criticism of her actions, often produced more thoughtful responses on Foundation Tier.

The alternative question on ideas about freedom on Higher Tier elicited some of the best responses on the paper. Again, responses in which the centrality of contextual factors in how characters behaved was recognised tended to fare better, on both tiers, than those which focused on the particular aspirations of each character. In many of the best responses here, the meaning of freedom for different characters and how it was manifested in their behaviour and aspirations was explored in detail. Versions of the American Dream focused in many responses but at the highest level its deep roots in American history and the American way of life were examined and challenged. George's craving for self-sufficiency and independence was considered as almost the right of all self-respecting white men, on which America believed itself founded. This version of the American Dream was properly understood at the highest level as more than just the idle wish of all migrant workers which had been shattered by the Great Depression. Other expressions of a yearning for freedom were also discussed in depth and seen as ways in which Steinbeck criticised his society's cruelties and prejudices. In some excellent responses, candidates distinguished between George's vision of freedom and Candy's, even though both involved the same dream farm.

Candy's desperation, seen in his willingness to give away all his savings to a man he barely knew, was more a need for freedom from indignity and poverty in old age than wanting a good life. Similarly, the meaning behind Crooks' cynicism about such dreams of freedom was better understood by Band 4 candidates. While many pointed to his brief inclusion in George's plan and saw this as his own aspiration for freedom from discrimination, some sensitive responses explored how his behaviour in reaction to Curley's wife's racist insult revealed a much more hopeless future for black people in which freedom would not feature for decades. Other approaches to the question, on both tiers, considered characters' aspirations for freedom alongside those who had more freedom, such as Curley or Slim. Some interesting and very engaged responses on Higher Tier suggested that Curley was just as trapped by social expectations he could not live up to and that even Slim perhaps represented the view that there was no happiness in false hopes of freedom and the only contentment to be had was in abandoning such ideas.

On Foundation Tier, candidates who remembered to link the behaviour of their chosen characters to contextual factors which helped to explain them generally did quite well. Many candidates chose George and Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks as examples of characters who wanted more freedom and were able to outline what these aspirations were and how they affected the characters' lives. Where comments were supported by reference to specific incidents in the novel and apt, well-chosen references to support ideas, marks in Band 4 could be awarded.

### *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Both questions on this novel elicited some effective, focused responses which explored the text in its context with some apt reference to events, characters and relationships. The first question on the Ewell family and their significance in the novel gave thoughtful candidates an opportunity to consider the portrayal of Bob Ewell, Mayella and in some responses Burris as a vehicle to shed light on social values and attitudes in the American South of the 1930s. In some excellent responses, Lee's use of the family as representative of an underclass of 'white trash' in respectable Maycomb was commented on productively. The poverty, fecklessness and poor morals of the Ewells, particularly Bob Ewell, were explored in some interesting approaches, often contrasted with the lives of Tom Robinson and his family who are shown by Lee as lower in status when confronted by the prejudiced justice system at the time. Some explored the vulnerability of Mayella whose pathetic efforts to alleviate her own suffering and that of the younger children in the family seemed to shed a more nuanced light on her character than the brutish portrayal of her father. A focus on the author's intentions in her portrayal of the Ewell family and what they stood for was often characteristic of better responses to this question, with some suggesting that the depiction of Bob Ewell's moral bankruptcy during the trial helped to cast Tom Robinson's fate in stark contrast with Maycomb's tolerance of the Ewells. There was also some use made of Burris Ewell's appearance at school on Scout's first day to highlight the family's distrust of authority and education and to introduce an element of white society that could not be defended. In some responses, there was some confusion between the Cunningham family and the Ewells though in more successful responses there was a strong focus on the events involving different members of the Ewell family and how Lee uses them to criticise the hypocrisy of the American South of the 1930s.

The alternative question was tackled by candidates across the mark range though more successful responses understood with some sensitivity the mockingbird motif and how Lee uses it to highlight characters' innocence or their ill treatment by a corrupt and prejudiced society. The characters most often chosen to represent the mockingbird theme were Boo Radley and Tom Robinson, often with some detailed reference to how and why such innocents were badly treated by their community.

In Boo Radley's case, successful responses focused on the stifling conformity and obsession with appearances which led to his imprisonment in the first place and Lee's mockery of the gossiping classes who created the bogeyman he later became in their eyes. The final scene in which Boo appears for the first time was explored in relation to the mockingbird theme as well as some of the events which highlighted his essential innocence. Tom Robinson's characterisation by Lee during the trial as a humble, clearly innocent character whose main crime was the admission of sympathy for a poor white girl also came under some scrutiny in high scoring responses. Other potential mockingbirds included Atticus and, occasionally, Mayella, though most high Band 3 and Band 4 responses tended to focus on fewer characters in more detail rather than spread their commentaries more thinly across a wider canvas.

There were only a few responses on Foundation Tier from candidates who had studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Where candidates were able to show a reasonable understanding of events involving some members of the Ewell family or could select appropriate characters to show an understanding of the mockingbird theme, some fairly high marks could be awarded.

### *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Most candidates who selected the first essay question on the lives of women in this autobiographical novel sensibly focused their attention on one or two characters and where examiners awarded high marks there was a detailed examination of events, characterisation and context which showed a sound grasp of the lives of black women in 1930s America. Genuine responses from candidates who had studied the novel were almost exclusively entered for Higher Tier. Maya's grandmother gave candidates plenty of material from which to select the salient features of black women's lives. In the most successful responses, she was seen as not just a downtrodden figure who suffered the prejudices of a racist society but also as a strong, resilient and respected member of her community. Examples of the fear and indignity commonly suffered by black women at the time were given, such as the incident with the white girls outside her shop, but these were sometimes balanced by her courage in the face of her horrendous treatment by the white dentist or her disciplined, righteous upbringing of her grandchildren. In some thoughtful responses Maya's mother was included with her grandmother as an example of how younger black women in different regions of America lived in a different way and while the same prejudices prevailed, this generation reacted in different ways and brought up their children with different methods to resist them. Maya herself as a young woman who challenged the racism she encountered in the later episodes of the novel was also included in some sustained and well-referenced responses to this question.

The alternative question elicited responses which often documented in some detail the kinds of hardships and traumas Maya suffered as she grew up, including her rape, her abandonment by her father and some of her ill-treatment by representatives of a cruel, discriminatory society. Occasionally, some candidates offered a more balanced view of Maya's childhood, suggesting that these same hardships had created a strong and resilient character and that Angelou also shed an affectionate light on a community which looked after its own and bestowed a dignity on its people that was denied to them by wider society. As always, responses which showed a thoughtful, settled understanding of characters, relationships, events and the intentions of the writer, and could support their ideas with detail from the novel, were highly rewarded.

## *Chanda's Secrets*

There were relatively few responses to this text but both questions were addressed. In the first, most candidates who selected this question discussed the contribution made by Chanda to the transformation of her community. Her battles against the stigma and shame of AIDS were usually outlined in some detail, including her defence of Esther and her mother against the prejudice of others and her efforts to take care of her siblings in the face of poverty and suspicion. Other potentially transformative characters included Chanda's mother and her bravery in protecting her children, Esther who endured rape and disease and Mrs Tafa who confronted her own shame to challenge her community's superstition and ignorance.

The small number of candidates who selected the alternative question wrote mostly about Chanda herself as a resilient, hopeful character. Despite the various tragedies that befall her and her family, her efforts to help Esther and her mother with their disease and their own lives, as well as her influence in setting up the centre at the end of the novel were cited as evidence of her resilience. Some responses to the *Chanda's Secrets* questions on Higher Tier showed a little more breadth in their selection of events and references from the novel to warrant marks higher in Band 3.

### **Characteristics of good essay responses:**

- clear appreciation of how context shapes characters' attitudes and motivations
- selection of a range of apt events and quotations to develop and support ideas
- some analysis of how the writer's message is conveyed through characters, relationships and events.

### **Ways in which performance could be improved:**

- practice in how to structure and sustain a response
- practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked
- more focused discussion of how contextual factors affect specific characters' personalities, choices, ambitions and stories
- practice in selecting detailed textual evidence to support ideas.

## Poetry Comparison

Most candidates on both tiers understood how their marks were awarded in the poetry task and that a clear commentary on both poems with some focused comparison was necessary to give them the best chance. Examiners rewarded comparison wherever they found it, although, most candidates looked at each poem first before making comparisons. Some compared all the way through their responses while others discussed the first poem and then compared it with the second, making comments on meaning, imagery and mood about both poems as they did so. A significant minority on Higher Tier wrote only about one poem or offered no comparison between poems. This inevitably affected their access to the higher bands, even where their understanding of one or both poems was secure.

Higher Tier candidates were given the rubric that 'both poets describe their thoughts about a younger member of their family'. Most candidates at all levels found 'Poem for my Sister' reasonably accessible in terms of meaning and mood, and most could locate in the language of the poem the closeness of the relationship between the sisters and the anxiety the poet feels for her 12 year old sister that emerges in it. More successful responses, however, were typically more confident in probing the subtext of both poems and offering a coherent interpretation of the different kind of loving care experienced by the narrators for their young relatives. In these responses, there was often some secure grasp of the extended metaphor of shoes and feet in the Lochhead poem and some thoughtful exploration of how meaning is created by it. The progression in the stanzas from the affection of the first to the warning in the last stanza was properly addressed in comments about structure. The picture of a typical young girl trying on her older sister's heels in the first stanza was understood by some thoughtful candidates as the child practising being a grown-up, willing herself into adolescence and adulthood. The action was also seen as suggesting an admiration for the older sister, misplaced perhaps as revealed later, but also reciprocated by the older sister in the second stanza. Some detected a nostalgic harking back to her own childhood on the poet's part, or some envy of the younger sister's carefree focus on the childish game – both credible interpretations. Better responses also addressed thoughtfully the idea of the young girl's competence at hopscotch: some, for example, contrasted the girl's movements in the second stanza with those of the first, suggesting her sure-footedness when her actions are appropriate for her age but she 'wobbles' when aping more adult movements, showing her older sister that she isn't ready to become a woman. The last stanza was generally considered to be more serious in tone though more successful responses here paid closer attention to the language and imagery used to demonstrate AO2 skills as well as more interpretative ideas about meaning for AO1.

In 'For a Five-Year-Old', the best responses picked up quickly on the strangely dissonant use of the indefinite article in the title, some suggesting that this might be a typical rather than specific view of how parents and children form early relationships, with perhaps some acknowledgement that there are secrets and lies in all such relationships. Successful responses to this poem tended to show the cohesiveness of the poem as a whole where less successful attempts struggled to marry the picture of the mother's loving care in the first stanza with that given in the second. The mother's insistence on teaching a lesson of care and protection to the child in the first stanza was illustrated by the language used to describe how the child is instructed to handle the snail with 'careful hand' and not to be 'unkind'. In successful responses, the contrast between this conscious use of instructions and the language of kindness and care in the first stanza with the brutality of language and actions in the second was the focus of analysis, where less successful responses tended to shy away from meaning and ideas in the second stanza. The child's unquestioned 'faith' in the mother's influence and willingness to be 'moulded still by words' belies the terrible truth of the mother's own actions.

While some considered responses suggested that the mother might have regretted her past actions and was being 'taught' by the child as much as the other way round, there was some focus in others on the matter-of-fact 'But this is how things are' and the bald statement 'I am your mother.' There were some sensitive readings which commented on this as evidence of a necessary hypocrisy in the mother's attitude, perhaps that of all parents, in which the 'harshest kind of truth' must be kept from small children, as well as an acceptance that the role of parent involves such contradictions and compromises.

Meaningful comparisons in the best responses focused on the poets' relationships with the younger children, the meaning of their own roles in guiding them and the acknowledgement of the perhaps inevitable struggles to come in their futures. In some, there was some focus on the way the poet observes her little sister with some trepidation for her future compared with the mother's active, didactic role in teaching the child attributes she does not have herself. Both poems, for some careful readers, taught the older relative something painful about their own lives as much as the lives of the children and while Lochhead seems to 'wish' to stave off the inevitable anxieties of adolescence for her sister, the mother in the Adcock poem seems to accept that, for now, the child should be sheltered from 'the harshest kind of truth', even about their own parent. At the highest level, the language and imagery used to convey ideas in both poems was compared with some probing of the extended metaphor and its impact in the first poem and some understanding of the way the deliberate straightforwardness, even bluntness of language in the second creates a very different effect. Many candidates compared the structure of the poems, suggesting a similarity in how the lightness of touch and atmosphere of love and care at the beginning gives way to a darker tone in both poems and these kinds of comments on structure were more highly rewarded than those which counted lines and rhymes in each poem.

The Foundation Tier poems, 'Lone Dog' and 'Before You Cut Loose', were mostly understood as having different moods and atmospheres, even where the content was not always clearly understood. The first poem was seen in more successful responses as describing a dog who chose to run wild, confident in its natural element despite the privations and there was some credible evidence given in the best responses to support these ideas. Images of freedom in nature, such as the 'wide wind and wild stars' were sometimes used to highlight the dog's 'natural' state, contrasted with the derided images of domesticity such as 'the fireside, and 'the well-filled plate.' While there was some reluctance to accept that the dog chose this way of life in many responses, the best responses were able to offer some ideas about how the poet uses the voice of a wild dog to show a different perspective on how wild creatures might think.

The second poem, 'Before You Cut Loose' presented more of a challenge to most candidates but in successful responses some sense of the loyalty and extreme dependence of domesticated dogs on their owners usually emerged. The idea of the poem as a harsh, direct warning to owners who might be tempted to 'cut loose' was sometimes understood, especially through the last two lines which invite the reader to imagine how they would feel if their dog was one of those who, against all odds, managed to find their way home again. Some careful readers picked up on the cruel language used to describe some human actions, such as the way dogs are 'hurled like bags of sand from rented cars' or the graphic description of injuries sustained in dogs' attempts to return home.

Comparison mostly focused on the differences between the ways the dogs are described, the independence and resilience of McLeod's dog contrasting with the neediness and loyalty shown in the second. Many saw that the use of the dog's own voice in the first poem conveyed ideas differently from the human voice in the second. Where candidates could make more detailed reference to the poems in their comparisons, particularly to the different ways the dogs are described, and could suggest feasible ideas about the 'messages' in each poem, examiners could sometimes award marks in Band 4.

**Characteristics of good poetry responses:**

- balanced, well-timed coverage of both poems as well as a clear comparison
- probing of subtext, tentative interpretation rooted in the poems
- strong focus on images, language and effects created
- clear grasp of what the poets are trying to say about the topic.

**Ways in which performance can be improved:**

- careful reading of poems to avoid misunderstanding – figure out what’s happening first by reading the sentences not just the lines
- practise locating ideas, mood and meaning in the language used in the poems
- think about how you will address each of the assessment objectives in your answer
- compare what the poets say about the theme given to you on the paper, and how they say it. Remember AO2.



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