



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE (NEW)
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

SUMMER 2019

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WJEC ENGLISH LITERATURE

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UNIT 1

General Comments

On both Higher and Foundation Tiers, *Of Mice and Men* was clearly the most popular of the texts, as in previous years, with *To Kill a Mockingbird* also quite popular on both. There were responses written to questions on all the other novels except *Anita and Me*, including some by students who had studied *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *Chanda's Secrets*.

Although much more prevalent on Foundation Tier, a significant number of candidates on both tiers wasted a lot of their time reading extracts and answering questions on novels they had never read or studied. This remains a serious problem which detrimentally affected outcomes for a large number of candidates. The time wasted on unnecessary reading of extracts and addressing essay questions for which they were wholly unprepared often meant that candidates' responses to the questions they should have answered were brief and sketchy and many candidates did not reach the poetry question at all. Centres must address this seriously in preparing candidates for the examination.

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 on both tiers, some understanding was shown of how characters' lives, behaviour and aspirations were affected by social factors at the time the novels were set. There were few responses where there was no explicit commentary on the context of the novel studied. Most candidates on both tiers used their contextual knowledge to inform their response to the essay questions, although there remains some confusion and misunderstanding about where on the paper context is assessed. Responses to the extract sometimes included more wide-ranging comments on the novel's themes or what happened to the characters in the extract before and after the extract itself. Fairly common also was the inclusion of comments about context: the discrimination against disabled people like Lennie in 1930s America or Burris Ewell's position in the social hierarchy of the American South, for example.

In most essay responses there was a sensible balance between context and text, with fewer essays than in the past focused almost exclusively on social and historical details. While there were some responses to text essay questions which were less focused on how the society of the time influenced characters' thoughts and behaviour, most candidates included some contextual references which examiners could credit. Better responses, as always, showed that the candidate's understanding of characters was not just informed by knowledge of context but that the whole text reflected and shed a critical light on the social mores of the time.

There were a number of responses to the question on Candy which showed some misreading of the question, or which showed some confusion about the character. Some candidates, on both tiers, wrote about Curley rather than Candy while others, mostly on Foundation, misnamed the character they wrote about. These errors were inevitably costly for candidates who often knew their text well but had not read the questions with enough care.

The poetry comparison question was generally handled with a clear understanding of the need to cover both poems and the comparative element. Candidates compared the poems in different ways and were credited for all comparison comments but there were a number of candidates who wrote reasonably well on both poems but offered no comparison. Given the weighting of the Assessment Objectives here, this omission had serious consequences. Better responses looked closely at the language and imagery used in the poems and focused on meaning and interpretation: what the poets had to say about love or about the thoughts triggered by snow. There was still some tendency to 'spot' techniques with limited commentary on effects or in many cases the effects attributed to devices were formulaic or imposed assertively on the poems. In weaker Higher Tier responses, a significant number of responses discussed punctuation, enjambement, rhyme and form but did not show how the use of these devices added to or helped to convey meaning and ideas. Better responses on both tiers included a range of sensible interpretations of ideas and some comparison while those at the highest level on Higher Tier looked very closely at the way language and imagery was used to reveal subtle differences in tone and meaning.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Extract questions

Of Mice and Men

The Steinbeck extract question asked candidates to focus on the speech and behaviour of George and Lennie in this scene and to comment on what it reveals about their relationship. Successful responses focused on the details and the language used to describe George's internal struggle between his love for Lennie and the frustrations and restrictions he endured in looking after him. Not all interpretations of George's behaviour were sympathetic: some candidates saw his barely disguised contempt for Lennie as exploding through at times, including the way he throws the dead mouse away and mocks Lennie's distress. Others focused on his sympathy for Lennie at the beginning of the extract and his gesture of remorse and sadness at the end when he puts his hand on Lennie's shoulder. As always, responses where there was apt, detailed support for these ideas could be awarded high marks, as well as a thorough tracking of the twists and turns of Steinbeck's characterisation here. Some insightful answers homed in on George's vigilance of Lennie at the beginning and the way he knows Lennie so well that he instinctively knows what he's doing. Lennie's 'pantomime of innocence' was sensitively interpreted at times. The use of 'pantomime' to suggest an exaggerated, comical performance was considered carefully as an indication that this routine between the two men was common, contributing to George's frustration. The image of the terrier refusing to return a ball to its master was noted by many candidates, but better responses unpicked the language which defined the interaction – the way George speaks 'coldly' and commands Lennie 'imperiously', for example.

Weaker Higher Tier responses tended to make more general comments which could be applied to the relationship between the two men at most points in the novel, rather than focusing on the specific interaction in the extract. Foundation Tier responses were less successful when candidates wrote generally about the character, recognising the father/son dynamics but without anchoring their comments in the extract's details. Occasionally, on both tiers, the behaviour of each character was simply described with limited understanding shown of what it tells us about their thoughts and feelings and what their behaviour means. Contextual information about ranch life during the Depression also leaked into some extract responses and although examiners did not deduct marks where this occurred, candidates' time and effort was often wasted on comments which could not be credited.

To Kill a Mockingbird

The characterisation of Burris Ewell gave Higher Tier candidates plenty of opportunities to explore the writer's technique in introducing the first Ewell family member to the reader. Candidates were generally confident in using the detail in the extract to show how Burris' appearance and his contemptuous behaviour towards the young teacher is meant to shock and fascinate and many tracked through the extract carefully to develop their responses. Burris' cruelty at the end of the extract, the sadistic pleasure he derives from Miss Caroline's tears, drew some thoughtful comment and there was also some probing of his cowardice and the false bravado which is momentarily undone by 'a child half his height'. The fragility beneath the swagger was perceptively addressed through the language of the extract in high-level responses. His pitiful physical condition, the absence of his mother and his misplaced pride in cheating the education system to his own detriment elicited some sensitive interpretations.

As always, the development of ideas and the level of detailed references to support them tended to determine how high in the mark range it was possible for examiners to go. On Foundation Tier, although most candidates who attempted this question had not studied the novel, those who had usually chose apt support from the extract for a commentary on Burris' filthy appearance and his arrogant rudeness towards the teacher.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

There were some genuine Higher Tier responses here from candidates who were able to track through the twists and turns of Maya's fearful journey through the house after the conversation with Brother Taylor had terrified her. The extract gave plenty of scope for candidates to comment on Angelou's use of language and imagery to evoke the irrational fears of a child seeing her own home in a different, more frightening light. The physical manifestations of her fear – the chilled blood, the contrast between the 'ocean of darkness' and her 'friendly fire, for example – were used to support some thoughtful interpretations of Maya's childish imagination. The deliberate hyperbole and the rather comic details in the extract were used to show a solid understanding of the writer's technique here.

Chanda's Secrets

Relatively few responses from candidates who had studied the novel were submitted here but more able candidates explored how the 'miracle' of Mama's apparent recovery is described, only for the inevitable decline to have more impact when her health suddenly worsens. Some thoughtful responses given marks in Band 4 showed how Mama's own desperation to get better and be a good mother was at the root of her recovery, perhaps more than any medicinal help. Her admission at the end of the extract that 'nothing works' and her failure to keep up a pretence for the sake of her children drew some sympathetic comment from candidates. Weaker candidates struggled to keep their focus on Mama and commented instead on Chanda's reactions to her mother.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the specific extract, not the context of the novel or storylines**
- **Selection of short, apt 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 what is being assessed here and what is not
- More thorough coverage of the extract
- A strong focus on the writer's choice of language at different points in the extract
- More practice on probing subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract, not relying on surface meanings

Essay Questions

Of Mice and Men

The question on Candy asked in what ways the character is important in *Of Mice and Men* and better responses focused on this aspect – the function of the character in the novel as a whole – as well as Candy's attributes, behaviour and actions. Many candidates showed a sound understanding of the character's underlying attitudes and motivations at different points in the novel and had clear and well considered views about the impact of contextual factors on his actions and attitudes. The fears and insecurities of older workers in 1930s Great Depression America were well understood but better responses drew these conclusions from Candy's own explanations and actions as much as candidates' knowledge of the social and economic hardships of the time. His low status on the ranch, his vulnerability to stronger characters and his willingness to buy a glimmer of hope from people he barely knows were features which highlighted Steinbeck's critique of a harsh, uncaring society which abandoned the old to their miserable fate.

Many saw Candy as a somewhat pathetic figure, temporarily emboldened by a delusional promise of future happiness. There was also some careful consideration of the ways in which he reflects some of the social values of the time. His casual racism towards Crooks, his assumption that 'he's a nice fella' who can yet be abused at Christmas for entertainment, was understood to reflect the times, as was his prejudicial attitudes towards Curley's wife. Steinbeck's use of Candy to describe characters to George and Lennie, and the reader, before they appear in the novel was considered in one sensitive response to be 'prejudice in action, leading them and us to make harsh judgements about some of the most vulnerable people in society before we've even met them'. Candy's bitter attack on the dead girl, and his blaming of her for the collapse of his hopes for the future, also came under scrutiny in these perceptive responses. The misogyny underlying such an outburst was explored as well as the extent to which it highlighted his desperation and fear of life in his old age.

Weaker responses focused more narrowly on Candy's story, the chronology of events, on both tiers, made reference to the shooting of his dog and how this event shows his weakness and vulnerability. There was sometimes some generality in the commentaries offered on Foundation Tier. Candy was seen as a 'kind, caring man' but there was limited support given for this view and while responses showed some sympathy for him there was often limited understanding of why he wanted to give away his money to strangers. The farm was considered to be a long-awaited fulfilment of his 'American Dream' or his friendship with George and Lennie seen as evidence of his kindness which suggested a more limited understanding of Candy's thought processes in the novel. Contextual factors were sometimes not explicitly addressed on Foundation Tier. Although examiners could sometimes credit AO4 where candidates implicitly understood how Candy was affected adversely by his age and physical disability, the various ways in which he was impacted by American society in the 1930s were not well understood.

The alternative question on 'trapped and powerless' characters was also a popular choice on both tiers. Better responses on Higher Tier focused on evaluating how far Steinbeck used these characters to highlight the cruelties and injustices of his society. Candidates on both tiers selected apt characters to consider in what ways they could be seen to be 'trapped' or 'powerless' or both. Curley's wife and Crooks were most often discussed as being particularly weak because of the prejudice and discrimination of American society at the time. At the highest level, these and other characters were considered as part of a wider picture of social exploitation of minorities. There was also sometimes an evaluation of not just how such characters were trapped but why and of how pervasive ideas of power as an entitlement for rich, white males was at the time. In a few responses, Slim was considered to be a character who epitomises a kind of inner freedom, the opposite of 'trapped'. One interesting response suggested that Slim is Steinbeck's version of a 'free man, not because he is rich but because he treats people without the prejudice that keeps them trapped'. These high-level responses showed a developed understanding of the novel as the writer's vehicle for social criticism.

Weaker responses, particularly those on Foundation Tier, tended to rely on fairly straightforward explanations of selected characters, what happened to them in the novel and some ways in which they could be considered 'trapped', usually with reference to society's racist and sexist values. While nearly all responses showed some understanding of contextual factors, weaker Foundation Tier responses tended to be brief accounts of characters' actions with one-sentence links to context, such as 'Crooks was segregated because he was black'.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Candidates showed a sound understanding of Lee's characterisation of Boo Radley and there was much sympathy and engagement with the character on both tiers. Better responses on Higher Tier were able to show how Boo is a victim of Maycomb's rigid and conformist society and their punishment of people who fail to live by a narrow set of rules, even as children. This more nuanced and thoughtful interpretation of context was sometimes impressively developed to explore the malign impact the social values of the time had on vulnerable people. Boo's draconian treatment by his father and brother over many years and the construction by Maycomb residents of the 'malevolent phantom' Boo has become was discussed in some detail with supporting references from across the novel.

For the alternative question on the theme of courage, there was often a detailed consideration and discussion of the idea of 'real' courage, particularly as opposed to what Maycomb society generally consider to be courageous. Mrs Dubose's battle with morphine and Atticus' defence of Tom Robinson, even though there was no chance of success, were most often selected as examples of courage from the novel. Examiners found higher level responses addressed the idea of 'real' courage more directly, outlining the ways in which Lee uses Atticus to undermine the kind of qualities usually considered brave or courageous in that society. His repudiation of violence with guns or fists in favour of justice and empathy gave candidates an evaluative angle which many exploited to good effect.

Weaker responses tended to focus on listing events where characters showed courage rather than considering what 'real' courage might be or what Lee wanted to say about courage. On the whole, however, the knowledge and understanding of context was impressive in Higher Tier responses to this question and was linked confidently and assuredly to the events discussed.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The first question invited candidates to discuss the ways in which Maya changes throughout the novel and this was a popular choice. Responses clearly showed genuine engagement with the text and candidates had plenty to discuss, selecting from a wide range of well-chosen incidents and events to support their points of view. Most discussed the ways in which family members like Momma, Maya's parents and Bailey influenced her in different ways and also focused on the defining moments that shaped her understanding of the prejudices around her and her increasing confidence to tackle them head-on. Better responses engaged in some complex discussion of the role of education in her life and its impact on her.

The alternative question on the presentation of Stamps was also well handled by the majority who -in their efforts to portray what life was like in the American South of the 1930s- wanted to focus on the more disturbing incidents Maya and Bailey had to live through. Most discussed hiding Uncle Willie from the lynch mob, the incident at the dentist, the incident at Mrs Cullinan's when Maya was being mistreated as a maid, and the taunting of Momma by the white girls in her yard. More able candidates also ventured into discussion of the ways Stamps was affected by poverty in the recession of the 1930s, the injustices in the education system and the reliance on religion.

Chanda's Secrets

A small number of candidates had studied this text and responses were split very evenly across the two questions. The first invited a discussion of the relationship between Chanda and Mrs Tafa and most candidates sensibly adopted the approach of charting the ways the relationship changed from the start of the novel to the end, with appropriate exploration of key incidents and events that demonstrated the changes. There was some interesting discussion of the various power struggles and differences of opinion, particularly regarding Esther. Better answers showed awareness of the shift towards honesty and mutual respect at the end of the novel. Almost all candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of conditions in sub-Saharan Africa at the time the novel was set but a discriminating factor was the amount of focused use of close textual detail.

The presentation of the theme of responsibility was equally well handled and contextual factors were similarly covered with detailed knowledge and understanding that was carefully applied to the focus of the question. Responses were interesting to mark as different approaches were employed and a diverse breadth of incidents and events covered. Some candidates focused purely on characters that had taken responsibility, exploring how and why, whereas others wanted to compare these with characters that had behaved irresponsibly - there was some particularly interesting debate on Jonah here. Overall, it was evident from the number of thoughtful responses that pupils had clearly engaged with the text. The majority of candidates knew the text well and could refer to a range of detail to support their views.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **Clear appreciation of how context shapes characters**
- **Selection of a range of apt events and quotations to develop and support thoughtful ideas**
- **Some analysis of how the writer's message is conveyed through characters and events**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- Practice in how to use the wording of a question to show knowledge and insight
- Practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked
- More focused discussion of how contextual factors affect characters' personalities, choices, ambitions, stories
- Practice in selecting detailed textual evidence to support points made

Poetry Comparison

Most candidates on both tiers understood that both poems and the comparison between them must be addressed 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 minority sacrificed a close examination of the poems themselves in trying to compare them and there were also some whose comparison between poems was much weaker than their examination of the poems as individual pieces. On the whole, however, only a few candidates on both tiers mis-managed their time and limited their achievement as a result.

Higher Tier candidates were given the rubric that 'both poets write about people's lives and relationships' and better responses focused on what the poets had to say about the break-up of the relationship in 'Ending' and the kind of life the couple in the second poem lead. The best responses began to develop interpretations which included some perceptive ideas, using the vivid images in both poems. 'Ending' was generally better understood than 'The Way We Live' although at the highest level the subtlety and ambiguity of the Feather poem provided enough challenge for candidates to show their analytical skills. Gavin Ewart's poem was widely understood to be about the experience of breaking up with a partner whose love for each other faded over time. Many candidates noticed the use of contrasting couplet lines to juxtapose the 'before' and 'after' details which chronicled the demise of the relationship. The use of similes such as 'hot as curry' and the image of electricity to represent the spark of passion in the relationship were also generally understood and commented on though were not always explored in depth and detail. Surprisingly few candidates understood the image of the 'congealing chop' and thought it referred to a sudden, violent movement – a misreading which nevertheless was consistent with other valid ideas and images.

'The Way We Live' presented more difficulty for most candidates. The best responses, however, showed a clear understanding of the disappointment and boredom experienced by the couple in the poem, but could also see how the imagery of the theatre contributes to the meaning of the poem. Some saw the theatre references as an image of fake or staged coupledness and domestic harmony: the reality presents a marked contrast of 'tired lines' and 'slumped in chairs' and the underlying implication is that all long-standing couples will end up living in this bleak state. While many middle range candidates could identify the regretful tone of 'Once we must have dreamed/Of something better', the best responses probed the subtext and the language to show how there is both melancholy and bitterness in the poet's tone.

Weaker responses sometimes looked for meaning and interpretation without close reading, misinterpreted ideas or saw some tenuous connection between meaning and rhymes, the number of stanzas or the punctuation in the poem. At this level, candidates sometimes asserted that the missing partner in 'Ending' is dead or, assuming a common idea in both poems, that the couple in Feaver's poem also broke up. There was also much discussion about the titles of the poems which in these texts did not really warrant as much attention as they were sometimes given, at the expense of ideas, meaning and interpretation of the poems themselves.

Weaker comparisons tended to focus almost exclusively on form and structure rather than ideas and meaning. Sometimes the rhymes or lines were counted and compared and devices such as enjambment or caesura were also identified, not always accurately and the effects attributed to such features were often not credible.

The Foundation Tier poems were generally quite well understood and most candidates could give an accurate summary of the content of each. Better responses focused on the different tones of the poems and could select apt references to show how the joyful reaction of the narrator in 'Remembering Snow' contributes to this tone. In 'A Winter Night' the onset of cold weather creates a tone of pity and sadness and in some Band 5 responses there was a clear understanding of how the language in the poem set this atmosphere. The sense of the transformation of a 'grubby' landscape by snow was commented on in these responses and candidates made reference to the detail in the poem to support the impression of a peaceful and joyous scene which the narrator finds mesmerising. Some responses referred to the 'mute miracle of snow' and offered some sensitive interpretation of the image. One candidate, for example, suggested that 'the snow is like a gift from heaven which changes everything about the world and makes it all brand new'.

The Teasdale poem gave candidates a clear contrasting view of the snow and the best responses could explain that this poem depicts the winter snow as dangerous and threatening in the image of the moon as 'cruel' and the wind a 'two-edged sword'. The comparison of the writer's room as 'a bit of June' also was explored in Band 5 responses as the source of the guilt which forms part of the poem's tone. While the comparison element of the task is often challenging for weaker Foundation candidates, most candidates could offer some simple, brief comments to show the different attitudes to the snow shown in the two poems.

Weaker responses relied on simple summaries of the poem's content though sometimes with little or no direct references made. The very different tone in the two poems was compared quite successfully, if simply, by many candidates. In better responses, candidates were able to locate in the poems the language which set the tone. Weaker responses tended to summarise, to say what was happening in each poem but there was little actual comparison.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- **Coverage of both poems and a developed comparison of ideas, techniques and effects**
- **Probing of subtext, tentative interpretation rooted in the poems**
- **Strong focus on images, language and effects**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **More exposure to ways in which poets use language in different ways**
- **More focus on how ideas are conveyed through imagery**
- **Careful reading of poems to avoid misunderstanding**
- **Practice in supporting ideas about mood and meaning with detailed reference to the poems**

WJEC ENGLISH LITERATURE

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UNIT 2A

General Comments

This was the third sitting of the new specification for Unit Two. There were no significant problems with the papers or with specific questions. General accessibility was equal across all texts on both tiers. Overall performance was impressive, with candidates showing detailed knowledge of the texts studied. The extent and security of this detailed knowledge worked as a strong discriminator in achieving higher marks and bands. There was also evidence of a strong general ability to address the correct Assessment Objectives for each question answered. Entry for tiers was generally effective and sensible, with candidates achieving well at each level. The most pleasing aspect of these papers was the amount of engagement with the texts studied shown by the majority of candidates. An Inspector Calls and Heroes remained the most popular text choices on Unit 2A on both tiers, although some excellent work was seen on many other texts such as About A Boy, A Taste of Honey and Othello, especially on the Higher Tier. Text choices were somewhat narrower on Foundation Tier and some texts had not been studied by anyone. There were continuing problems with Rubric Infringements, mostly (but not exclusively) on both Foundation Tier papers. Most commonly this resulted in candidates answering on multiple texts, some of which they had clearly not studied. It was a shame to read messages from candidates who were 'surprised' to be asked questions on other texts as well as Inspector Calls and Heroes, for instance. Any further efforts that can be made by centres to alleviate this trend would be worthwhile if the number of errors could be reduced as the candidate's time in an exam is vital and marks are only awarded for one text within each section of the paper.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Extract Questions:

These were generally well attempted across all the texts. There was less dipping into AO4 context than in previous years. This meant an increased and effective focus on AO1 and AO2. There was less unnecessary use of subject terminology than last year too. There was evidence that increasing attention is being paid to working through the whole extract without taking away from the time needed to complete essay responses, but there is still room for improvement. For instance, the Heroes extract was less confidently placed within the text than that for An Inspector Calls and was sometimes treated as an unseen by those who I am sure showed textual knowledge in their essay response on the same text.

For the extract on **Othello** candidates often responded with insight and maturity on Higher Tier. The distance in the marriage and Iago's controlling nature was immediately identified through 'How now? What do you here alone?' suggested as emphasising his distrust of Emilia and her limited freedom within the marriage. Emilia's character was interpreted as both obedient in fulfilling her husband's request to obtain the handkerchief and then in leaving when he instructs her to, but also bold in her retaliation, 'Do not you chide.' Her familiarity with her husband's insults was identified and candidates also discussed her attempts to capitalise on her temporary power by angling for a reward. Subtle points were made on Emilia's mistake in revealing how precious the handkerchief is to Desdemona, with one candidate suggesting that this 'fuels the fire of Iago's plan by showing how valuable an asset it really is.' Iago's soliloquy was also discussed as evidence of just how much information he is keeping from his wife who is clearly just being used as a vehicle for his plans. Iago's language when talking about Othello was explored, with attention to references to hell and the devil as revealing Iago's sadistic nature. It is worth mentioning however, that quite a significant number of candidates only commented on the extract up to Emilia's exit. Iago's soliloquy revealed a lot about his scheming personality and provided opportunity for analysis of language.

The extract for **An Inspector Calls** offered plenty of opportunity for analysis of the Inspector. On Higher tier in particular, responses demonstrated close reading and clear understanding of the Inspector's language use and means of interrogation in this part of the play. Candidates referenced the Inspector's method of summarising and his relative leniency towards Sheila due to her willingness to accept blame, as compared to the other characters. The Inspector's focus on the Birlings' abuse of power and rejection of responsibility demonstrated candidates' understanding of the prevailing themes of the play. A range of techniques were also considered, including discussion of the significance of stage directions, the Inspector's blunt, declarative mood and Priestley's use of emotive language. Candidates provided a good spread of points from across the extract, including informed discussion of the Inspector's final speech.

On Foundation Tier there was sometimes less security about when this extract happens within the play, with some suggestion that is the inspector's initial interrogation at times. Having said this there were many responses that got into the top band for Foundation by sensibly selecting a range of points from across the extract and commenting upon them relevantly.

For **A Taste of Honey** some candidates chose to read the extract as wholly romantic, and others picked up clues that Boy does not seem completely dedicated to Jo. The toy car was interpreted as him being childish in his interests, but also that he may already have a child that he is hiding from Jo. Most students linked Jo's eagerness to be married as her latching onto the first person who shows her any affection because of her dysfunctional relationship with Helen. The boy's use of 'she' was highlighted as showing a distance from Jo, and reminiscent of the way Helen speaks about her. '...a screw! Did that drop out of your head?' was read both as a jokey atmosphere between the two, or as Jo taking on some of Helen's critical approach to relationships. On both tiers it was clear to see how a wider understanding of these characters as they appear in the play as a whole helped to give a fuller appreciation of what is happening here.

For the **Heroes** extract some candidates on Higher Tier considered mood and atmosphere with insight. Points were made about Francis' efforts to be positive in presenting himself as capturing the glamour of the First World War aviators, then his realisation that he doesn't. Attention was paid to his 'face in shadow' and 'head down' as his attempts to hide his disfigurement, and the depressing atmosphere that this creates. His conversational tone was understood as encouraging the reader's sympathy, and Francis' awareness of others' judgement and doubts about his future furthered this. References to money were read both as positive in the security it afforded Francis, and as sad in that the money cannot compensate for his ruined life. Mrs Belander's reaction to Francis was explored as upsetting, or, alternatively, as positive in that a lack of recognition from her was what Francis was hoping for.

On Foundation Tier candidates that were able to track through the extract commenting and showing their personal thoughts and feelings regarding the language that Cormier used to present Francis were very successful. Some responses treated this extract as an unseen response, presumably due to its placement at the start of the novel. Unfortunately, this prevented candidates from showing their full understanding of Francis. Similarly, some candidates lacked focus on the text and used the opportunity to discuss Francis and why he found himself disfigured at the start of the novel.

Real insight into Will's character was shown in the response to the extract from **About A Boy** on Higher Tier, with exploration of his need to appear cool rather than show any real enthusiasm. Will's sense of superiority was discussed through the idea that the other cars, the venue and the people were all beneath him. There was sustained exploration of character with attention to Hornby's language choices. There was sensitive exploration of how quick Will is to criticise the exclamation mark on the poster as 'trying too hard' when he is actually trying ridiculously hard himself in his attempts to find a woman. There was considered discussion of Hornby's use of 'frogmarched' to describe the way Will envisages being removed from the centre. It was suggested that the imagined drama of this revealed Will's concern with preserving his dignity, and also the unlikeliness of it happening as a rather childish flight of fancy on Will's part. His final question 'Have I come to the right place?' was read as both literal and metaphorical, recognising his role as an outsider in life. Foundation responses were rare for this text.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Direct response to the terms of the question set rather than general comments on the extract**
- **Selection of a range of relevant detail from across the extract to support discussion**
- **Ability to use wider knowledge of the text to access subtext in the extract or to aid precise discussion of the events and characters presented**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Sticking to the question set rather than making more general comments**
- **Avoiding treating the extract as an unseen piece**
- **Using comments about structure to support comments on language. Why is that particular word effective in describing that character at this specific point in the text?**

Essay Questions

There were popular choices for some texts and on others a more even split between the two options. Greatest sympathy and other more evaluative tasks (how far do you agree etc.) continue to give candidates the opportunity to explore their own readings of texts and demonstrate a more flexible and applicable set of knowledge. For instance, for *An Inspector Calls*, many did extremely well on the Sheila question on each tier, but others wrote about her for the sympathy question instead and effectively combined this demonstration of detailed knowledge with comments on other characters that helped to demonstrate an overview of the play. This doesn't work for everyone and all types of questions allow for achievement at all levels. There was strong evidence that most candidates knew which type of question suited them best and were prepared for all eventualities.

There was much evidence of enthusiasm for the texts studied and this informed many of the most impressive responses.

For the first question on **Othello** candidates drew on the gullibility and jealous nature of Othello in order to argue that he was his own worst enemy. There was also consideration of his poor character judgement, and the obsessive love which prevented him from separating his private and public life. Most candidates also considered the role of other characters in Othello's downfall, arguing reasonably that Iago should be considered Othello's worst enemy in being so manipulative that virtually anyone would have been convinced by him. Informed considerations of context strengthened these arguments and included discussion of Othello's position as a man of colour in a white society and subversion of Elizabethan codes of conduct by eloping with Desdemona, then, later, striking her in public.

There were some extremely sophisticated responses to the question about trust, with candidates not just discussing which characters trusted each other but rather considering the power inherent in trust. A range of characters and situations were considered, such as Roderigo's trust in Iago, Brabantio's initial faith in his daughter in asserting that she would not elope, Othello's shifting trust in Cassio and Desdemona, and the characters' final realisation of Iago's abuse of their trust and how he had capitalised on this. Candidates' argument often centred around Iago and the epithet 'honest Iago' was used as a point from which to explore characters' reactions to him. Othello's overly trusting 'free and open nature, that thinks men honest that but seem to be so' was also considered. An interesting approach was to explore Desdemona's unwavering trust in Othello, even to the point of her death where she blames herself for her own murder.

Context was embedded extremely productively, with consideration of racial tensions, the state's misplaced trust in Othello when his wits are called into question and the role of misogyny in Othello's willingness to trust Iago over his wife.

For **An Inspector Calls** the question about Sheila proved popular on both tiers, and encouraged insightful responses. The change in Sheila was tracked carefully, with more subtle responses exploring that this change is gradual. It was evident which candidates knew the play really well through examination of Sheila's character beyond her behaviour in Milward's. These candidates examined Sheila's initial reaction to the news of Eva's death, her superficiality in asking if Eva was pretty, her comments that the news had spoiled her evening, and her immature reaction in running from the room. This examination was embedded in context, with suggestions that her concentration on attractiveness could be due to its currency in a society that focused on a woman's worth as marriage material. Her immaturity was tied to her protected life as a member of the upper middle class. Beyond her interrogation, candidates also explored her intuitive nature and emerging role as an accomplice to the Inspector.

On some occasions, more often on Foundation Tier, this question was sometimes approached purely using the extract to inform the candidates' response. This resulted in lower marks as the responses showed little knowledge of the text or character as a whole. More successful Foundation Tier candidates were able to weave context into their answer when discussing Sheila's treatment of Eva as well as her relationship with her parents and Gerald. They saw that her treatment of Eva was a direct result of her position and the class system.

Greatest sympathy was also a popular question, with a wide number of characters being identified as deserving of sympathy. Some candidates chose to focus on one character throughout their response, whereas others explored the extent to which different characters were deserving of sympathy before selecting one. Both approaches were convincing on both tiers. Eva proved the most popular choice, with sensitive arguments being put forward and strengthened by productive contextual reference. Arguments for Sheila and Eric were also presented, with some particularly strong arguments presented for Eric as, effectively, having a loveless upbringing. Some candidates chose to argue sympathy for Gerald due to his support of Eva, which was a relevant argument. This approach was stronger however, when candidates referenced the Inspector's evidence that Gerald had made Eva happy for a while, and less successful when arguing that their love was only thwarted by class barriers.

Some candidates, more often on Foundation Tier, misread the question slightly in various ways and wrote about which character shows sympathy, or which character the inspector shows most sympathy too etc. The Foundation Tier candidates that answered this question were often quite passionate over who they sympathised with the most. There were some very interesting and emotive responses for the characters of Eric and the Inspector. Those that sympathised with Eric really showed clarity of understanding in the relationship between the different generations and the impact the parents had on the children. The candidates that showed sympathy for the Inspector did so with an awareness of Priestley using the character to voice his opinions and concerns regarding society at the time. On both tiers the application of a secure, detailed knowledge of the play was profitable and developed even the most engaged responses.

For **A Taste of Honey** and the question about Helen and Jo most answers presented a balanced argument which looked at the dysfunctional relationship and Helen's lack of care for Jo, but also evidenced her concern in not wanting Jo to repeat her own mistakes. This was evidenced through Helen's suggestion that Jo attend art school and her later return to Jo when she hears about the pregnancy. Context was embedded well with a clear understanding of the relationship as being outside the fifties' nuclear family, along with judgement of inter-racial relationships and single mothers. The relationship was presented as both lacking in affection and, alternatively, being one of love masked by petty squabbles. Both interpretations were equally convincing.

For the sympathy question Jo and Geof proved the most popular choices, but sensitive arguments were also put forward for Helen. Jo's dysfunctional life was a source of sympathy, and this was balanced against her lack of appreciation of Geof, and her violent comments about her unborn child, claiming 'I'll kill it when it comes', although there was recognition that this outburst is a reflection of her insecurities and her poor parental role model. Context was used to inform characters' behaviours, particularly with reference to Geof. His plea, 'Marry me, Jo' was cited as evidence of him trying to be accepted in a homophobic fifties' society.

The question about Nicole for **Heroes** proved popular. On Higher Tier there were some candidates who discussed Nicole's importance well but with very little acknowledgement of Cormier's craft at all, or, alternatively, those who took a heavily language-based approach at the expense of constructing argument. There were also many who did select key descriptions of Nicole and use them to support a response that showed a clear understanding of her character despite the challenging chronological structure of the book. Top responses on Higher Tier often addressed the issue of her importance to the novel more directly, suggesting that she is more than just a love interest for the main character.

On both tiers accuracy of knowledge was again all. On Foundation the range of accurate references was sometimes narrower and there was some loss of focus at times as discussions of Larry and Francis took over. However, there were still many well informed and engaged responses that easily reached the top band of this tier.

For the other question on Higher Tier candidates presented convincing arguments for a number of different characters as either heroic or not. Most candidates chose to debate Nicole, Francis or Larry. Some interesting arguments were put forward when the idea of the veterans as heroes was explored. This idea was best applied by those who had already considered several of the major characters in detail and then used this as a closing argument to show the full answer to the question.

For Foundation Tier the essay discussing who doesn't deserve to be a hero generated a range of responses. The majority of candidates began their essays with why Larry should not be called a hero. More often than not in the same essay this character was followed by Francis for his betrayal of Nicole and his inability to act to stop the rape. Others were also able to further their discussion of Francis and why he should not be called a hero by discussing his attempt at suicide as an unheroic characteristic. Some candidates considered Francis' mission and pursuit of justice for Nicole as an unheroic act of vengeance which ultimately was a selfish and self-indulgent act. A clear understanding of the timeline of the book again proved essential in making these responses convincing.

For **About A Boy** the question about Marcus provoked detailed and informed responses and often an impressive spread of points from across the novel. The issue of change was discussed with understanding. There was informed discussion of the influence of other characters on him, most notably his mother, Will and Ellie, who were all presented as agents for Marcus' change. Hornby's craft was discussed, with an understanding of the alternating focus of chapters in revealing the characters and the later combining of Will and Marcus' chapters as signifying the links in their lives.

On occasion some responses were extremely similar, with more than just the same series of points, perhaps suggesting they had been learnt almost word for word. Although this approach may well provide students with security, it does not always allow for a response that is precisely focused on the demands of the given question. These responses demonstrated that students had learnt about Marcus, but did not necessarily look at how Hornby presented the changes in his character.

The task about adults and children proved a popular and successful question. Really thoughtful responses were constructed here, with candidates establishing clear arguments. In the main, candidates did not just present what the characters did but crafted well-reasoned and sustained arguments which debated how age-appropriate their behaviours were.

One particularly interesting approach was to look at the word 'try' and discuss to what extent Marcus is attempting to be mature from choice and to what extent he is forced to play a role created by his mother. Most candidates concentrated on Will and Marcus, but many also brought in Fiona and Ellie, and often Rachel and Suzie. A wealth of relevant detail was often brought to the table in these responses.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **The ability to apply detailed knowledge in a flexible way to meet the exact demands of the question, including context where appropriate**
- **The ability to comment on language use, structure and AO2 in general whilst building a successful and pertinent response**
- **Combining an engaged and enthusiastic approach to the question with the demonstration of detailed knowledge from across the text, again including context where appropriate**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **A better focus on the exact demands of the question set rather than just using it as a starting point.**
- **Using context, when appropriate, to support detailed arguments throughout discussion, rather than just occasionally or separately**
- **A greater range of detail in some responses. Use the opportunity to apply detailed knowledge of the text rather than give a brief response**

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2019

UNIT 2B HIGHER AND FOUNDATION TIERS

General Comments

This was the third sitting of the new specification for Unit Two. There were no significant problems with any of the papers or with specific questions. General accessibility was equal across all texts on both tiers. Overall performance was impressive, with candidates showing detailed knowledge of the texts studied. There was also evidence of a strong general ability to address the correct Assessment Objectives for each question answered. Entry for tiers was generally effective and sensible, with candidates achieving well at each level. The most pleasing aspect of these papers was the amount of engagement with the texts studied shown by the majority of candidates. On both tiers the popular texts remain Blood Brothers, A View From the Bridge, Lord of the Flies and A Christmas Carol. View is increasing in popularity on both tiers. Text choices were somewhat narrower on Foundation Tier and some texts had not been studied by anyone. Silas Marner made a reasonable showing on both tiers and it was very well attempted when studied. It has a relatively straightforward narrative structure that does help students to engage with the text as a whole and show detailed understanding. There were continuing problems with Rubric Infringements, mostly (but not exclusively) on both Foundation Tier papers. Most commonly this resulted in candidates answering on multiple texts, some of which they had clearly not studied. Any further efforts that can be made by centres to alleviate this trend would be worthwhile if the number of errors could be reduced as the candidate's time in an exam is vital and marks are only awarded for one text within each section of the paper.

Comments on individual questions/sections

On Unit 2B

Extract Questions

These were generally well attempted across all the texts. There was less dipping into AO4 context than in previous years. This meant an increased and effective focus on AO1 and AO2. There was less unnecessary use of subject terminology than last year too. There was evidence that increasing attention is being paid to working through the whole extract without taking away from the time needed to complete essay responses, but there is still room for improvement.

Understanding of the extracts for Blood Brothers and A Christmas Carol was generally sound, but some candidates took events literally in the extract for Lord of the Flies. Some of these candidates saw this as the killing of a pig or beast rather than Simon. This does reinforce the need for candidates to have a secure knowledge of all major events in a text.

The **Blood Brothers** extract proved very accessible on both tiers. There was plenty for candidates to discuss. On both tiers many focused on the difference between the social classes evident in the ways in which Eddie and Mickey speak e.g. 'Mam' vs. 'Mummy'. Candidates wrote well when considering the actions of Mickey and Eddie, especially in their discussion of the dictionary. Some candidates were able to discuss how Mickey seemed to want to save face by not admitting that he didn't know what one was. Some candidates picked up on Eddie's rebellious nature and how he was going against his mother's wishes by playing in the area. They also discussed how quickly Eddie seems to idolise Mickey, and how this was similar to the way Mickey idolises Sammy. There were many engaged responses on both tiers and it was interesting to note that all the points above appeared in responses from both tiers. The main general difference between the tiers was the ability to show how these points were presented (AO2). Understanding (AO1) was not lacking on either tier.

Candidates responded well to the **A View From the Bridge** question on both tiers, tracking the extract closely. Many were able to place the events within the play, discussing the extract's dramatic importance. Some foundation candidates struggled to write at length whilst others on both tiers discussed superficial aspects, such as whether a character would be shouting or not.

Candidates who covered the full extract did well, picking up on the importance of the closing lines of the extract. Some considered how his 'slowly' hanging up may signal his regret as he realises the enormity of what he has just done. This was noted by some on both tiers.

At the top of Higher Tier, some candidates discussed the author's craft and the genre of the play. Many considered how, as an audience we know where it's going and what Eddie will do. They discussed the loss of morals and social code as Eddie goes back on his word, many were able to link this to his opinions at the start of the play and how we are now seeing a man destroyed by jealousy. This was done without losing focus on the extract itself and the behaviour of Eddie and Alfieri.

Some Foundation responses seemed unsure about the role or character of Alfieri, but in general they were well informed and engaged.

For **A Christmas Carol** many on both tiers discussed the extract in isolation without considering its place in the novel making comments about the reader wanting to read on as they don't know what will be on the gravestone. At the top end of Higher Tier many focused on word level analysis discussing the neglect evident in the extract and how this had already been seen in the novel but also how it contrasts to the description of Tiny Tim's grave which is green and looked after. They also discussed Scrooge's fear of the unknown, or his fear as he knows what his fate is likely to now be. Some considered the aim of this part of the novel, to force Scrooge's change and why, as a result, it is the most fearful part of the novel.

On Foundation Tier successful responses used a range of selected detail to appreciate some of this same tension, often in a more straightforward but still effective way. The description of the ghost pointing the way helped those with detailed knowledge to place and understand this extract almost immediately and it is important that, on both tiers, candidates look out for this sort of helpful cue.

Some candidates on both tiers responded well to the **Lord of the Flies** extract, tracking mood and atmosphere closely. Many were able to discuss the importance of the 'steady pulse' and the 'single organism' and how this contributed to the rise in tension. Word level analysis was a key feature in these responses and candidates were able to discuss nuances in meaning.

The terror and violence created by the tribe and their frenzied chants were a common focus with candidates considering the choices made by Golding and how these contributed to mood and atmosphere. There was some misunderstanding of what the 'blue-white scar' was with many candidates discussing how this was symbolic of happiness and calm.

At the top end, candidates were able to discuss how mood and atmosphere changed in the final paragraph discussing the symbolism of the water and the realisation of how 'small' the beast was.

On both tiers, though more frequently on Foundation, there was some quite basic lack of understanding of the extract and this key event. As suggested in the general comments, a very literal approach was taken, almost as if the extract were an unseen. This led many to miss the mood and atmosphere as they talked about the killing of a real beast or even a pig.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Direct response to the terms of the question set rather than general comments on the extract**
- **Selection of a range of relevant detail from across the extract to support discussion**
- **Ability to use wider knowledge of the text to access subtext in the extract and to aid precise discussion of the events and characters presented**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Sticking to the question set rather than making more general comments**
- **Avoiding treating the extract as an unseen, applying key knowledge of wider events to show appreciation of the aspect of the extract asked about**
- **Using comments about structure to support comments on language. Why is that particular word effective in describing that character at this specific point in the text?**

Essay Questions

There were popular choices for some texts and on others a more even split between the two options. More evaluative tasks (how far do you agree etc.) continue to give candidates the opportunity to explore their own readings of texts and demonstrate a more flexible and applicable set of knowledge. This doesn't work for everyone and all types of questions allow for achievement at all levels. There was evidence that most candidates knew which type of question suited them best and were prepared for all eventualities.

On occasion candidates have prepared specific thematic essays and are determined to squeeze them in no matter what the question. Lord of the Flies, for both tiers, was an example of this. One option on each paper asked candidates to talk about selfish characters but the answers became about savagery almost instantly on many occasions, suggesting that was the question that had been prepared for.

Whilst it is advisable and understandable that candidates be prepared for questions on all major characters and themes in a text it is the flexibility of a candidate to use detailed knowledge of the text (as well as its context where applicable) to answer the question set that will impress examiners.

There was much evidence of enthusiasm for the texts studied and this informed many of the most impressive responses. There was less awkward use of context unrelated to the task or to detail than in previous years. It was also good to see less AO4 discussed for *Blood Brothers* where historical knowledge is not often particularly productive and where AO4 is not being assessed.

For the first option on **Blood Brothers** candidates demonstrated a good level of understanding of Mrs Johnstone (on both tiers) and drew on a wide selection of evidence from the play to support their discussion. Common events were discussed: the giving up of her baby, the locket and the final scene with the twins.

On Higher Tier, some responses focused on superstition and not the character explicitly. Some were able to turn this around, suggesting that Mrs Johnstone's main importance was her superstition and how this drives events in the play. There was a lot of discussion of Marilyn Monroe and how she foreshadows Mrs Johnstone's misfortune in the play.

In many of the more successful Higher Tier responses discussion of Mrs Johnstone's character was more sensitive, and they discussed the stagecraft and how this contributed to her development, e.g. the narrator's presence reminding us that she is never free and that a setback is always close by. Successful candidates were able to explore how the audience is manipulated from the start as Mrs Johnstone is described as 'wicked' before we meet her. Many also considered the role of fate and how she is unable to break the 'curse' which makes her a sympathetic character.

Foundation tier responses were often engaged and detailed. Limitations appeared when candidates could not identify main different points in the play to discuss or chose them from one part of the play. Tracking through events rather than jumping from the beginning to the end is still an area for Foundation candidates to develop in character-based responses.

On Higher Tier responses to the jealousy and anger question varied. Some candidates focused solely on the validity of the statement and how far it could be seen to be true. Others engaged with the statement but argued that other factors (mainly superstition) had a stronger influence on the outcome of the play.

As candidates moved up the bands, they were more focused on the question, referring to Mrs Lyons' jealousy of Mrs Johnstone, for example. They also considered basic ways in which Mickey was jealous of Eddie and Eddie's jealousy of Mickey and Linda's relationship.

At the highest level, the 'how far' aspect of the question was well considered. Candidates drew on a range of ideas and evidence such as Mrs Lyons' reaction to the locket and the ironic nature of Eddie's jealousy of Mickey's relationship with his mother and how he seems to want Mrs Johnstone as his mother, too. Anger was considered as both an immediate cause at the moment of the shooting but also as something that had built up alongside jealousy during the play.

On Foundation Tier there were many approaches to the task about who or what is responsible for the death of the twins. The less successful ones blamed a single incident or factor without considering characters and events in any more detail or depth. Superstition was also not an easy route although many chose to take it. The more successful approach was to consider some of the factors and characters, and to show, with the support of detail, how they could be considered responsible.

For **A View From the Bridge** the task about Catherine was a popular question on both tiers and candidates responded well to the character although some did lose focus, going off track to discuss Eddie at length. Many tracked through the play, looking at how Catherine develops as a character, going from a naïve 'kid' to an independent woman, mainly demonstrating this through her relationship with Eddie. Candidates were able to discuss how much Catherine relies on Eddie at the start of the play, seeking his approval at all times in comparison to the end of the play when she turns on him, focusing her loyalty on Rodolpho instead.

Some candidates began to explore Catherine as being crucial in the downfall of Eddie and her being his fatal flaw. They recognised that her behaviour and relationship with Eddie changes once she understands the true nature of Eddie's feelings. They also recognised Catherine's sexual awakening and her criticism of Beatrice as a wife to Eddie and how this showed a more negative side to Catherine's character.

At the top end of the Higher Tier responses, candidates discussed Catherine as a device within the play, addressing her importance directly. There were also sensitive ideas expressed, the imagery of her as a little bird representing her innocence and how by the end, she has matured and flies the nest. Some candidates discussed her as a manipulator, someone who is conscious of the way she is behaving towards Eddie at the start of the play.

On Foundation Tier there was some effective use of the bullet points, but sometimes at the exclusion of looking at any overall change or development in her character.

For the other Higher Tier option there was a mixture of candidates who agreed with the statement about jealousy and its destructive influence and those who discussed the 'how far element' of the question. There were a lot of ideas explored including Rodolpho's jealousy of the American way of life, Beatrice's jealousy of Catherine and Eddie's jealousy of Rodolpho.

Moving through the bands, there was a wider discussion of a range of jealousies seen in the play including sexual jealousy and emotional jealousy. They considered how Eddie's jealousy was a driving force, causing his own character to be destroyed.

The jealousy question on Foundation tier was not a popular choice, although there were some engaged and well-informed responses.

Fred was a popular choice on both tiers for **A Christmas Carol**. Some candidates on both tiers struggled with this question at times, mistaking Fred for Bob Cratchit. Context was often embedded well here, considering Fred as Dickens' own mouthpiece in the novel. There was a pattern of students across the board, quoting Dickens as using this text as a 'sledgehammer to the middle class'. Many successful candidates discussed the use of Fred as a juxtaposition to Scrooge's character and as a tool to show what Scrooge could be especially in stave 4 and his kindness to the Cratchit family. Some strong responses discussed more subtle aspects to Fred's character e.g. his symbolism of light imagery, his representing Christmas spirit and his Christian characteristics and messages: forgiveness, benevolence etc.

On both tiers an accurate knowledge of the book and its context was needed to answer this question. It was essential to have an idea of the context of the book as something more than just the tale of Scrooge becoming less mean, although even here there were comparisons to be drawn.

On Foundation tier the bullet points proved helpful, but many responses were still not developed.

On both tiers some of the candidates attempting the question about children had little to say and many responses were very brief as a result. Responses were more successful when they considered the significance and message spread by children in the novel and their emotive nature. Many of the strong responses discussed Dickens' reasons for campaigning for children in the novel, discussing a range of the children presented. Some made strong cases for Scrooge's formative years having moulded him into the man he becomes, exploring how kind characters like Fan and Fezziwig were unable to change him permanently. These candidates also considered the contrast between the Cratchits and Belle's children to the young Scrooge and how this demonstrated that money does not bring happiness. Some candidates on both tiers made good use of the characters of Ignorance and Want to develop their responses, but there was some misunderstanding of what they represent at times, especially on Foundation tier.

The question about Ralph in **Lord of The Flies** was generally answered well on both tiers with a lot of detailed knowledge of the character demonstrated. In places, historical context was tagged on to essays which made it less successful. Candidates who embedded context, especially the social context, into their analysis were often more confident in their discussion of its importance.

Many candidates on both tiers were able to discuss Ralph in contrast to Jack and some made valid comparisons to how Golding physically presents them as well as their symbolic and contextual similarities and differences. They noted how Ralph remains civilised and his desire throughout the novel to be rescued. They also considered how Ralph tries to keep the boys on the island civilised by maintaining the rules and routines of home.

Some more successful candidates were able to discuss some of the more negative aspects of Ralph's character such as his early treatment of Piggy. There were also some who were able to draw on the ending of the novel and how Ralph's innocence has been somewhat broken by his new-found knowledge of evil in the world. There was some sensitive discussion about the naval officer representing Ralph's father (due to his role in the navy) and how this did mean that Ralph's belief that his father would save them sort of came true.

Foundation tier responses again relied on accurate knowledge for success. The bullet points were used successfully on most occasions to structure responses but errors such as saying that Ralph is the only one not involved in the death of Simon (which is also the extract) sometimes led to wider assertions about his angelic nature that had not been supported.

On Higher Tier, some struggled to consider the question about the boys being selfish fully, simply changing the question to savagery and loss of civilisation. At the lower end, candidates struggled to develop their ideas or give ample textual evidence.

More successful candidates discussed how the boys become more selfish as they lose civilisation. This of course included savage behaviour but considered from a less direct perspective. Candidates were able to discuss those characters who do not demonstrate selfish characteristics such as Simon and Ralph.

At the top, candidates discussed the slow descent into selfishness which Jack goes through. They were also able to consider Ralph's reaction to other character's selfishness such as the boys letting the fire go out so that they could go and hunt. Candidates considered the flip side of the question well, demonstrating an understanding of those characters who remain selfless throughout the novel.

Very few candidates attempted the Foundation version of this question but some were able to identify legitimate examples in detail.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- The ability to apply detailed knowledge in a flexible way to meet the exact demands of the question, including context where appropriate
- The ability to comment on language use, structure and AO2 in general whilst building a successful and pertinent response
- Combining an engaged and enthusiastic approach to the question with the demonstration of detailed knowledge from across the text, again including context where appropriate

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- A better focus on the exact demands of the question set rather than just using it as a starting point.
- Using context, when appropriate, to support detailed arguments throughout discussion, rather than just occasionally or separately
- A greater range of detail in some responses. Use the opportunity to apply detailed knowledge of the text rather than give a brief response

WJEC ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2019

UNIT 3 NEA

General Comments

Generally, there were very few problems with the administrative aspects and those responsible for the compilation and despatch of the samples should be congratulated on a job well done. This is particularly the case in large centres with multiple teachers where the organisation of the process is particularly burdensome.

In most cases, if the sample had to be altered for some reason, there was an indication of the reason, usually in a letter from the teacher responsible. It is important that such information is provided for the moderator as if it is not, the centre has to be contacted for an explanation. There were occasions when incorrect marks had been entered on IAMIS. Moderators have the authority to change such marks on the system but obviously they can only do this for the sample folders and the rest of the entry does not receive this type of safeguard. It is vital that marks are checked within the centre before submission to the Board.

As noted in previous reports, if copies of the texts used by the candidates are included with the essays it is important that the teacher responsible has made it clear that any annotations were made during the assessment session. It must be remembered that candidates are not allowed any kind of pre-prepared notes during the writing of the essays.

The number of staples used has this year was reduced. It would be pleasing to see them eliminated altogether since they slow the moderation process as they often have to be removed to allow access to the essays. Treasury tags are greatly to be preferred. Similarly poly-pockets are unpopular as again they delay the moderation process. Some centres feel it is necessary to use cardboard folders for each candidate's work. This is not required and on a practical level, increases the cost of postage.

Very occasionally, moderators had to ask our colleagues in Cardiff to request copies of JCQ Forms 10 and 15. The former is the request for 'Special Consideration', most often used when an inappropriate task has been attempted. The completion of Form 15 is a requirement when marked work has been lost. It is appreciated that essays can go missing even in the best-regulated centres. However, it is essential for this form to be completed before an examination organisation can accept the mark. These forms can be downloaded from the JCQ website.

Having made these points, it must also be stated that the majority of centres presented the folders in a user-friendly fashion and moderators are always grateful when this is the case.

There were very few occasions when incorrect tasks and texts had been used and many centres used the sample tasks published with the set text list.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

The themes for the Shakespeare assessment were 'Parents and Children' and 'Loyalty/disloyalty'. The former was the more popular with the application of the theme to 'Romeo and Juliet' being by far the most attempted task. Essays on the adult Capulets' treatment of their daughter made up the majority of the responses across the whole cohort. This was expected and unsurprising as it was an accessible task, providing an opportunity to candidates of all abilities to show some knowledge of the text at least. Having said this, while it was relatively easy to gain middle range marks on the task, it was more difficult to write a response which pushed the marks up into Band 5. Coverage of the text was the first issue. The best responses looked at least at the relevant sections of Act I scenes ii and iii, Act III scenes iv and v, Act IV scene v and Act V scene iii. Some candidates also considered the Prologue as a guide to the action and quickly filled in any necessary details to aid the eloquent flow of the essay. This ensured the requirement that the work must 'show appreciation of a whole play by Shakespeare' (Non-Examination Assessment Tasks document) was fulfilled. Those candidates who did not cover all of these areas of the text put themselves at a disadvantage since the scenes all investigate the change in familial relationships.

Those candidates who covered the appropriate scenes and were able to justify their views of the changing relationships through clear and apt textual reference often produced very good work indeed. As always, such success was built upon a solid framework of understanding of the text and an ability to investigate the nuances of Shakespeare's language.

When the title attempted was generalised (e.g. "Consider the relationship between parents and children in 'Romeo and Juliet'"), the better candidates considered the Montagues' concern for Romeo and Romeo's own view of his parents. Obviously this was not a large section of the essay but it allowed an interesting comparison between how different rules applied to the nurturing of male and female teenagers.

This theme was only rarely considered in relation to other plays. There was, however, very interesting work on the three father/child relationships in 'The Merchant of Venice' and some centres looked at Hamlet's treatment of his mother. Lear and his daughters featured in some centres' work and occasionally the bullying of Baptista by his daughters Katherina and Bianca made an appearance.

The second theme, 'Loyalty/disloyalty' was also used in relation to 'Romeo and Juliet' with tasks like 'Discuss Juliet's loyalty to her parents' but the bulk of the responses on this topic were based on 'Macbeth'. The task most attempted looked at Macbeth's loyalty to himself, though some candidates considered his loyalty to his wife and/or Duncan. Coverage of the text was an issue in some responses. Those looking at the protagonist's loyalty to Duncan found that there was not much to write about after his death and thus did not show 'appreciation of the whole play'. In the work from those considering his loyalty to his wife, the response often stopped at the point where he has Banquo murdered, ignoring the final dissolution of the marriage in Act V. There was not a problem with text coverage when candidates attempted the interesting task 'Macduff's loyalty is to Scotland alone'. As in the 'Romeo and Juliet' responses, excellent work was evident from those who knew the text thoroughly and were thus able to disentangle the relationship.

Loyalty as a theme was rarely considered in the context of other Shakespeare plays though the task based on Antonio's loyalty to Bassanio in 'The Merchant of Venice' proved to be an excellent title.

In work on both major Shakespeare texts, it was sometimes evident that the candidates had only read a few scenes from the play. While it is accepted that the focus in any essay in Section A will be on specific areas of the play, it should be evident that the candidate can range outside those specific scenes. The ability to cross-reference is an important skill since it encourages intelligent overviews.

It was very pleasing to see the candidates' engagement with the texts, particularly 'Romeo and Juliet' with its easily relatable problems for teenagers. On the whole their views on the behaviour of Juliet's parents was balanced with an awareness that, for what ever reasons, they wanted the best for their daughter.

Section B

The theme for this section was 'Places and People', a sufficiently wide topic which gave the candidates plenty of room for manoeuvre. It was pleasing to see the variety of combinations offered. While all the poems made an appearance in the responses, by far the most popular pairing was 'In Cardigan Bay' with 'A Peasant'. Rather like the parent/child task on 'Romeo and Juliet', this was a superficially easy task and many candidates were satisfied to work on the surface details of the poems. Again there was a good sense of engagement with the texts and plenty to offer in terms of links and comparisons. The more able could see that the 'A Peasant' was more than a description of a hill farmer and that Thomas was thinking of the emotionless stoical aspect of the man and his suggestion of Iago's prototypical significance.

Equally successful was the linking of 'Welsh Landscape' with 'Cwm Farm near Capel Curig' since here there was a clear difference of opinion about the views of Wales and Welsh culture. Some of the more able candidates who tackled this combination were clearly enraged with the apparent insult to their homeland presented by RS Thomas, though there was also an awareness that the picture in the other poem presented a backward looking nostalgia that was not entirely healthy. These two poems made the candidates think about their own views of the country they live in.

The linking of 'Toast' with 'Return to Cardiff' was also popular, though the work on the latter poem was generally not strong. Candidates did, however, grasp Sheenagh Pugh's delight in the 'builders' bums', as many candidates phrased it, and they clearly enjoyed the vernacular light-hearted nature of the verse and found it relatively easy to compare it with Abse's darker picture of Cardiff.

'Caroline: a County Life' and 'Let's go to Barry Island' was another combination which seemed to engage the candidates, covering as it did two very different places and marriages. Idris Davies' poem was rightly seen as a joyous picture of a working marriage in a low-income family that allowed many points of comparison with the 'County' set and the failed marriage leading to the decline into alcoholism of Caroline. Both poems are rich in detail to investigate, an opportunity grasped firmly by many who attempted it.

Care is taken in the choice of the selected poems to ensure a good mix of relatively straightforward material and more testing verse. This sometimes resulted in the candidates outpaced by the choices made. 'Fern Hill', the longest and probably the most complex poem in the selection, for example, proved to be rather too testing for some candidates who worked on it and this left moderators wondering if they would have been better employed tackling something less challenging.

Moderators' general opinion was that the candidates had enjoyed reading and studying the verse and that they had been engaged in the writing of their essays. It was pleasing to see that the AO3 aspect is now receiving more consideration.

Assessment

Many centres had produced a reliable rank order and appropriate marks. More often than not in such centres there had clearly been some form of effective internal cross moderation. Such centres and their teachers are to be applauded for this achievement. Elsewhere though there were problems with the assessment, which led either to teacher/centre scaling or a remark of a teacher or centre's work. In virtually all cases this was necessary because of generosity in the awarding of the marks.

In Section A, one of the reasons for scaling has already been touched on above. Where the range of text covered was too limited, a high AO1 mark was necessarily reduced. For example, if a candidate had not covered Act I scene ii in her/his appraisal of Capulet's relationship with his daughter, a vital piece of evidence was clearly missing since it is here that the benign Capulet is seen. Without this evidence his later behaviour especially when talking to Paris in Act III scene iv and his outburst in Act III scene v do not tell the full story of his relationship with Juliet. Similarly his outpouring of grief in the final Act, which perhaps shows his true feelings, is an important part of the jigsaw. In the same way, if a candidate omitted some consideration of how Macbeth is presented in the first part of the drama, clearly an accurate survey of his descent from loyalty to treachery has not been achieved. In both cases, the Band 4 criterion 'Candidates can select and evaluate relevant textual details' has not been met.

The AO1 criteria also cover the selection of textual support. Generally this means choosing appropriate quotations from the text to illustrate the point being raised. If a candidate writes assertively without such support, then clearly the AO1 mark cannot be high.

In Section B, similar aspects are important. To gain a high mark, coverage of the content of the chosen poems should be well developed. For example, when writing about 'Caroline: a County Life', a failure to mention the woman's descent into alcoholism and eventual death would indicate an uncertain grasp of the important features of her life and such a failure would necessitate a reduction of a generous AO1 mark. In Section B, it is perhaps easier to choose appropriate textual references though if the work were to be virtually devoid of any such support, again a high AO1 mark would need to be reduced.

In AO2, often merit was given for AO1 skills, like choosing an appropriate reference. To gain credit in this AO, the candidate needs to investigate the language. In both Sections to gain a Band 3 mark, candidates are expected to be 'able to recognise and make simple comments on particular features of style and structure'. If, for example, a candidate correctly identifies a metaphor, to gain a Band 3 mark she/he would need to make a 'simple comment' upon it. Simply identifying the figure of speech would only justify a Band 2 mark ('generalised comments on stylistic effects'). To gain a higher Band mark there would need to be an investigation of how the figure of speech works. For example, based on Lady Macbeth's comment about her husband that he is 'too full of the milk of human kindness', if a candidate said this was a metaphor she/he would perhaps gain a Band 2 mark. If she/he went on and simply commented that the word 'milk' suggested something good or innocent then a Band 3 mark would be a possibility. If she/he then went on to say something about a mother's milk and how this was life giving and represented a mother's nurturing love then the candidate could move to Band 4 or even, with a little more development, Band 5. However, the figure of speech needs to be identified correctly. Moderators report occasions this year when an incorrectly named piece of imagery had been ticked and credited. The same is true when a candidate names a part of speech. It is probably advisable not to name one unless the candidate is absolutely certain to be correct. Naming a part of speech is unlikely to add much to the credit and failing to be accurate is likely to weaken the reader's opinion of the writer.

Care also needs to be taken with the use of the language of literature. If a candidate claims that both 'A Peasant' and 'In Cardigan Market' are sonnets, as many did, she/he is displaying a lack of understanding of the term. Because this has a negative effect on the marker, it may have been better for the candidate not to mention the point at all. Similarly, the candidate who claimed that Capulet speaks in 'free verse' has only betrayed her/his lack of understanding of the term.

As suggested above, work on the AO3 aspect was stronger this year but often the marks given were generous, especially when limited to superficial aspects. For example, again using the popular 'A Peasant'/'In Cardigan Market' pairing, a candidate who only noted that both characters smell, work hard, sweat and look unattractive with the textual support, would perhaps reach a low Band 3 mark ('Straight forward links and connections between texts'). To get into Band 4, the candidate would need to begin to investigate 'links and comparison of theme and style' as well as make 'some evaluation of subject, theme, character and the impact of the texts'.

To gain marks, the links must be credible and based closely on the texts. Counting and comparing the number of lines, verses and rhyme schemes is not very profitable unless some definite point can be made about how these aspects shape our response to the verse. Similarly, noting that both poems use 'metaphors/similes' or 'enjambment' is not likely to gain credit since these features are to be found in most verse. This year a number of candidates made such feature spotting central to their essays and thus did not allow the reader an understanding of the poems as whole artefacts in their own right. Responses which relied on simple prosodic links and never actually talked about the content, structure, mood, viewpoint and imagery of each poem were clearly not going to gain high AO2 marks. For example, some candidates wrote "Both poems use enjambment..." 'Both poems have metaphors...' and so on with examples of the aspect mentioned. Often there was no connection made between the examples of metaphors etc thus not gaining credit for AO3.

Candidates can also misunderstand the use of the word 'structure' in the assessment criteria. While there are some features of rhythm, meter and form particular to the selected poem to examine, the word, more importantly, is concerned with the way the poet has developed the ideas throughout the poem. It is this aspect that candidates need to focus on rather than line counting. A study of the structure of the poem 'In Hospital: Poona', may look at how the poem begins with a sense of longing for a specific person who is far away to a sense of longing for place, in this instance Lewis's homeland, Wales. The poem then moves from a general sweep of Wales to a more specific area, 'the small nameless mining valley'. In the final stanzas the poem moves back to where it started with the realisation that he is far from his lover as he is in India and she is in Wales. The structure of the poem is shaped around the time difference between the two places, the central part of the poem is concerned with place, moving from the general to the specific and the end line of the poem, 'love survives', returns to his lover. The candidate would still need to make an investigation of the rich imagery of the poem but an understanding of the structure and development of the ideas is also essential.

The final point to be made about AO3 is concerned with the focus of the work. Returning to 'A Peasant' and 'In Cardigan Market', most candidates spent their time comparing the people rather than the poems. Obviously, the people and their situations do need to be compared but the way the poems are written, their overall purpose and style and the type of imagery used also need coverage for a full high scoring response.

The points noted above are designed to be helpful and to improve candidate performance. Having made these comments, I am aware that many students are fully aware of the need to write clearly and fully about the relevant aspects of their tasks. In many centres they are encouraged to do so and produce some excellent work, greatly to their and their teachers' credit.

Summary of key points

- Appreciation of the whole play in Section A, Shakespeare, is a requirement of the specification.
- Good responses in Section A are built upon a solid framework of understanding of the text and an ability to investigate the nuances of Shakespeare's language.
- In Section A and B it is important for candidates to provide appropriate textual support for their points through appropriate quotation.
- To gain marks in AO3 the links between poems must be credible and based closely on the texts. Comparisons should look at content, structure, mood, viewpoint, style, purpose and the imagery of each poem.
- Centres must make it clear if any annotations on the poems or plays were made during the assessment sessions as candidates are not allowed any kind of pre-prepared notes. The coversheet will be amended next year to reflect this.



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