

GCSE Examiners' Report

English Literature
GCSE
Summer 2025

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Introduction

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

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

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

Further support

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

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

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
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Executive Summary

Responses to the extract questions posed few problems; candidates wrote about the characters in question with some detail and understanding. The vast majority tracked through the extract focusing on specific details and making sensible comments. Better answers increasingly focused on the writers' choices of language and imagery, and the characters were discussed with some insight and clear understanding of subtext. A minority attempted to address contextual factors – which are not assessed here – rather than using the opportunity to show their close analysis skills.

Essay questions were generally handled well and none of the questions proved problematic to candidates. More successful text essays combined the discussion of a range of specific incidents and events from the text with detailed, specific discussion relevant to the task set. Less successful responses were usually brief and, whilst showing some understanding of the relevant themes or characters, discussed them in a generalised way without the close reference to specific detail and specific incidents or events. Assessment objectives were generally handled well and AO4 Context was addressed where appropriate; candidates seemed generally well trained in the application of their knowledge to the appropriate essay question. There was an increased emphasis on AO2, and the effects of language choices made by the writer. This is always best when linked to AO1 so that the candidate demonstrates an understanding of meaning as well as technical effects and is therefore able to suggest how the two are linked together in the text.

In the poetry comparison, most candidates understood the need to cover both poems and the comparative element. However, on Foundation Tier, a significant number did not compare or just wrote about one of the poems.

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

Overview of the Unit

As has always been the case on both Higher and Foundation Tiers, *Of Mice and Men* was the most popular text by a considerable margin. The number of candidates studying *To Kill a Mockingbird* remained steady whilst a smaller minority studied *Chanda's Secrets* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

As in January, a number of candidates addressed questions on novels which they had not studied. In many of these cases, every extract on the question paper was read and answered as an 'unseen' text. This rubric infringement limits the chances of these candidates achieving a grade commensurate with their abilities. The time wasted often results in under-developed responses on the text that the candidates have actually studied. A number of candidates, particularly on Foundation Tier, did not respond to the poetry at all, making it impossible for them to achieve the outcome they could have. Some candidates on both tiers wrote about *Anita and Me* mistakenly thinking that was the 'unseen poetry' and referring to the novel as a poem. It is always a good idea to ensure candidates have seen a whole exam paper to better understand the layout and where the unseen poems are physically situated, though I'm sure this is likely to be standard practice in all centres.

Responses to the extract questions posed few specific problems for candidates who were able to write about the characters in question with some detail and understanding. The vast majority tracked through the extract focusing on specific details and making sensible comments. Better answers increasingly focused on the writers' choices of language and imagery, and the characters were discussed with some insight and clear understanding of subtext. As is often the case, a minority of candidates wasted time attempting to address contextual factors which are not assessed here or trying to talk about other scenes in the novel almost as if they were trying to turn the task into an essay response rather than using the opportunity to show their close analysis skills.

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

In the poetry comparison, most candidates understood the need to cover both poems and the comparative element for AO3. However, on Foundation Tier there remains a significant number of candidates who explored the poems without comparing them or who only wrote about one of the poems. This had a damaging effect on their overall achievement given the weighting of the assessment objectives for this task.

As noted in January, there seemed to be fewer responses that were extremely difficult to read and perhaps an increase in the number of candidates taking the opportunity to type their responses. Many thanks for your continued support in this area.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Extract questions

The *Of Mice and Men* extract question focused on how Steinbeck presented the character of the boss to the reader. Successful responses paid attention to both assessment objectives to address the question on Steinbeck's characterisation of the boss and the language choices which revealed his thoughts, feelings and personality. More successful responses tracked through the extract with close reference to specific detail, discussing his suspicious nature, his inquisitiveness and inherent mistrust, with most candidates focusing on his squinting eyes amongst other details. The character is open to differing interpretations in this extract as in the phrase 'he pointed a playful finger' which candidates understood in a variety of ways. Some preferred to see him as very fair and concerned for Lennie's interests whereas others focused on him being tough, hard and mistrusting. Better responses were able to identify the ways he was intimidating and demonstrated his importance and status.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* the presentation of Calpurnia was generally well handled by candidates on both tiers. Again, better responses tracked through the extract making focused use of the detail and discussing language choices and their effects on the reader. Better responses focused on Calpurnia's initial doubts about Jem's account of the dog followed by her quick sense of urgency and panic and then exploring her genuine desire to ensure the safety of everyone in the neighbourhood.

The discussions of Bailey Junior in the *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* extract were similarly interesting, and candidates had a range of well-supported views. Most showed their understanding that he was genuinely upset about the events of the night before but determined to become independent and stand on his own two feet with a perhaps slightly naïve optimism about his future. Higher level responses also saw Maya's awareness that he was interacting with her in a different way than used to be the case and was genuinely worried and apprehensive about him despite his hopefulness.

The extract from *Chanda's Secrets* gave candidates plenty of opportunities to comment on the complexities in Esther and Chanda's relationship, and attitudes towards both the current situation and their futures. Most tracked through the extract showing their understanding that Esther's angry and accusatory attitude was born of a combination of possible shame, desperation and frustration, and that Chanda's criticisms were because of her genuine fears for Esther's safety and reputation. They recognised this as a difficult moment in an otherwise important and close relationship.

Text Essay Questions

Examiners needed to take account of the extent to which candidates had addressed the different assessment objectives relevant to each question. In most essay responses, some references to contextual factors were given to show an understanding of how they influenced characters' lives, behaviour and aspirations. Most candidates used their contextual knowledge thoughtfully to inform their response to the essay questions, although there were some responses on both tiers where there was limited reference to context and a small number of candidates included no contextual comments whatsoever, particularly on Foundation Tier.

The *Of Mice and Men* question on which relationship showed us the most about life in America in the 1930s gave candidates the opportunity to refer to a range of incidents and events showing their chosen relationship/s at different points in the text and often what they showed about friendship, loneliness, poverty, racism, misogyny, status, violence, masculinity and even dreams in that era. Some candidates took a discursive approach covering a range of relationships. More successful answers zoomed in on a range of specific incidents and details. On Higher Tier, more successful candidates discussed how Steinbeck used the relationship to illustrate key themes and as a vehicle to criticise the social beliefs and values of the time.

The second question on the extent to which the men were all afraid of each other was slightly less popular on both tiers. In essay questions like this, it is possible to argue for either view or provide a balanced response; both approaches are equally valid. A common approach here was to agree with the statement discussing a range of incidents and examples that showed that the men were scared of each other often with a central focus on Crooks or Curley. Many showed the statement was not exclusively true because of the relationship between George and Lennie and the men's relationships with Slim which were based on admiration and respect, not fear. Again, more insightful responses explored what Steinbeck was trying to show and do. Less effective responses on both tiers tended to be more general than specific, and while context was usually addressed to some degree, the commentary was simple and general. A small number of candidates wrote an essay exclusively on Curley's wife – presumably because it was her statement in the question – without really getting to grips with the central focus of the question which was men's fear of each other.

For those who studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*, both tasks elicited responses across the mark range on both tiers with the question on Scout proving the more popular of the two. This question was addressed with some evaluation at the top of the mark range on Higher Tier and most candidates chronologically tracked through the sequences of the novel where Scout had significant importance. Better responses discussed in depth how Scout was used to illustrate the prejudiced attitudes of Maycomb and how she was used to criticise the strict conformity of society and the rigidity of its values at that time. Better responses showed a thorough, detailed knowledge of the text and candidates made apt selections exploring Scout's increasing understanding and indignation at the lack of fairness in the society of Maycomb and much was made of her developing understanding of Boo Radley and her changing relationship with her father Atticus as she grew to understand and reflect his moral standpoint and his empathetic attitudes towards others. Context was covered well with particular focus on expectations of women and the racism exposed by the trial. Less successful responses tended to refer to fewer incidents and events and discuss more generally, paying less attention to Scout's importance in reflecting American society.

The alternative question on the theme of poverty and racism gave candidates on both tiers some choice and freedom of characters and events to write about. Most chose to answer the question through the prism of discussing the Ewells and the Cunninghams, but many discussed the novel's depiction of racism and a racist society with insight and an excellent range of detail. Answers included focus on how Lee was trying to use the themes of poverty and racism to highlight injustices in 1930s America. At a lower level, candidates concentrated on illustrating examples of poverty and racism in the novel with straightforward commentary.

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UNIT 2

Overview of the Unit

As usual, all four papers for Unit 2 were available this series: Unit 2A Higher and Foundation Tiers, as well as Unit 2B Higher and Foundation Tiers.

- For 2A, on both tiers, the dominant texts remained *An Inspector Calls* and *Heroes*. There were a good number of responses to other texts on Higher Tier, notably *About a Boy* and *A Taste of Honey*. The range of achievement was comparable on different texts showing that all remain accessible.
- For 2B, *Blood Brothers* and *A Christmas Carol* continued to dominate, with *Lord of the Flies* and *A View from the Bridge* also taking a good share, particularly on Higher Tier.

Despite the gradual improvement in exam technique noted on the return to exams over the last three years, this session saw a step backwards in one regard; there were many candidates – on both Tiers and in both 2A and 2B – who attempted to answer on multiple texts that they had not studied. Some realised fairly quickly and crossed out irrelevant answers, others carried on and answered on every text on the paper.

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

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

There was again evidence of an increased emphasis on AO2 and the effects of language choices made by the writer. This was generally good to see and appeared controlled and appropriately applied in most cases. Of course, this is always best when linked to AO1 so that the candidate demonstrates an understanding of meaning as well as technical effects and is therefore able to suggest how the two are linked together in the text. Some candidates do overuse this approach and apply the ‘This adjective...’ format to the exclusion of wider comments, particularly in essays that require attention to AO4 Context.

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

Comments on individual questions/sections

Unit 2A: Literary heritage drama and contemporary prose

Higher and Foundation

An Inspector Calls

For *An Inspector Calls*, the extract covering the exchange between the characters in the Birling house after the Inspector leaves worked well. Candidates were asked to write about the characters and those that covered more than one or two did particularly well.

On Foundation tier, many candidates at this level confused which character said which line, and some struggled to explain the meaning of particular phrases. However, a good number of answers were able to track the extract and comment on how different characters behave and speak at this point in the play. Those who did well noticed the differences between Sheila and Eric, who feel guilty and want to change, and Mr Birling and Mrs Birling, who dismiss what has happened and want to go back to how things were. Some candidates also recognised that Sheila's line about "fire and blood and anguish" was important and showed how she had learned something. Stronger responses also picked up on how Birling laughs and makes jokes, showing how he doesn't take responsibility.

On Higher tier, good use was made of quotations, including reference to stage directions such as the use of the adverb "passionately" used to describe Sheila's tone at one point in the extract. Higher in the marking bands, candidates analysed characters with more subtlety and insight – for instance seeing the childish elements of Birling's language and actions. Those who covered the whole extract were rewarded by seeing Eric's last line which allowed for more assured comments about the sides now being taken between the older and younger generations.

Both of the essay questions proved to be popular choices, with the Inspector option proving the most popular.

For the Foundation tier, the Inspector question was generally better answered. Many were able to explain how the Inspector is serious and confident at the start, how he speaks differently to each character, and how he becomes more emotional and angry in his final speech. There was some good awareness of how he represents ideas about social responsibility and how his behaviour reflects the time the play was written and set.

For Higher tier, there were two general approaches. The first and most common was to look at the Inspector's role in the text in delivering Priestley's socialist message and critiquing aspects of 1912 British society. This often led to some confident overview and analysis, with plenty of attention to AO4. Sometimes this approach was taken a little too far to optimise the marks gained by moving away from the text to the extent of not including any character names or specific events. The other approach was to take a narrative approach and work through what the Inspector does in the play, including his interactions with each character. This did sometimes lead to a lack of AO4. A combination of the two approaches was the best of all – overview and analysis, context, but also knowledge of the events of the text demonstrated for AO1.

The second question, about relationships being less important than money and status, was less popular and proved more challenging on Foundation Tier. Many answers struggled to develop their ideas fully, often repeating the same point about Mr Birling valuing money over his daughter's happiness, but without supporting it with enough detail from the play. Most focused on Birling's relationship with his children and how he puts money over their happiness although there was some tendency to rely on the extract for aspects of these responses. Some responses also considered Mrs Birling's focus on money referencing her treatment of Eva Smith; some of these were well discussed but many lost sight of the focus of the essay question.

On Higher Tier, there was more confidence in selecting appropriate incidents and characters with which to explore the statement. Mr Birling and his children still featured frequently, as did Mr and Mrs Birling, as well as Sheila and Gerald. The best responses used several of these to contribute to an overview of the play which was closely related to context.

The extract question for *Heroes* asked candidates to respond to an account from Francis of his meeting with Marie from quite early in the text when he is 'seeking' more information about Nicole.

For Foundation Tier, the extract question produced a wide range of responses. Many struggled to understand what was happening in the extract and found it difficult to stay focused on what the question was asking. At the lower end, responses relied too heavily on retelling events or confused Marie with Nicole, which made it harder to explain Francis' thoughts and feelings clearly. Better answers engaged with key details, noticing how Francis feels nervous and shy when trying to mention Nicole, and how he keeps waiting for the right moment to bring her up. Some also commented on his embarrassment when "colour creeps into his cheeks," showing his feelings of awkwardness and admiration. Stronger responses also picked up on the atmosphere of the scene — the calm, friendly setting on the piazza — and how this contrasts with Francis' inner tension about Nicole.

Higher Tier responses varied but the better ones showed initiative and true knowledge of the text in adapting to a question that featured a minor character. Many effectively used a detailed description of Marie to show what she adds to our understanding of the protagonist, Francis. For instance, many were able to comment on her childishness and immature joking, but the more successful responses linked this to Francis by suggesting that this reminds of just how young he was when he fell for Nicole, emphasised by the "chasm of being twelve years old." AO2 work on this extract was often successful, with much made of the "colour creeping into my cheeks" for example.

Heroes

Both of the *Heroes* essays were popular choices but, as expected, the relationship between Larry and Francis was the more popular choice.

For Foundation Tier the first question about Francis and Larry's relationship was much more popular and often well done. Many candidates showed good understanding of how and why their relationship changes: starting with admiration when Larry teaches them table tennis and boosts Francis' confidence; turning to horror and betrayal after Larry attacks Nicole at the Wreck Centre; and ending with Francis confronting Larry. A few responses misunderstood the ending of their relationship, but most were able to explain how Francis' feelings change over time and why.

On Higher Tier, the same stepping stones were often used, and the chronological order was generally well handled. There are still a number of candidates on both tiers who think that the attack on Nicole occurred on the night of the table tennis tournament, however. The best responses probed into why Francis is particularly vulnerable in the first place and how this makes him easy for Larry to manipulate.

For Foundation Tier, the second question, about whether the ending is sad but also hopeful, was less popular and more mixed in quality. Many candidates tracked sad and hopeful moments from throughout the book, such as the sadness of Francis' injuries and Nicole's pain, alongside more hopeful signs. The better responses clearly stated their own judgement about the ending in their response and then used examples from earlier in the text to explain why it felt mostly sad, mostly hopeful, or a mixture of both at the end.

On Higher Tier, there were many different interpretations of what constitutes the end of the book. Some started from Larry's death, some even earlier, but usually the final meeting between Francis and Nicole and his subsequent departure were also addressed or used as a main focal point. Each of these approaches worked dependant on the level of accurate detail and analysis applied to them. There were also many different opinions and approaches to the ideas of 'sad' and 'hopeful' with much success gained by those who suggested that there is an element of both present at the end.

About a Boy

For *About a Boy*, the extract question was generally well answered at Foundation tier. Most candidates were able to show empathy with the way Marcus and Fiona speak and behave in the extract, with the majority taking Marcus' side and recognising his frustration at not being understood by his mother. Many commented on how Marcus feels that Will understands him better and how Fiona refuses to accept this, showing her stubbornness but also her concern for Marcus. Better answers supported their points with phrases such as "Only Will knows what I need" and Fiona insisting "We're doing all right our way," which helped explain the tension between them. Stronger responses also noticed how Marcus questions whether they really are "doing all right" and how this shows his growing independence and awareness of their struggles.

On Higher Tier, there were a range of judgements made of both Fiona and Marcus as they appear here. Most knew where in the book this exchange occurred, and this helped them to show how Marcus is going away from here. There was much useful AO2 work, for example noting that Fiona cuts Marcus off halfway through a sentence showing how she will not accept what he is saying and wants to maintain control.

The essay questions were both equally popular on both tiers and showed that most candidates had a good understanding of the plot and characters, with some appropriate use of quotations. Those who wrote about Ellie as a friend for Marcus often gave balanced answers, showing how she helps him stand up for himself and feel more confident but also sometimes gets him into trouble. Many showed a clear understanding of why Marcus values Ellie despite her faults.

The question on whether the book is more funny than sad also produced some thoughtful answers. Most candidates were able to pick out moments of humour, such as Marcus' dead duck in the loaf of bread or Will pretending to be a single father, alongside sadder events like Fiona's depression and Marcus being bullied. Stronger responses led with a clear judgement of which aspect came through most strongly for them and supported it with examples from different points in the novel.

Unit 2B: Contemporary drama and literary heritage prose

Higher and Foundation

Foundation Tier is much smaller 2B and will be referred to only where appropriate.

The History Boys

For *The History Boys*, the extract question was generally well approached, with many candidates showing a good understanding of how Bennett uses dialogue and behaviour to reveal character. Successful responses tracked Mrs Lintott's frustration at the male-dominated perspective of history and her dry, ironic humour. Many noticed her attempts to challenge the boys' complacency and the dismissive attitudes shown by Timms and Dakin. Better answers explored how she uses wit to expose sexism and how this exchange reveals generational and gender tensions, as well as contrasting her pragmatic outlook with the boys' flippancy.

For the essays, those who agreed that Irwin is more likeable than Hector often focused on his vulnerability and awkwardness, showing empathy for his struggles to assert himself and connect with the boys. Some disagreed, citing Hector's warmth, humour and his unconventional approach to teaching. The strongest answers balanced personal likeability with the impact each teacher has on the boys and how Bennett encourages different audience responses to both.

Responses to the humour question were often varied. Many candidates pointed to clearly comic moments, such as the French brothel role-play, Mrs Lintott's scathing summary of "five centuries of masculine ineptitude," and the boys' behaviour at various points in the play. More thoughtful answers also considered how humour is used to undercut serious issues such as Hector's inappropriate behaviour.

Blood Brothers

For *Blood Brothers*, the extract question was generally handled well, with many candidates showing awareness of how Russell creates mood and atmosphere through Mrs Johnstone's song and the interruption by the Milkman. Better answers tracked the shift from the nostalgic and bittersweet tone of the early verses, through the growing sense of despair as her situation worsens, to the abrupt and harsh change in mood when the Milkman enters. Some candidates were confused by the phrase "in the club," misunderstanding it as a literal club rather than slang for pregnancy. The most successful responses, however, engaged closely with how the Milkman's arrival impacts mood and atmosphere creating tension and emphasising Mrs Johnstone's hardship and lack of escape.

For Foundation tier, this extract was handled well generally, with many able to show sympathy and empathy at least. The Milkman was criticised by many, sometimes a little harshly perhaps. Much was made of Marilyn, usually with relevance.

For the essay questions, many candidates chose to explore Mrs Lyons' importance. Stronger responses explored how she contrasts with Mrs Johnstone and how her desire for a child leads her to make morally questionable choices that set the tragedy in motion. Candidates often commented on her growing paranoia, jealousy and eventual instability, with more perceptive answers noting how Russell uses her to illustrate the damaging effects of fear and possessiveness. Some argued that Mrs Lyons is a victim of her own circumstances and insecurities, which make her actions more tragic.

The strongest responses also linked her behaviour to the wider themes of the play, analysing how she embodies the corrosive nature of class division and social inequality. They explored how her treatment of Edward, shielding him from his true background while looking down on Mickey, reflects deep-rooted prejudices that Russell critiques. Some thoughtful answers considered Mrs Lyons' role as a mother figure, contrasting her cold, controlling love with Mrs Johnstone's warm maternal care. Foundation candidates preferred this question and produced some accurate, detailed responses. Some were limited by stopping early in the play, sometimes even before she moves, and therefore before some of her most important moments.

Those who chose the most interesting relationship often discussed Mickey and Edward's friendship, with many exploring how it evolves as they grow up and reflects the play's themes of class, fate and inequality. The strongest responses engaged perceptively with the idea that they are not just friends but twins and how this bond carries a tragic inevitability. These essays often explored how Russell presents their closeness and innocence as children, then shows it unravel as class and circumstance pull them apart, reinforcing the idea that their fates are determined as much by the society they live in as by their choices. Other popular choices included Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons, and Mickey and Linda, with some thoughtful analysis of how these relationships also demonstrate the corrosive effects of class division and insecurity on personal connections.

For Foundation, Mickey and Edward were very popular too, though Mrs Lyons, Linda and Mrs Johnstone also made appearances in various combinations. The main limiting factor was again the ability to talk about the play as a whole, rather than, for example, just Mickey and Eddie's first meeting.

Across both essay questions, there was an encouraging focus on AO2, with candidates analysing writer's craft closely. Fewer responses integrated contextual understanding — which is not assessed in this section — showing a welcome shift and understanding of the specification.

A View from the Bridge

For *A View from the Bridge*, the extract question was effectively handled by many candidates at Higher tier. Most demonstrated a good understanding of Eddie's aims in this moment – to undermine Rodolpho. Whilst some candidates did not pick up on Eddie's sarcasm, better responses examined his methods closely, recognising how he mocks Rodolpho while pretending to compliment him and drawing contrasts with his own traits, which he sees as more masculine. There was a nice range of points from most candidates, including the significance of Eddie twisting the newspaper, pulling his trousers up to assert dominance, and inviting Marco to the fighting bout before turning on Rodolpho. The strongest responses looked sensitively at how Eddie's insecurities are presented here and how Miller uses stage directions, props and dialogue to foreshadow the later tragic conflict.

The essay questions were equally well covered, with candidates showing a clear understanding of the play and its tragic framework. On the whole, more candidates chose to agree with the statement that Marco and Rodolpho are the heroes, often focusing on how their actions highlight Eddie's flaws and defend family honour. Some candidates, however, chose to disagree, arguing that Marco and Rodolpho contribute to Eddie's tragic downfall through their presence and behaviour, with Alfieri being a popular choice as the real 'hero' who guides the audience through the events. Many of these responses showed thoughtful engagement with Miller's intentions and the conventions of the tragic genre.

For the second essay question, a wide range of characters were selected as 'least to blame' for the tragic events. Beatrice and Catherine were the most popular choices, with sympathy often expressed for the way they were caught between conflicting loyalties. Others chose Rodolpho, highlighting his innocence and lack of malice, and a smaller number argued for Alfieri, noting his limited ability to intervene. The strongest responses here demonstrated understanding of how Miller crafts his characters to evoke complex audience reactions and how the genre of tragedy frames their culpability.

Pride and Prejudice

It was encouraging to see *Pride and Prejudice* becoming a more popular choice this year, with a good number of thoughtful and well-supported responses. A very small number of answers, however, relied too heavily on film adaptations, which sometimes led to inaccuracies in textual references.

For the extract question, most candidates were able to explore how Elizabeth and Mr Darcy's speech and behaviour reveal their pride, growing respect and the underlying tension. Stronger answers analysed the contrast between Elizabeth's wit and Darcy's reserve, and how Austen uses dialogue and subtle changes in tone to show the evolution of their characters and feelings.

The essay questions were fairly evenly chosen and context was often used successfully to further arguments and to explore Austen's messages. Many candidates approached the question on family relationships confidently, exploring the Bennet family dynamic, the impact of Lydia's elopement, and how family expectations reflect social and cultural pressures of the time. Stronger responses also commented on the importance of marriage in securing social status and security, linking this to the historical context. Some considered other family units within the novel, often in contrast to the Bennets.

For the question on the least sympathetic character, popular choices included Mr Collins, Lady Catherine, and Lydia, with candidates often focusing on arrogance, selfishness, or irresponsibility. Stronger essays explored how Austen uses satire, irony and narrative voice to shape readers' lack of sympathy, and linked this to her critique of social conventions.

Silas Marner

A small number of candidates studied *Silas Marner*, but those who did often responded thoughtfully and with a deep understanding of the text. For the extract question, most candidates were able to comment on how Eliot creates mood and atmosphere, particularly through the description of Silas's ghost-like appearance and the villagers' fearful reactions. Stronger answers tracked the shift in mood from eerie suspense to confusion and disbelief, noting the use of imagery such as "strange unearthly eyes" and the simile comparing the men's reaction to "startled insects." Some candidates also picked up on the humorous tone in the narrator's description of Mr Macey's mixed feelings and the landlord's pragmatic response.

In the essay section, the second question on Lantern Yard was the more popular choice. Many candidates explored how Silas's unjust expulsion from Lantern Yard shapes his character and creates the foundation for the novel's central themes of loss, faith and redemption. Stronger responses argued that while Lantern Yard is key to understanding Silas's journey, later events (such as Eppie's arrival) ultimately carry more emotional and thematic weight.

Fewer candidates chose the question on Godfrey Cass, but those who did often explored his inner conflict, moral weakness and eventual growth. Strong responses discussed how Eliot uses him to expose the limitations of privilege and to highlight key themes.

A Christmas Carol

For *A Christmas Carol*, the extract question saw a wide range of responses on both tiers. Some candidates struggled to place the extract within the narrative and misread its focus, which limited their ability to analyse how mood and atmosphere were being shaped at this point in the story. However, the strongest answers understood that Dickens was building a tense, dramatic atmosphere, foreshadowing Scrooge's eerie arrival home and the imminent appearance of Marley's ghost. Better responses tracked the extract closely and identified how Dickens used light and dark imagery, personification (such as the bell "chattering" and the ice being "misanthropic"), and contrasts between warmth and cold to create an atmosphere of unease tinged with festivity. Some also commented perceptively on the symbolism of fog and obscurity reflecting Scrooge's spiritual blindness. At the lower end, there was evidence of misreading and narrative retelling rather than analysis, but overall many showed strong engagement with Dickens' language and its impact on the reader.

For Foundation tier, there were brave attempts to show how language was used to build a cold atmosphere, contrasted with that of the shops and the industry of the Lord Mayor's home.

For the essays, the ghost question was again the more popular, attracting a range of approaches. There was a fairly even split between those who agreed that Marley is the one who truly saves Scrooge and those who argued that his role is only the beginning of a longer process led by the three spirits. Many agreed that Marley's warnings provide the crucial turning point, forcing Scrooge to confront his failings, while stronger responses also explored how the other ghosts reveal different aspects of Scrooge's life and inspire genuine change. The best answers balanced both arguments, showing how Dickens presents Marley as a cautionary figure whose primary function is to set the redemptive process in motion, rather than complete it. Some also made thoughtful links to the moral and religious context of Victorian beliefs about redemption, personal responsibility, and the afterlife. Some few (on both tiers) noted that ghosts are only able to appear because of Marley's influence 'a chance of my procuring'. On Foundation tier, there was sometimes an unfortunate amount of reference to film versions that include elements that are not in the original text.

The question on poverty was less popular, but many of those who attempted it produced perceptive and thoughtful answers. Most focused on the Cratchit family and Want and Ignorance as clear examples of Dickens' critique of Victorian attitudes to poverty, particularly Malthusian ideas about the poor being expendable. Stronger answers went further, exploring characters such as Mrs Dilber and Old Joe to show how poverty degrades moral values, and even mentioning the miners, sailors and lighthouse keepers as reminders of the broader social reach of Christmas spirit and hardship. The best candidates integrated contextual understanding of Dickens' concern for social reform and his sympathy for the working classes, showing how the novella reflected and challenged Victorian attitudes to charity, responsibility and inequality.

On Foundation tier, it was good to see some relevant supporting detail such as the "are there no prisons" exchange with the charity collectors/ghost of Christmas present.

Lord of the Flies

For *Lord of the Flies*, the extract question was generally well answered, with many candidates able to comment on how Golding creates mood and atmosphere through description and dialogue. Most recognised the oppressive heat and the sense of disorientation created by the “scar” in the jungle, with stronger answers exploring the unsettling contrast between the boys’ schoolboy habits and the wild, alien setting. The best responses tracked the extract closely, picking up on the witch-like cry of the bird and the jungle imagery to show how Golding builds an uneasy, tense atmosphere, while also hinting at the boys’ vulnerability and naivety. Weaker responses tended to focus more on retelling or general observations about the island being “dangerous,” without exploring the language in detail.

In the essay questions, Simon was a very popular choice, with many candidates presenting thoughtful and perceptive arguments about why he is the most interesting character. The strongest essays highlighted his symbolic role as a Christ-like figure, his insight into the true nature of the “beast,” and how his tragic death exposes the boys’ complete descent into savagery. Context was often used effectively in these answers, with candidates linking Simon’s death to Golding’s critique of human nature and the loss of innocence, and some also referencing ideas about the Second World War and the breakdown of civilisation to strengthen their argument.

For the question on which character elicited the least sympathy, Jack was the most common choice, with candidates analysing how his ambition, cruelty and enjoyment of violence make him increasingly unsympathetic. Some also chose Roger, focusing on his cold-blooded brutality and lack of remorse. The most successful answers here explored how Golding uses their actions, dialogue and symbolic roles to show how power corrupts and how savagery overtakes morality. Context was again used well, particularly in discussing how the novel reflects post-war anxieties about the fragility of civilisation and the capacity for evil within everyone.

Summary of key points:

- Only answer on the questions for the two texts that have been taught
- When AO2 or AO4 are being assessed relate points to understanding of the text (AO1) to enable access to an overview of the text
- Try to work across a text for character or relationship questions to show development rather than just addressing early events
- When possible address the writer’s intent and why a character or theme is presented in a particular way; this will also help to address AO4 where appropriate.

WJEC ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3 NEA: SHAKESPEARE AND WELSH WRITING IN ENGLISH

Overview of the Unit

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

- Section A requires candidates to complete a thematic response to a Shakespeare play and assesses both AO1 and AO2.
- Section B requires a thematic response to a pre-released set of Welsh poems written in English. This assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3.
- Centres are well-used to the demands of this Unit, and this was evident in the majority of samples moderated. Task setting was mostly appropriate and in the majority of cases marking was reasonably accurate.
- Where marking was generous, it was most often in the assessment of AO2 in both Section A and Section B.
- In Section A, the requirement to demonstrate clear appreciation of the whole Shakespeare play was sometimes overlooked. This was also a concern in previous years.

Tasks

Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

As with last year, the majority of centres chose to use sample tasks provided by WJEC on the Non-Examination Tasks Instructions sheet. A few centres adapted the set tasks to fit their texts of study, and some wrote their own tasks based on the set themes.

The use of common tasks for all candidates in a submission was again something that was relatively widespread. This has some benefits in providing a reliable rank order and, understandably, seems to encourage more focused and detailed internal moderation. Common concerns with a centre-wide approach to task setting is that work can appear very similar at times. This is particularly the case where multiple learners in a centre focus on only very specific and narrow evidence selections, often commenting on them in the same order whilst making similar points. Some individuality in approach, evidence selections and commentary are to be encouraged to ensure each candidate is fully demonstrating what they can do and are engaging individually with the set texts. Centres who set different tasks and texts for different teaching groups, particularly in Section B, sometimes seem better able to tailor the work more specifically to cater for different abilities.

In **Section A** tasks could be based on the theme of 'Love' or the theme of 'Deception'. Both themes enjoyed good coverage in the submissions seen by moderators with the set tasks for both well employed. Unsurprisingly, the most popular text choices were *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The sample task which explored the breakdown of the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth was very popular and it was clear that this was a task which really encouraged whole text engagement and evaluative skill. The exemplar task which asked learners to respond to the idea that 'the romance between Romeo and Juliet is not very convincing' was also a popular choice and it was clear that varied and thoughtful work had taken place in centres on this subject. It was interesting to see the different ways candidates responded to this relationship and the task statement. For those candidates who produced work on the theme of 'Deception', moderators reported that the set task on Juliet's deception of her parents was widely used. This was a task which seemed to encourage a real focus on how Juliet's language helps to reveal aspects of her character. There was also a number of centres which used the *Macbeth* set task based on the Witches' deception. Again, this provided a very specific focus and seemed to encourage real engagement with Shakespeare's language. The study of other Shakespeare plays was rare indeed, but moderators occasionally came across plays such as *King Lear*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Once again, most task setting for Section A was designed to encourage candidates to demonstrate awareness of the whole play of study. The majority of candidates worked hard to meet this requirement of the specification but, as with last year, there was a minority of candidates who did not demonstrate sufficient whole text awareness. In order to access all available marks, candidates must demonstrate that they have studied the whole play. Some moderator marks were lower than those submitted by the centres as a result of this requirement being overlooked. Work which only considers *Macbeth* up to the killing of Duncan, or which focuses specifically on the meeting of *Romeo and Juliet* with no other textual awareness, does not meet the requirements of the specification.

All selected plays provided clear opportunities in relation to the set themes. Once again, it was very pleasing to see the enthusiasm and willingness to explore the texts in detail that was shown by so many in their work on Shakespeare. Many candidates were able to discuss an interesting and appropriate range of evidence from the text with real thoughtfulness in response to Section A.

In **Section B** the set theme for the poetry study for 2025 was 'Mothers and Fathers'. For the vast majority this theme worked very well and gave candidates the opportunity to engage thoroughly and personally with the poetry. For a few candidates, this theme was inappropriate and in those cases, centres wisely liaised with WJEC to seek an alternative.

Moderators reported seeing all 15 of the set poems represented across the samples of work. It is usually true that some poems are seen more frequently than others and that was certainly the case with 'Learner House' very often being compared with 'Daylight Robbery'. 'Learner House' was also often paired with 'A Cwydd for Kate'. Both of these pairings worked well and provided candidates with the opportunity to explore differences in parental emotions and changes in the parent-child relationship depending on time and circumstance. The first of WJEC's set tasks also proved very popular with many centres electing to use Task 1 and its prescribed poems ('My Mother's Perfume' and 'To My Father') as well as its stated focus of dysfunctional relationships between parents and their children. This combination led to some very thorough and detailed work on both poems and some interesting and diverse points of connection.

Other interesting combinations included the various ways parents or grandparents are remembered (often responding to Sample Task 2). Work on 'My Mother's Mother' in comparison with 'Elegy for Mrs Mordecai' was generally enthusiastic and encouraged careful comparative work on how the women within the respective poems are presented. Similarly, comparisons between 'Walnut Tree Forge' and 'To My Father' were often thoughtful and careful to consider the language of the respective poets. Elsewhere, a number of candidates focused on the role of the mother in 'Dancing Woman 1' and 'Jugged Hare'. While this combination enjoyed some thoughtful and probing commentary, it was clear that there were a few candidates who struggled to fully get to grips with aspects of 'Jugged Hare' and the point of view being offered by the narrator of the poem.

It was pleasing to see that most candidates worked hard to offer balance in their poetry work. With the weighting on AO3 marks in this part of the assessment, previous years have shown that candidates sometimes prioritise this area with the structure of their essay to the point that it interferes with their ability to respond thoughtfully to the poems as distinct pieces of writing. This appeared to happen less this year, and most candidates worked hard to balance the requirements of the task and demonstrate thoughtful engagement with both texts as well as the ideas and techniques that linked them.

As has been the case in recent years, there was evidence of candidates making detailed and thoughtful connections between poems. It seems clear that candidates have been encouraged through good teaching to comment on links in content and theme as well as style, language and structure. As this report mentioned last year, this has perhaps created the potential for more original commentary from learners as they pursue quite different ideas and with different levels of detail and scrutiny.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

The administrative aspects of NEA were well handled by the vast majority of centres. Where additional context was needed, many centres included helpful covering letters which explained any changes or additions made to the sample. A number of centres also included cover letters in order to explain task choices and centre arrangements. This attention to detail was appreciated by moderators. As ever, most cover sheets were fully completed and contained authorising signatures from teachers and learners. In a few cases signatures had not been obtained but most centres acknowledged and explained this in advance, before forwarding on the necessary information when it could be obtained. In a few cases, centres had used the outdated version of the cover sheets and moderators needed to request that the most recent version, which included the AI declaration, was also signed by teachers and candidates.

Marks were generally inputted accurately on IAMIS and there were relatively few examples of moderators needing to request additional information or submit corrections.

Folders were usually well presented and packaged with care. As this report has mentioned previously, the most convenient way to present NEA is to secure each individual folder with a simple treasury tag and organise the folders in descending rank order. It is greatly appreciated by moderators when centres adopt this approach as it helps to streamline the moderation experience and make sure that all necessary paperwork is easily accessible.

Once again, the majority of centres produced accurately marked NEA. In most cases, moderators were able to agree with centre rank orders and overall there was much agreement with marks given. Marks were usually accompanied by detailed supporting commentary and annotations which made careful references to the Assessment Objectives. The Assessment Criteria was well used to support placement within the relevant band by both the initial teacher marking the work and by internal moderators. Internal cross-moderation was usually employed effectively in the majority of centres, and this was often helpfully evidenced through clear annotation of the assessment pieces by second and third marker comments. As with last year, in some centres internal moderation was evident but did not always seem to be acted upon in the awarding of final marks. In a few centres, it appeared that internal moderation was more likely to be acted upon if marks were being increased through the process but not if they were being decreased. This was unhelpful in establishing a reliable and consistent rank order.

The annotation of work was usually helpful and made clear links with the assessment criteria. In some cases, this process was more limited with just the identification of an AO appearing in the margin of the work. This is such a generalised approach that it does not help to reflect a candidate's achievements nor validate the mark awarded.

In cases where marking was not agreed, this was mostly because centre marks were too generous. As with last year, this occurred most often with the marks given for AO2. In some cases, centres seemed to think it appropriate to award the same mark for both AO1 and AO2 marks with little evidence to support this approach. Usually, when moderator marks were lower than those of the centre for AO2 it was because candidates did not engage with the ways writers create effect through language and structure; being able to comment on meaning does not necessarily help a candidate to progress with AO2. Sometimes candidates were credited too highly for quite limited skills such as device spotting or the identification of structural techniques. Clearer and more detailed appreciation of the effect of a writer's language selections or structural decisions was necessary to justify some of the generous marking.

AO1 was often more accurately assessed across both Section A and Section B. Where generosity occurred, it tended to be due to misplacement in the higher bands. Marking of NEA takes a best fit approach, and a piece of work must be assessed holistically. If a candidate has mostly shown Band 3 skills for a piece of work - for example, beginning to select relevant detail and demonstrating some understanding – their work is unlikely to be accurately marked if they are given a lower Band 5 mark because on one occasion they have offered a ‘tentative judgement’ about a piece of evidence. The majority of centres were mostly accurate in relation to AO1, and it was clear that most assessors of NEA are well versed in the necessity for best fit marking.

As with last year, moderators reported that AO3 was marked reasonably accurately. This Assessment Objective is only assessed in the poetry work (Section B) and it was evident through much of the work produced that centres had encouraged learners to prioritise this aspect. Links made between the poems were often detailed, interesting and well-observed. Candidates focused on making thematic points and drawing comparisons of writers’ techniques. Where generosity occurred in the marking of AO3 it tended to be because links were quite general and perhaps lacked focus on the question or failed to develop detail in the explanation. Some candidates also seemed to struggle to make a range of connections, perhaps repeating ideas and assertions. In some cases, these were credited as numerous connecting points when in reality only one or two areas had been covered.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

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

Tel: 029 2240 4291

Email: gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

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

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

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

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

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WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk