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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**SUMMER 2018**

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCSE

Summer 2018

### COMPONENT 1

#### General comments

*Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* were again the most popular Shakespeare texts, with *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* all reasonably well represented; *Henry V* was perhaps chosen slightly less than last year. Like last year, there were a few incidences of candidates responding to texts they had not been taught, particularly extract questions, but these were a very small minority. Almost all candidates seemed to find the paper accessible, with candidates across the whole ability range accessing the questions, and most showing genuine engagement with the texts.

No questions appeared to mislead or confuse candidates; any misunderstanding seemed to be limited to the occasional mixing up of characters or poets. Examiners felt that candidates seemed well-prepared and there was a strong sense that, in this second summer of the qualification, both teachers and candidates seemed more confident with the demands of the paper and assessment objectives. For less-able candidates, the questions enabled engagement and empathy, with secure knowledge of narrative and character gaining respectable marks. Extracts were familiar and essay questions were straightforward. Meanwhile, for those working at higher levels there was plenty of scope to show focused, sustained exploration and analysis of the texts.

Once again, examiners were impressed with both the enthusiasm and depth of understanding candidates showed in the responses to Shakespeare across the six plays offered. English departments and teachers deserve great credit for preparing their candidates so effectively. In the vast majority of cases, candidates knew the play they had studied very well and were able to make detailed and appropriate references to support their comments.

Many essay responses ranged effectively across the text. Last year it was a key message that some candidates seemed to have stronger knowledge of the first three acts of the play than the final two. This year knowledge of the whole text seemed stronger, although the sequence of events within the text was sometimes an issue; for example, in some responses, we first meet Tybalt at the Capulet ball; in others Macbeth sees the “air-drawn dagger” as a guilty reminder of his murder of Duncan. Revision tasks that involve sequencing the events of the play would certainly be helpful for candidates close to the exam.

Again, examiners felt that candidates who had seen productions of the plays found it easier to discuss them, particularly perhaps when writing on the extracts, but film references did crop up, particularly from the Baz Luhrmann version of *Romeo and Juliet*. It’s important to keep reminding candidates they are studying the play rather than a particular film version, and perhaps where possible, giving them the chance to see how different directors treat the same scenes. All in all, though, examiners continue to be impressed with the levels of engagement and, in some cases, palpable enjoyment of the Shakespeare texts.

Section B of the paper seemed to work extremely well for candidates. *Mametz Wood* and the theme of war seemed a very popular choice, and one for which candidates had been well-prepared. This poem engaged the full ability range, with virtually all candidates offering relevant comments, and the vast majority tracking through successfully.

For 7.2, several poems from the anthology proved popular for comparison: *The Manhunt*, *Dulce et Decorum Est*, *The Soldier* and *A Wife in London* were all apt and fruitful choices. Responses to this question, though, were more varied, with some candidates writing in detail and with enthusiasm on their own selection, while those who had perhaps not revised as conscientiously as they might offered more sketchy comment. Although these candidates struggled to build detailed comparisons, they were at least usually able to offer some relevant points. There were certainly some examples of candidates running out of steam or time for this question, but on the whole answers were focused and full. Encouragingly, examiners cited many examples of candidates who offered personal, sometimes quite heartfelt responses to the poems.

A key message from last year's report concerned Assessment Objective 3: contexts, and in particular a lack of contextual comments offered by a number of candidates in questions 7.1 and 7.2. Happily, this seems to have been addressed by centres and, perhaps aided by the choice of poem for 7.1 and the theme of war, examiners reported a distinct improvement in the frequency and quality of contextual comments. Eduqas has produced a [set of resources to help centres](#) with the teaching and learning of this aspect of the course following feedback from centres.

AO3 is not assessed in the Shakespeare section, but once again many candidates offered relevant contextual comments, often to good effect, garnering marks for AO1. In particular, discussion of gender roles and the patriarchal society in Shakespeare's time provided a useful perspective on audience responses to the extracts, for example in the interplay between Romeo and Juliet, Lady Macbeth's manipulation of her husband and Beatrice and Benedick's public sparring. However, sometimes this theme was laboured by candidates, and those who saw everything through the prism of gender roles in Shakespearean society often neglected more useful analysis of the events and language. In a related matter, candidates' historical context seems to have been muddled by their study of Component 2 texts in some cases, so references to "Victorian" audiences rather than Elizabethan or Jacobean ones were disappointingly frequent.

### **Extract questions**

The extracts selected from each play were key moments and clearly familiar to the vast majority of candidates, who were able to discuss both their content and their significance within the play as a whole. Better responses tracked the extracts carefully, noting reactions of characters, selecting and commenting on language and possible effects on an audience. In the main, candidates managed to comment on the drama of the extracts' events and how Shakespeare created effects for the audience, for example the romance and flirtation of Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, or the unease at Lady Macbeth's ruthless manipulation of Macbeth into murdering his king.

Weaker responses tended to only cover part of the extract – usually the first half, so they might have missed the dramatic change in mood when Romeo finds out Juliet is a Capulet, or when Beatrice reflects on how she knows Benedick "of old". Other less successful responses tended to miss the opportunities to look at specific language choices, therefore not achieving much coverage of AO2.

Candidates now seem more familiar with the “How... an audience might respond” part of the question, and many were able to sustain their focus on this very effectively throughout their responses. Considering and comparing how both Shakespearean and modern audiences might react is often productive up to a point, but can lead to less focused, increasingly contextual discussion, which tends to be limiting.

A few responses devoted too much time and effort to ‘placing’ the extract in relation to its significance to the play as a whole, even to the extent of including multiple quotations from other scenes. While it can be an effective way to begin a response by showing how it fits within the events of the play and commenting briefly on its significance, the focus should always be on close analysis of the extract itself.

An understanding of the technique of dramatic irony is extremely useful for extract response, while the ability to distinguish between verse and prose, suggesting reasons for their use, remains a rare skill.

### ***Romeo and Juliet***

The chosen extract is one of the best known moments in the play and was greeted enthusiastically by most candidates, although a small but significant minority misplaced it, thinking it was the balcony scene; perhaps it was the presence of the Nurse that led to the confusion. Nonetheless, candidates focused effectively on the characters of Romeo and Juliet, seeing the instant attraction between them, with most picking up on the imagery relating to worship and pilgrimage. “You kiss by th’book” was interpreted in a range of equally valid ways: seeing it as a reflection of the relative experience / inexperience of either, or both, characters. Encouragingly, more responses seemed to address the end of the extract this year, so candidates usually recognised the shift in tone, and were able to discuss the significance of “account” and “debt.”

Stronger responses tracked the extract closely, noting the developing feelings and behaviours of Romeo and Juliet, often recognising Juliet’s control and the way she teases Romeo. The best responses combined an overview of the scene while recognising the sonnet form and its significance, and exploring the extended metaphor of the “pilgrim” worshipping at a “holy shrine”.

Weaker responses tended to track the surface of the text without clear focus on the interaction of the protagonists, or perhaps limited themselves by only discussing Romeo. Some failed to consider the final part of the extract when there is a marked change of mood and plenty of potential to address AO2. Given the richness of the figurative language in the extract as a whole, it was a shame when candidates didn’t take the opportunity to engage with it, though this was unusual overall.

Much was made of the references to “sin”, and while a few excellent responses looked at this within the context of the extended “pilgrim” metaphor, far more, quite reasonably, saw a wider significance. However, while many of the points made were valid, some candidates seemed to miss the fact that Romeo and Juliet don’t learn each other’s backgrounds until the end of the extract and are unaware until that point that their love is “forbidden”. Others, meanwhile, seemed, in the end, to be suggesting that it is intrinsically a “sin” for two teenagers to kiss at a party – an odd conclusion for 16 year-olds to reach.

## **Macbeth**

The selection of a well-known extract from relatively early in the play meant that responses, on the whole, were in-depth and focused on the question. Candidates of all abilities engaged with the drama of the Macbeths' plans for Duncan and the shifting dynamic between them. Even the weakest candidates seemed to have a sound grasp of what is going on in the scene, with a basic sense of Lady Macbeth's manipulative language and an understanding that she has already planned the murder. Candidates had plenty to say about Lady Macbeth's 'evil' behaviour and Macbeth's relative weakness in the extract.

Stronger responses also tracked Macbeth's lines and noted his surrender and admiration for her masculinity, as well as exploring Lady Macbeth's relentless bullying and manipulation of her husband. Many discussed the contextual importance of gender roles, exploring Shakespeare's subversion of them, and how both Jacobean and modern audiences might respond. Phrases such as "dashed the brains out" and "screw your courage to the sticking place" were well-used; only a select few dealt with the callous arrogance of "swinish sleep" and "spongy officers". Analysis of structure came with the repeated use of rhetorical questions and the imbalance of lines underlining Lady Macbeth's dominance.

Weaker responses were characterised by a lack of engagement with the language employed by Shakespeare. In some cases, candidates struggled to get beyond an audience reaction of shock towards Lady Macbeth, labouring the point of gender roles and thereby missing the opportunity to explore the situation and language further. A small minority clearly wanted to talk about Lady Macbeth beyond the extract and quoted from her soliloquies to no avail. Examiners were slightly surprised at the widespread confusion regarding Macbeth's final lines, which were frequently (and sometimes spectacularly) misunderstood.

## **Othello**

Examiners have the sense that where *Othello* is taught, teachers are passionate about the play. This comes across in the candidates' responses: just like last year's essay question on Iago, this extract seemed to generate enthusiastic, thoughtful discussion. Many talked in detail about the effect of the soliloquy on the audience and the majority were able to probe and interpret phrases such as "honest Iago", "play the villain", "divinity of hell", "pour this pestilence" and "the net that shall enmesh them all".

Stronger responses tended to stick closely to the language while tracking Iago's thoughts through the soliloquy, exploring the use of irony, metaphor and rhetorical questions. There were some excellent evaluations of his motives and machinations, along with some personal reactions covering a wide spectrum from admiration to repulsion.

Weaker responses often failed to see the irony of Iago's comments about being called a "villain". Some had a general sense of him being evil, with support from words such as "hell" "devils" and "sins", but didn't develop much beyond this impression. Others were brief or didn't cover the whole extract, thereby neglecting the "net" image, for example. A very small number spent their time technique-spotting, thus limiting both AO1 discussion and attention to language choice.

## ***Much Ado About Nothing***

Beatrice and Benedick's first interaction at the start of the play was a well-known choice of extract and this was reflected in generally focussed and engaged responses. It was often set in context as part of the "merry war" between the pair, and, while this was a sensible approach, on occasion candidates drifted into discussing moments between the pair beyond the extract. Many saw the humour between the pair, and their colourful insults lent themselves to comments addressing AO2. Popular selections included "I am loved of all ladies", "scratched face", "rare parrot teacher" and "you always end with a jade's trick".

Better responses tracked the wit flying between the couple and considered the implications of their turns of phrase. Some charted the increasing vitriol and examined the implications of Benedick bringing the exchange to an end, and what we learn from Beatrice's final words. Plenty of candidates were able to pick out the similarities between the pair, and many saw their tangible enjoyment of each other's company, despite the apparent spikiness of this exchange.

Weaker responses tended to labour the point of Beatrice being unusual given the position of women in Elizabethan times, to the detriment of further exploration. Others wandered beyond the extract or didn't get to the end, and therefore missed out on plenty that was ripe for inference. Some candidates started off on the wrong foot by assuming that Benedick begins the extract by talking about Beatrice, when he is actually referring to Hero.

## ***Henry V***

The extract seemed familiar to most, although the fact it comes from the latter part of the play perhaps troubled a few candidates. There was a clear focus on audience response, with many candidates appreciating that this is an opportunity for the audience to see Henry in a new light after extensive exploration of his role as a soldier, leader and king. Stronger responses tracked the text closely, seeing his self-deprecation and perhaps lack of confidence here. Not many noted the fact that the extract is written in prose, though quite a few did appreciate the effect of Henry's addressing Katherine as "Kate". The best responses were able to follow Henry's appeals to honesty, loyalty and the importance of "a good heart" over the superficiality of manners and beauty.

Weaker responses tended to betray confusion over the content of the extract, struggling to follow his meaning. This led to some thinking he is saying Kate's face "is not worth sunburning", and others believing Henry is offering to do anything she wants: write her poems, dance and play leapfrog with her. For a few, the fact that Henry was looking to marry Katherine led to confusion with a later King Henry, better known for marriages, so Kate was duly warned. Hopefully these were candidates misguidedly trying their luck with a play they hadn't actually studied.

## ***The Merchant of Venice***

Examiners felt that this extract was handled well by candidates: where contextual comments were included they were relevant and appropriate, and tended not to be overdone. Stronger responses tended to track through the exchange between Salarino and Shylock, picking out Shylock's hatred of Antonio, before exploring the emotive language and rhetorical power of his speech. Candidates clearly understood (though didn't necessarily appreciate) Shylock's motivation and this led to some thoughtful personal responses on how an audience might respond.

Weaker responses were few and far between, and tended to be brief or limited in their coverage of the extract. A few candidates didn't take the opportunity to look at Shakespeare's language choice, or didn't make the most of Shylock's impassioned rhetoric. In some cases, candidates spotted techniques without discussing the effect on an audience.

#### **Characteristics of good extract responses:**

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on the details in the extract**
- **Selection of short, apt references to support points made**
- **Critical probing of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas**
- **Wide-ranging coverage of the extract**
- **Close examination of how the language/imagery used helps to convey meaning.**

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

- **More detailed coverage of the extract, managing comment on the beginning, middle and end, not straying beyond it**
- **More selection of supporting references rather than general impressions**
- **More practice on probing subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract**
- **Less reference to contextual factors when AO3 is not addressed in this question**
- **Careful adherence to the rubric requirements of the paper to ensure that candidates are only answering questions on the texts that they have studied.**

#### **Essay questions**

Essay questions were focussed on key characters, relationships and themes in the plays, and enabled candidates of all abilities to access them and demonstrate their knowledge. Weaker candidates managed to track the narrative and find some points of focus; encouragingly, most were also able to offer some relevant, direct references from key moments. For higher ability candidates, the challenge was to plan and execute a focused, analytical response, selecting the most pertinent references in support.

The direction to address "different points of the play" was included in all of the questions, and candidates were generally successful in choosing key scenes to track their character / relationship / theme. Better responses were characterised by this tracking across the whole text chronologically and the ability to select and comment on key quotations from these scenes, so in *Romeo and Juliet* responses stronger candidates were able to analyse Tybalt's appearance in Act 1 Scene 1, Act 1 Scene 5 and Act 3 Scene 1, with the best also commenting on the ramifications of and reactions to his death in subsequent scenes. In *Macbeth* candidates had acts of violence to choose from in every act of the play, so the skill lay in selecting the best examples to discuss.

Weaker responses often didn't cover the whole play, or perhaps didn't manage to incorporate AO2 elements into discussion. However, it is pleasing that so many examiners commented on the frequency of apt quotations (or sometimes paraphrases) utilised by candidates, and that comments on these selections were almost always meaningful, and often analytical. In particular, probing effects of language choice and use of imagery were extremely productive sources of AO2 reward. Another was the highlighting of turning points or key contrasts (for example Tybalt's death being the catalyst for the tragic outcome of *Romeo and Juliet*, or the contrast between the violence for which Macbeth earns praise and the appalling murder of Macduff's family.)

As we found last year, some contextual discussion in the Shakespeare essay was highly relevant in many responses (e.g. the prevalence of racist attitudes in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*; ideas of familial honour and shame in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet*). However, some candidates allowed contextual themes to dominate their responses. It is worth reinforcing the message to candidates that AO3 is not explicitly rewarded in this question, but can add to credit for AO1 when it is focused and proportionate. Encouragingly, most seem to be getting the balance right.

The total marks for this question are strongly influenced by AO4 and again this year examiners saw the full range of performance. There was certainly evidence of proof-reading and correction in some scripts, which is to be applauded. The lack of capital letters certainly lost some candidates marks, as did repeated misspelling of character (and indeed playwright) names.

### ***Romeo and Juliet***

Tybalt was an easily recognisable character for candidates, and almost all were able to make some judgements regarding his presentation in the play. Most were able to discuss the three scenes he appears in and the better candidates moved on to discuss his influence on the play. Knowledge of the text was generally very good, although the order of the scenes Tybalt appeared in and his actual words were sometimes confused. Despite him having relatively few lines in the play, many candidates were able to do a great deal with the material he provides.

Stronger candidates explored Tybalt's impact in the three key scenes, noting his direct use of language of violence and hatred of Montagues, but also identifying his death as a turning point in the play. More confident responses explored how his presence (even after death) continues to permeate the play, with the Nurse's response to his death showing a different side to his character. Some talked about how he is mourned by Lady Capulet and Juliet, and how his demise influences Capulet's change of heart over Juliet's future. There were a few sympathetic approaches that considered Tybalt's upbringing and how he is as much a victim as Romeo and Juliet, due to his indoctrination into the family feud, which made a refreshing change.

Weaker responses tended to mix elements between scenes or not move on from the basic idea of Tybalt's aggression. There were a significant minority that could track events with focus, but struggled to address AO2. Some candidates mixed up characters and events, for example claiming that Tybalt bites his thumb at the Montagues, or invented extra scenes in which Tybalt discovers Romeo and Juliet's relationship. Examiners saw a small number of responses where candidates had confused Tybalt with another character – mostly Mercutio.

## ***Macbeth***

Candidates found this an accessible question which encouraged the selection of scenes from across the whole play, from the battle scenes at the start to Macbeth's violent end. They were spoilt for choice for material to select; popular selections included Macbeth splitting Macdonald "from the nave to th'chaps", the "air-drawn dagger", the murder of Duncan, Banquo's murder and ghostly re-appearance, Lady Macbeth's demise and Macbeth's decapitation at the hands of Macduff. Many candidates considered the effect of violence through the deterioration in Macbeth's morality and Lady Macbeth's mental health.

Stronger responses saw the cyclical structure of the play and made apt selections across its range; many saw the irony of Macbeth, the aggressor, becoming the victim of the violence he instigated.

Many saw how patriotic violence is praised and that violence is seen as acceptable in order to combat tyranny at the end of the play. At the top end of the mark scheme, candidates offered thoughtful analysis of language and considered more subtle points, such as how violence in the natural world is used to reflect Macbeth's violent crimes.

Weaker responses tended to limit the discussion to just one or two examples of violence in the play; a few had little to offer beyond a hypothetically "dashed" baby lifted from the extract. Some discussion was rather general and therefore missed the chance to examine events in closer detail or incorporate specific references that would have helped generate marks for both AO1 and AO2.

## ***Othello***

This was a straightforward and accessible question which allowed candidates the opportunity to select from the whole play and track the change in the relationship, driven mainly by Iago. Stronger responses managed clear, purposeful tracking of the relationship, combined with well-chosen quotations and attendant detailed analysis of language. Some were cynical about whether their love was ever true, whereas others argued a convincing case for true love being proven by Othello's suicide. The 'difference' (social, cultural, racial) between the characters featured heavily in responses, with candidates astutely citing social prejudice and its influence, particularly on Othello's insecurity as key to causing the breakdown of the relationship. There was some excellent work on the murder scene in particular; it seemed to be known in detail.

Weaker responses tended to not cover the whole play – not all candidates, for example, mentioned that Othello kills Desdemona – or offered quite generalised discussion, but these were a small minority.

## ***Much Ado About Nothing***

Candidates knew Hero well and most had plenty to say on her presentation. Most wrote about her submissiveness and innocence, and tended to look at the masked ball, the gulling scene with Ursula and of course the two weddings. Some candidates mounted a defence of her against the treatment she suffers at the hands of male characters, with Claudio in particular coming in for criticism. Better responses contrasted her with her cousin Beatrice but went beyond the rather two-dimensional picture of Hero as a passive victim by highlighting the confidence, humour and intelligence she shows in the gulling scene (when the men are absent from the stage).

Weaker responses were often reasonably secure on the narrative and Hero's role within the play but were light on specific detail and textual analysis. Some focused on only one or two scenes; others didn't go far beyond generalised contextual discussion of how Hero exemplifies the Shakespearean view of women.

### ***Henry V***

Responses were mostly engaged and detailed, drawing from episodes across the whole play. Inevitably, many examples were of Henry himself showing power, such as how he deals with the traitors, his military ruthlessness at Harfleur and the power of his inspirational speech before Agincourt. However, candidates also explored the power of the Church in Act 1 and the power of war itself at various points in the play. Better responses were able to select several episodes and explore how power is exercised with attention to the language used, some discussing how power is perhaps wielded reasonably or abused at different points in the play.

Weaker responses tended to not range across the play and offered only one or two examples of power in the play. Some followed a reasonably accurate narrative approach with focus on Henry's use of power, but neglected specific reference, inevitably limiting AO2 marks.

### ***The Merchant of Venice***

This question offered candidates the chance to follow a main character throughout the play and on the whole they seemed well-prepared. Most answers began with Portia's "awearied of this great world" comment and tracked her across the play. Candidates could sympathise with her over the confines of the will and the casket scene was usually included. There was also focus on how Portia loses our sympathy because of the racial prejudice towards the Prince. Stronger answers continued in this vein, taking in her role in Shylock's trial and the test of the rings and how these events develop our view of her.

Weaker responses, however, tended to show less secure coverage of the latter part of the play or were brief and undeveloped. A few could track Portia's narrative thread, but without much specific reference or analysis of language. In some cases generalised contextual discussion intruded; brevity was also sometimes a factor.

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

- **Close tracking of a character/relationship/theme across the whole text**
- **Selection of a range of apt events and specific details to support thoughtful ideas**
- **Some analysis of the writer's intentions when creating characters and plots**
- **Highlighting of important turning points and key contrasts and their effects**
- **Careful spelling and punctuation, with vocabulary and sentence structure used to control meaning effectively.**

### Ways in which performance could be improved:

- Tracking a character/relationship/theme across the whole text, with effective coverage of later acts
- More focus on developing a personal engagement with the text rather than formulaic answers
- Practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked
- Practice in selecting detailed textual evidence for ideas
- Practice in proof-reading responses to avoid careless technical errors, such as forgetting use of capital letters for character names or neglecting punctuation
- Revision tasks that involve sequencing the events of the play
- An awareness of the differences between film versions and the written play.

### Poetry questions

#### Question 7.1

Examiners were pleased to report that they felt candidates had been well prepared for this theme and the chosen poem: almost all candidates engaged with the idea of how war was presented in *Mametz Wood*. Candidates across the ability range were able to track through the poem, selecting and commenting on Sheers' imagery, usually to good effect. Most picked up on Sheers' description of the soldiers as "wasted youth" and discussed what that phrase implies. They were also receptive to the poignant images of fragility. Examiners found many candidates had a strong empathetic response to the plight of the soldiers, and this sometimes led naturally to some contextual understanding being shown. The idea of time which runs through the poem was picked up, with the two time periods within the poem enabling candidates to show further appreciation of contexts.

Stronger responses probed the poem's subtleties, such as nature's role, the dehumanisation of the corpses and the veiled criticism of authority, and were able to link elements of the poem to context at various points. The best answers appreciated the impact of the closing lines, with its moving reference to the Welsh choral tradition and suggestion that Sheers is using the poem to give his dead countrymen's "absent tongues" a voice.

Weaker responses tended to be brief or not cover the whole poem. A very small minority spotted techniques or selected lines without offering much comment, but on the whole candidates grasped key ideas in the poem and could say something about context. In a few cases Sheers was believed to be a veteran, and there were a few other minor contextual slips (it was the Boer War or World War Two), but generally examiners were impressed with contextual understanding.

There does seem to be a box-ticking approach towards structure and form in the poetry questions, where some candidates appear to have been drilled into always writing a paragraph on structure for each poem. Obviously some poems lend themselves to structural comments more than others; unfortunately, this seems to lead to candidates counting lines and stanzas and trying to make tenuous links to meaning. While some structural comments offered were plausible ('the lack of rhyme adds to the sombre tone', 'the regular structure perhaps echoes the regimented treatment of the soldiers') others ('the lines represent the bodies lined up in the grave', 'the three-lined stanzas resemble the ploughed field') were not. Rather than writing contrived and implausible comments on structure, candidates would be better off spending their time analysing language choices.

## Question 7.2

Examiners were generally impressed by the way candidates had retained knowledge of the poems in the anthology, with all abilities recalling details from the poems they chose to compare with *Mametz Wood*. Many candidates really grasped the opportunity to discuss at length and in detail the poem they knew well. *Dulce et Decorum Est* and *The Manhunt* were the most popular choices, but *The Soldier* worked well too, offering a clear contrast. *A Wife in London*, which also offered a different background and perspective, was also a successful choice. There were some more unusual choices, but they were often self-penalising in their lack of a direct link to the theme of war.

Stronger responses included contextual details on both poems, often outlining key bits of information early in the response, then filtering in references to them throughout. *Dulce et Decorum Est* yielded effective points of comparison, with candidates incorporating plenty of detail from this vivid poem and finding clear connections between these two critiques of war. Much was made of the graphic imagery and horrific conditions in both. *The Manhunt* was generally handled well, with plenty of context on the subjects of Armitage's poem and how PTSD is portrayed in the poem; candidates saw that these poems were both about the aftermath of war, but found plenty of differences between them. *The Soldier* enabled candidates to consider differences and examiners saw some excellent responses that explored the differences in the presentation of death and burial in the earth.

Weaker responses tended to be brief, perhaps running out of time or struggling to recall details from their chosen poem. Strangely, candidates did not always use the range of knowledge of *Mametz Wood* that they had already shown in 7.1, making the comparison less effective and losing marks: it's important to remind candidates they can replicate comments they have made in 7.1 in 7.2. With several poems in the anthology featuring the theme of war there was some confusion between titles, poets and sometimes between poets' biographies. Some of this could perhaps have been avoided with reference to the list of poems and authors printed on the exam paper, which might have refreshed memories. AO3 was an issue in a small minority of cases – certainly smaller than last year – with context not explicitly discussed, or only discussed for one of the poems.

### Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- Careful tracking of the poem set for 7.1, with detailed coverage of the whole poem
- Probing of subtext, tentative interpretation rooted in the poems
- Strong focus on imagery, language and the effects they create
- Interweaving of relevant contextual detail into discussion
- Sensible selection of poem to suit the theme for comparison in 7.2
- Detailed, developed comparison of ideas, language and context in 7.2
- Personal responses to the poems supported by textual references

### Ways in which performance can be improved:

- More detailed coverage of the whole poem set in 7.1
- Practice in supporting ideas with detailed reference to the poems
- Selection of an appropriate poem for comparison, with a strong focus on the theme of the question
- Effective revision of anthology poems to ensure the ability to recall and make good use of textual detail
- Practice a structured approach to comparison, ensuring effective coverage of both poems and detailed comparative comments in 7.2
- Incorporation of relevant contextual detail to support overall discussion in both 7.1 and 7.2

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCSE

Summer 2018

### COMPONENT 2

#### Section A – Post 1914 Prose/Drama

##### General Comments

As last year, the most popular texts studied were *Lord of the Flies*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Blood Brothers*. A large number of candidates had studied *A Woman in Black*, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, with smaller numbers tackling the other Section A texts.

##### Rubric Infringements

On an untiered paper it is to be expected that some candidates will attempt all of the questions. This was obviously more evident at the start of the paper: there were far more rubric infringement responses on questions 0.1-0.4, including a number of pupils simply copying out every extract. For example, more than 160 candidates had tackled question 02, Anita and Me, without studying it, evidenced by no recognition of Papa as anything other than a 'gambling addict'.

While examiners can award marks for sensible comments made from tracking the extract, the responses are obviously only limited to that section of the text and cannot demonstrate any wider textual knowledge, leaving them within Band 1 or low in Band 2 at best. It is vital that candidates are familiar with the lay-out of the paper and are reminded of the rubric before entering the exam hall. Even more able candidates can make this mistake under the pressure of so many Summer exams.

##### Section A

The source-based response essay was again successful in offering support in the closed book, untiered exam. The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. There was a range of character, relationship, and theme questions within Section A. Candidates were clearly very familiar with their key characters and most were able to show knowledge of their development (or not in Mrs Birling's case) throughout their texts.

The majority of pupils used the extract as a starting point for their essays, and then moved on to discuss the text as a whole. A smaller number took a more integrated approach by dipping in and out of the extract to make links across the whole text. Both approaches are valid and effective. In comparison to last year, pupils managed to avoid spending too much of their time focusing on the extract, to the detriment of their AO1 marks and allowed themselves more time to demonstrate their knowledge of the wider text. This seems to have been addressed well by teachers following last year's report and CPD advice.

On the whole, candidates were able to demonstrate some good AO2 analysis and evaluation skills with relevant subject terminology, though there were also a large number of pupils still forcing subject terminology (especially word class labelling) into their responses to the extract – either incorrectly or very tenuously. Feature spotting does not gain marks and can be at the detriment to the fluency of the overall response. However, there was also some exceptional AO2 analysis demonstrated across all texts, with more able pupils able to strike the right balance of exploring the closer impact of key words and images, *where relevant* to the question.

The less successful responses overall, relied too heavily on tracking through the extract in excessive detail. In extreme cases, unnecessary labelling and reference to the effect of every word and unhelpful comments on the impact of punctuation marks, left insufficient time to demonstrate their wider textual knowledge which would develop a more effective response and a higher mark.

#### **AO4 – Spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structure accuracy**

As reported last year, common errors include misspelling of character and author names with numerous variations of Priestley, Sheila, Arthur, Woman, Piggy, Johnstone etc. Run-on sentences, or comma splicing also affected AO4 marks across the ability range. Similarly, missed capital letters and apostrophe misuse could be addressed when preparing pupils for Section A. Informal expression and illegibility also caused problems for even the most able candidates and is self-penalising.

#### **Timing Issues**

It was evident from some very long Section A essays, that many candidates had spent significantly longer on the Section A text than on their 19<sup>th</sup> Century Prose – which had a knock-on effect for their poetry responses too. Whilst CPD training and more familiarity with the paper made this slightly less of an issue than last year, it is still something to reinforce with candidates. It is probably down to ‘first question enthusiasm’, but candidates should be advised and given opportunities to rehearse answering on their set texts within 45 minutes and be reminded of the of the 45/45/60 timings when familiarising themselves with the overall paper structure.

#### ***Lord of the Flies***

The extract seemed to provide a good opportunity to discuss the significance of the conch, as well as Jack’s challenge to Ralph’s leadership and his greed for power. Stronger candidates linked these to broader ideas of civilisation and savagery in the rest of the text. This passage evoked some perceptive close reading, with most candidates placing the passage clearly and noticing the “chaotic” atmosphere and the “desperation” in all the activity. Many were empathetic to Ralph, bearing the weight of civilisation and rescue on his shoulders as he struggled to enforce the rules and maintain order. The very best accurately placed the extract in terms of events on the island and went on to write analyses which were both forensic in terms of attention to detail and also sensitive in their interpretation. The growing violence, both in terms of language used by the boys and their actions was duly noted as was the effect of the darkness and the wind (and this was an instance where ‘pathetic fallacy’ was correctly identified and discussed). The role of Piggy was considered intelligently as was Ralph’s increasing frustration and his desperation for rescue.

Simon's death was often handled with sensitivity and the best responses included Ralph's and Piggy's involvement in the matter, along with their subsequent reactions. Plenty commented on the boys' leadership skills, contrasted their priorities and noted their roles as representatives of civilisation and savagery, particularly Jack's tactics of manipulating the boys' fears (and the concept of the Beast) for his own ends.

The significance of the conch in establishing, maintaining and eventually showing the demise of law and order was missed by only a very few and this was often the springboard from which to jump into a treatment of the question in terms of the whole novel. Many noted and dealt with Piggy's "it's ever so valuable". Most went on to deal with its breaking into fragments simultaneously with Piggy's death. Also, the majority were able to distinguish this act as deliberate, connect it to Roger's earlier stone-throwing and use the material to demonstrate the breakdown of law and order.

Weaker responses were distracted by unnecessary contextual background (not assessed in Section A) with a number of responses spending time on Golding's biography, his time as a teacher, soldier and other WW2 matters, including Hitler's dictatorship and his treatment of the Jews. These candidates often penalised themselves because, having front-loaded this material, they ran out of steam in dealing with the whole novel or the extract, depending on their order of presenting their ideas. Also, with so many useful events and symbolic moments to draw upon, some candidates would have benefited from spending a little time at the start, ordering their thoughts. Some essays were often very long and occasionally very repetitive. Others had fairly scant reference to some of the novel's significant moments – for example limiting themselves to early events such as Jack's killing of the pig, but over-looking the murders of Simon and Piggy.

### ***Anita and Me***

As previously mentioned, there were very few candidates studying this text this year. Most responses were tackled 'unseen' with very little knowledge or understanding of Syal's presentation of Papa's character, or Meena's relationship with him. It is a shame to see so few studying this enjoyable text as it has been well received by candidates in the past.

### ***Never Let Me Go***

This complex novel clearly engaged candidates and the question elicited some very thoughtful and sensitive discussions of Kathy and Tommy's relationship. There was interesting use made of the extract to illustrate the balance of power in the relationship and the effect of Kathy as a narrator here.

Many candidates made clear links between the three stages of the novel and their developing relationship, commenting in depth on turning points such as the visit to Norfolk and the finding of a replacement of the Judy Bridgewater tape, or the trip to the stranded boat. The influence of Ruth was mostly well explored, with many responses dealing effectively with her role in keeping Kathy and Tommy apart, along with her apologetic gesture of Madame's address for them to appeal for a 'deferral'. Sensitive handling of the relationship in its final stages was also evident, with some effective links and evaluations made across the text from their early friendship at Hailsham and consideration of the 'unfulfilled' or tragic nature of this doomed romance. Some successful candidates also explored the effect of Kathy as narrator, and how the reader may be misled by this into seeing her as unemotional or unreliable in her accounts.

Weaker responses tended to make sweeping statements about the nature of Ruth and Tommy's relationship and her intentions or had little discussion about the later stages of Kathy and Tommy's relationship and his death, perhaps being rather skimmed over at the end of a longer piece. These responses tended to run out of steam after reference to events such as Tommy's tantrum at the start of the novel, with little commentary on events at the cottages in part 2, or beyond.

### ***The Woman in Black***

This text is undoubtedly engaging and most candidates responded with enthusiasm and sensitivity. The extract was usually well-tracked to elicit Arthur's reactions to this (second) sighting of the woman in black. Some mis-placed the passage as the first time he'd seen her, omitting the first encounter at Mrs Drablow's funeral, but most made a good job of discussing the narrator's mixed emotions at this point.

Essays were generally good on Arthur's narrative role throughout the novel – discussing Hill's use of flashback, which reveals the contrast between the younger man's arrogance and superiority and the older man's nervous disposition. The best essays tracked his growing uncertainty and fear across the narrative, from his early reluctance to engage in story-telling on Christmas Eve. Such responses often began well with reference to his initial 'London attitude' and his rather dismissive behaviour to the people of Crythin Gifford, illustrated by his first conversation with Sam Daily on his journey north. Candidates were then able to discuss how this attitude changes throughout the novel through the "real" ghost story of his own experience with the woman in black, linking forwards to his altered devastation at the novel's end with the final "Enough" interpreted effectively.

Coverage of the text as a whole was a discriminating factor in these essays: weaker responses failed to include the climactic revelation of the death of Stella and Joseph. Some also seemed muddled about the text's minor characters (Bentley, Daily, Jerome) and Kipps' family situation at the start and at the end of the novel. This may be due to the film/TV/stage versions which diverge considerably from the novel and from each other. In fact, the number of inaccurate film references for this text was an issue for a number of candidates, which inevitably limits the actual textual references an examiner can credit. It would also be helpful for teachers to reinforce the difference between Woman and Women. The Women in Black are frequently referred to in these essays (conjuring even more terrifying images than Hill's singular!).

### ***Oranges are not the Only Fruit***

Candidates engaged well with Elsie's character, with most effectively exploring Elsie's significance in the novel and her positive influence on Jeanette in contrast to the more difficult relationship Jeanette had with her own mother. The extract prompted sensitive comments regarding the nature of Jeanette's fascination with Elsie as someone both exotic and warm. Much was made of their 'teamwork' playing the piano, and there was effective reference to the humour evoked from Jeanette's younger narrative perspective too. Many compared Elsie to a grandmother figure to Jeanette and referred to key moments such as visiting Jeanette in hospital, and her support for Jeanette and Melanie, contrary to the rest of the congregation. Some made good reference to Elsie's role in broadening Jeanette's literary knowledge, again in contrast to Mrs Winterson's version of *Jane Eyre*, for example. There was sensitive reference to the impact Elsie's death had on Jeanette in the final stage of the novel, with good understanding of how Jeanette's exclusion from Elsie's funeral was significant to Jeanette's decision to move from the community completely.

Weaker candidates struggled to include a range of detail from across the whole text to demonstrate Elsie's growing influence on Jeanette, and therefore her significance to the novel as a whole. Others spent much of their response trying to compare the 'parenting' of Mrs Winterson and Elsie, and whilst at times relevant, these answers did not always remain clearly focused or develop sufficient discussion of Elsie as an important character in her own right.

### ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time***

This seemed to be a very good question in drawing out some very detailed and perceptive responses from stronger candidates. It enabled them to evaluate the role Judy had played early in the play where she is presented through the comments of other characters, especially Christopher's father, and the letters to Christopher, and contrast that with the character we actually meet later in the play. There was lots of interesting discussion about why she left, with quite a lot showing sympathy and understanding for her, and invariably the hope that she could develop into a better mother in the future. Candidates working at the top end still acknowledged that this wasn't a totally happy ending and Judy had many flaws. There was some very detailed analysis of the language in the extract, with the better linking the way the letter was written with Judy's emotional state.

In discussing the presentation of Judy's character candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the text. Many wrote sensitively about her role within the novel and her honesty as demonstrated within the extract. Whilst some responses saw her departure from the family as a simple demonstration of her selfishness most candidates were far more understanding of her motives. For some her self-deprecation was an accurate reflection of the complex family relationships within the Boone household: she left not because she loves Roger Shears more than Ed and Christopher but rather because she felt ignored, powerless and marginalised in the relationship between her husband and son. Judy was frequently praised for simply trying her best and though her behaviour is, at times, flawed, most candidates appreciated and understood that she at least does try.

Weaker candidates took a very much more black and white approach to this question; Judy was seen as a bad mother because she left Christopher when a good mother would have looked after her child, and at the end she had learned how to be a better mother. Amongst these weaker candidates there were many who relied far too much on the extract, and made very few comments on the wider text. Some candidates made more than was necessary of Judy's grammar errors in the extract, pulling apart her punctuation errors to somehow highlight flaws in her relationship with Christopher. There were also quite a surprising number who did not know who Judy was, and despite it saying Christopher's mother in the question, some still struggled to write about her.

### ***A Taste of Honey***

This powerful extract provided a basis for some very confident and sensitive responses about Jo's dramatic behaviour at this point in the play. There was good understanding of the close but complex relationship between Geof and Jo, and thoughtful comments referring to Jo's difficult relationship with Helen. Strong responses were able to evaluate the impact of Jo's extreme language in response to the 'wrong coloured doll' with some mature comments about her increasingly stressful situation within the context of the play and at the later stages of her pregnancy. There was good analysis of Jo's changing tone towards Geof and marriage in the latter part of the extract. Wider reference to Jo's development in the play focused effectively on her dysfunctional relationship with Helen, as well as her treatment by Peter. Most candidates demonstrated their sympathy for Jo's presentation and recognised the thematic links to parenting and motherhood with stronger answers dealing with Helen's return at the end of the play.

Weaker candidates lacked broader reference to the wider events in the play and stayed within the focus of the extract. Less successful answers considered Jo simply as selfish and irresponsible. Others misunderstood her responses to the doll as purely racist, perhaps missing the context of her situation. A large number of candidates referred to the significance of moments specifically from the 1961 film version rather than the original text, which cannot be valued as textual support by the examiner. Weaker responses also tended to focus on earlier events in greater detail and lose sight of the final scenes. As with other Section A texts, context can be problematic, in that Jo's situation as a young, unmarried mother within the 1960s setting is relevant to her character, but often 'bolted on' context or extended discussion about the characteristics of a kitchen sink drama, for example, are less helpful.

### ***An Inspector Calls***

The Mrs Birling question worked well and led to many detailed, focused and engaged responses. The question stretched the top end and gave opportunity for some rigorous comment and interpretation, with contextual factors, didactic purpose and character analysis seamlessly interwoven to good effect, while candidates at the lower end demonstrated some success in engaging with the character of Mrs Birling in the extract and drawing in wider knowledge from the rest of the text to support and often develop ideas about her personality and interactions with some degree of success.

Mrs Birling is the character that most candidates love to hate and those who gave full vent to their disgust were better at doing so than those who tried to give her a fair hearing or make excuses for her. The majority knew where the extract came in terms of the chain of events and were able to point out the irony in our being a step ahead of her in pointing the finger at 'squiffy' Eric. Her snobbery, high-handedness, and poor parenting skills were all well-noted. The best responses were able to move between close analysis of language to discussion of the bigger ideas such as the generational divide or issues of social inequality in Britain. Although context is not assessed in this question, many responses benefited from knowledge of wider contextual issues such as the difference between capitalism and socialism. This knowledge allowed candidates to broaden their discussion and to engage with the writer's intentions and messages. Also, the best responses were clearly structured, many containing a brief introduction presenting an overview of the character, and a detailed argument developed. The extract was accessible and candidates were able to engage with Mrs Birling and her interrogation by the Inspector. Candidates of all abilities were able to comment on stage directions and tone; although some struggled to interpret the impact of '*stung*' with a couple of candidates thinking that she had quite literally, been stung.

Stronger candidates focused on the contrast between Mrs Birling and the younger generation, particularly Sheila and were able to comment on the text as a conscious construct at this level. Top band candidates were often able to create an argument about Mrs Birling in terms of this – looking at her role representing the older generation and how a contemporary audience would view her following WW2. Some were also quite sensitive about the reasons for her behaviour – such as being trapped in her own upbringing as part of her class.

Common topics for discussion were Mrs Birling's poor relationship with her children, and her blinkered views of them; the way her superiority over her husband is shown in the opening scenes; her acceptance of society's gender roles at the time; similarities between her views and her husband's and how these differ from those of her children. Attitudes to women and to the lower classes were explored, with more able candidates exploring the use of language to convey Mrs Birling's dislike of Eva and 'that sort'. There was also much consideration of Priestley's use of Mrs Birling to criticise old-fashioned views.

Weaker responses were often linked to an over-reliance on the extract, with candidates developing a focused analysis of details from the extract without addressing the wider text. Weaker comments on the extract tend to just focus on single word analyses or surface-level feature-spotting and not engage with what it showed about Mrs Birling's presentation at this point in the play. Weaker responses would also repeat very similar comments on each of the references to the extract they made or try and force in comments about stage directions which didn't aid the point they were making and/or help to answer the question. Less successful answers also failed to discuss the climax of the play and were content to finish with discovering that Eric was the father of Eva's child.

### ***The History Boys***

There was some excellent analysis of the extract which provided a useful way into Irwin, his relationship with the boys and the theme of education. Candidates were well prepared for this character, judging by the assured selection of pertinent quotations selected from across the text as a whole. Most made the connection between his style of teaching and his later jobs as historian, journalist and spin-doctor, while also bringing in his massaging of the truth about his own educational background.

Some very good responses recognised that the extract was a turning point in the way the boys view Irwin, although discussions were rich and opinions varied, depending on the angle that was taken. Irwin is a character that clearly divides opinion. Many feel sympathy for him and dealt sensitively with his personal predicament and his willingness to challenge the status quo: 'It's not so much lest we forget, as lest we remember.' There was much valid discussion on the difference between the public Irwin and the private man particularly in connection with Dakin's invitation. There were many sensitive observations that Irwin's teaching is performance hiding an insecure, tentative individual. Other candidates saw him as an arrogant, amoral and irresponsible enemy of education.

Weaker responses were clearly rather reliant on the film version which usually revealed themselves by, "The first time we see Irwin....." and are unaware of the opening scenes of Act 1 with Irwin at 40 in a wheelchair. Irwin was described on school trips, in castles, gardens and on park benches. Other less successful responses spent too much time comparing him to Hector, and whilst this is relevant up to a point, such responses risk insufficient focus and balance on Irwin himself. Less successful candidates also clearly struggled with the density of the language in the extract. In these instances, candidates grasped Irwin's feigned boredom 'I am asleep' but moved on to a more general discussion of Dakin, homosexuality and the 'foreskins of Christ.' Incidentally, many candidates write that they have really enjoyed the play (they rarely do about other texts) which is refreshing.

### ***Blood Brothers***

The question appeared to work well across a range of abilities in the responses seen. More able candidates sometimes took a thematic approach or wrote about Mrs Johnstone in terms of Russell's view of society and its context. Some effective responses discussed the use of the Monroe and dancing motifs as a way of presenting the character. As with the other questions, the extract worked well as a starting point, with some candidates using it to discuss Mrs Johnstone's moral dilemma in a thoughtful or sensitive way. The fact she was pushing him away as a form of protection rather than cruelty, for example. The word 'cradling' was often discussed successfully by more able candidates too, linking it to the idea that she did not get to do this when he was a baby. Whilst less able candidates sometimes lapsed into talking about the two brothers and their stories, more able candidates explored Mrs Johnstone's character well. Many of them understood Mrs Johnstone's underlying feelings here and the complexities of her relationship with Edward.

It was interesting to see candidates' perceptions of Mrs Johnstone towards the beginning of the play. A significant number of candidates thought that Mrs Johnstone enjoyed 'dancing' (lots of candidates this year identifying this as a euphemism for having sex) with lots of different men, and therefore had lots of children by lots of different men - they were quite judgmental of her for this. Fewer candidates realised that she danced with one man, who became her husband, and had all her children with him. There was more sympathy for her when discussing her 'decision' to give away a child, and an appreciation that she was manipulated here by Mrs Lyons. Much was made of her superstitious nature and how this was used against her, with more able candidates exploring how this theme is continued throughout the play (e.g. with the narrator's song 'Devil's Got Your Number'). Superstition was linked to class, highlighting Mrs Lyons' initial scornful reaction to Mrs Johnstone's reaction to the new shoes on the table. Some candidates considered how Mrs Lyons became more superstitious and this took over her life, as Mrs Johnstone seemed to become less influenced by it. Quite a few candidates talked about how the superstition of twins separated at birth dying if they ever found out they were a pair was made up by Mrs Lyons but eventually became true because Mrs Johnstone believed in it.

There were some lovely responses that explored the development of Mrs Johnstone's character, and how she became a stronger and happier person when she moved house. Candidates compared her initial interactions with Mrs Lyons, where she was easily manipulated, with the later scene where she stands up to a knife-wielding Mrs Lyons.

Many candidates talked about Mrs Johnstone's relationships with her children, and how she was a loving mother despite her failings. Much was made of the care and love she showed to Eddie in the extract. Some pointed out how she helped Mickey and Linda when Linda fell pregnant and how she didn't judge. A few considered how she was understanding of Linda's relationship with Eddie, and again didn't pass judgement. Some mentioned the narrator's harsh condemnation of Mrs Johnstone at the beginning of the play – as being a cold woman with a heart of stone – and considered how this perception compared with the audience's perception throughout the play. There was some thoughtful discussion of the theme of 'living on the never never' and how this was portrayed through the character/throughout the play. A number of candidates pointed out that the twins' deaths at the end was the 'debt that must be paid'.

Weaker candidates often took a much more narrative approach to the question, usually starting with the extract and moving around from there. Most were able to comment in some detail about the differences between Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons, which helped them to produce some quite detailed answers. There was a tendency to over-simplify by just seeing Mrs Johnstone as a victim of the class system and having no power over her own decisions.

Context is obviously not marked here, but a knowledge of wider issues allows candidates to develop effective responses. Stronger candidates dealt with this efficiently, mentioning class and arguments about nature and nurture and poverty to support points they were making about Mrs Johnstone. Weaker candidates often wrote sweeping generalisations on the class system or poverty in Liverpool (during Victorian times in several cases), without showing directly how this linked to Mrs Johnstone. There was also lots of simplistic over-emphasis and widespread condemnation of Mrs Johnstone's Liverpudlian accent which many deemed to be the underlying flaw in her character. Many candidates, weaker and stronger, struggled to really use the references to Marilyn Monroe effectively. They had been told about her, but often did not really know who she was and why she was so important to Mrs Johnstone.

### Characteristics of a good Section A response:

- Answers move swiftly from highlighting key details in the extract into a wider discussion across the text
- Use a few well-chosen key events or scenes to comment on significant relationships and/or themes presented
- Good coverage of the text with reference to events spanning the beginning, middle and ending of the story, supported with some relevant detail, with increasing breadth and depth at the highest level
- Sustained focus on the question and direct textual references
- Development of ideas and supporting references, rather than assertions and general impressions
- There was some exceptional AO2 analysis demonstrated across all texts.

### Ways in which performance can be improved:

- Encourage candidates to be selective in what they use for the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills
- Use the extract as a springboard for a wider discussion, with a few key words or images explored.
- Prepare candidates to know the specific characteristics of the writer's techniques and find examples of these within the given extract
- Avoid 'over analysis' of vocabulary: *'Mrs Johnstone says she's leaving the wobbly table'. The adjective 'wobbly' suggests her life is unstable.'*
- It is not necessary to name every word class. As demonstrated in the example above, candidates get into wholly unnecessary muddles trying to label verbs, adverbs and many more.
- Avoid technique spotting where it does not add to the analysis: *'The alliteration of the 'y' in 'Your good for nothing you' emphasises the direct cruelty towards Jo'; 'Judy's use of enjambment further emphasises that she is in the room with Christopher'*
- Focus on analysis of sentence length, punctuation features or more non-fiction rhetorical devices can be an unproductive use of the extract.
- Contextual details should only be included in Section A if relevant to the question and the author's or playwright's intentions - for example Mrs Birling's class snobbery and lack of charity is central to Priestley's intentions and this year's task, whilst *'Mrs Johnstone's superstition represents how the working class in Liverpool had nothing to hope for and gave meaning to their empty lives'* is not helpful, relevant or accurate.
- Learn key spellings such as character names and authors
- Proof read their responses to Section A to eradicate simple errors such as capital letters or missing apostrophes.

## Section B – 19th Century Prose

### General Comments

The most popular texts continue to be *A Christmas Carol* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, perhaps due to their relative brevity and numerous film adaptations. However, *War of the Worlds* has grown in popularity and *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Silas Marner* all have a significant number of candidates studying them, with obvious passion from teachers who actively choose to teach these less prolific texts.

The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. At the lower end, there was a tendency towards unfocused narrative but most attempted to deal with “importance” and “presentation” and the majority of candidates produced well-supported, well-constructed essays. There was clear engagement with the questions and more able candidates were able to demonstrate evaluation skills and discuss the effects of the presentation on the audience.

As with Section A, the source based response (or “exploding extract”) continues to be successful in offering apt support for a closed book, untiered exam. All the extracts worked well as a starting point for candidates and they were, quite rightly, used in different ways. Some dealt with it at the start of their response; many worked it in from a chronological approach; and others used it throughout their response, cross referenced with the wider text. All approaches were valid and all were able to work satisfactorily for the individual candidates concerned. Very few didn’t use the extract at all, though some treated it with a light touch, preferring to focus on the wider text. This too was acceptable, though seems like a bit of a wasted opportunity. Relatively few candidates made no reference at all to the wider text, though many were unbalanced. Overall, it should be noted that the vast majority used the extract sensibly.

A surprisingly large number of candidates are still referring to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Prose text as a play. This was true of all the texts and it was occasionally clear that some candidates were basing their answers on theatrical productions. There were also numerous film references, particularly in *A Christmas Carol*, *War of the Worlds* and (to a lesser extent this year) *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Whilst film and play versions are undoubtedly of valid use in teaching a text, it is important that candidates study the full novels.

Context (assessed as AO3), on the whole, was handled well. Inevitably, there were examples where it was barely touched upon, poorly understood or included as a standalone ‘bolt-on’, but far more prevalent was relevant, integrated discussion. There seemed to be more biographical information than ever – particularly around Stevenson and Dickens, but across all the texts. This was rarely used astutely and often added little to a candidate’s response to the question.

Overall, it is clear that the questions across all the texts worked well for all abilities.

### ***A Christmas Carol***

The question focused on attitudes to Christmas in the novel. This gave candidates of all abilities something to discuss and allowed candidates to adopt a slightly different perspective on the novel. There were relatively few that merely retold the story and most had some focus on the question.

Lots of candidates tracked confidently through the extract, identifying the characters’ respective attitudes to Christmas as a starting point to their essay. Most were able to comment on Fred’s role as a contrast to his uncle, with candidates often commenting on the contrasting warm and cold imagery of their presentation. The key ideas of Christmas representing love, kindness, family and the celebration of humanity were all well discussed. Lower band responses often focused mainly, or entirely, on the extract and there was sometimes confusion over Fred’s social status: some candidates aligned him with the Cratchits and the rest of the deserving poor. Lower band answers also sometimes focused on the presentation of Scrooge rather than addressing the specific question of his views on Christmas.

The wider text was well referenced to discuss the various attitudes to Christmas. Inevitably, and sensibly, these often focused on Scrooge and how his attitude changes during the course of the story. However, most candidates additionally discussed the Cratchits (and Tiny Tim in particular), discussing with engagement and evaluation the ways they act as a catalyst for Scrooge's changing attitude to Christmas. Additionally, Fezziwig was very popular with candidates this year, with many very shrewd discussions of the example he should have set for Scrooge as an employer. Fezziwig's party is still the source of some confusion however, with many film references spotted in this area. Perhaps surprisingly, the Ghosts were often overlooked (perhaps they are not always seen as 'characters') but the best responses explored their role in changing Scrooge's attitude. This often also widened discussion to include minor details such as the lighthouse keepers, the sailors and the miners and their attitudes to the season.

The extract and the text provided lots of opportunities to meet the contextual requirements of AO3. Most candidates commented on the significance of Christmas and even in the lower bands, candidates were often able to engage empathetically with viewpoints on Christmas and most grasped, in a simple way, the intention of the author in raising awareness of the poor in Victorian England. The best responses included detailed knowledge of context, integrated with detailed knowledge of the text. These answers linked Dickens' construction of the characters to reflect his views on social reform, family and Christmas. Top band answers used contextual information to illuminate meaning in the text, blending the AOs seamlessly, and it was pleasing to see how context was used in such a meaningful way. Less successful, of course, were candidates who included contextual information in isolation, often in long context-driven introductions. There also seemed to be a lot of biographical information on Dickens this year which was not always accurate. This was rarely linked closely to the text and as such, often had little positive impact on the mark awarded.

### ***Silas Marner***

*Silas Marner* works well for every level of ability, with its strong storyline, clearly delineated characters and accessible themes, as well as clear contextual features. The vast majority of responses were excellent. Most candidates were clearly engaged with the sometimes conflicting character of Godfrey, and whilst there was occasional muddling of him with Dunstan, candidates were mainly well prepared and highly evaluative about the character and his role in the novel.

There was often a detailed and forensic analysis of the extract and there was much discussion of how it introduced the reader to Godfrey Cass's 'moral cowardice'. Many candidates took the opportunity to explore AO2 points through the extract, with many picking up on adverbs such as "savagely" and "quivering". There was plenty here for candidates to explore and most took full advantage.

Often, discussion of Godfrey's character led on to discussion of the important themes of parenting and responsibility. Most discussed Molly Farren, Godfrey's secret wife, though occasionally she dominated the essay, perhaps narrowing the scope of points for some candidates. There was some confusion about the timing of his marriage to Nancy and a small minority of candidates seemed to think he was married to Dolly Winthrop! However, there was often thoughtful discussion about his attempt to reclaim Eppie and the effect of his failure to do so. Many candidates traced Godfrey's growth through the novel, with interesting evaluations of his character at the end of the novel. Opinion was divided as to whether the character had learned anything or had changed by the end of the novel, with many saying that he is going to have to learn to live with his mistakes.

Most candidates used AO3 sensibly and at the top end this was perceptive and assured. Comments ranged from the nature of Godfrey's home life; the financial implications of the Napoleonic War; village life and attitudes; and poverty. For some, these contexts allowed them to judge Godfrey more kindly, which was an excellent use of context to evaluate character. The importance of marriage and the position of women was often discussed, sometimes with less secure attempts to link in biographical details about Mary Ann Evans and an occasional reference to the industrial revolution.

Lower band candidates discussed AO3 aspects (e.g. poverty) in detail without a direct link to the text, and there was sometimes an overt fascination with opium addiction. There were some sweeping statements too, with one candidate writing that "in Victorian times women were prostitutes". However, the vast majority provided excellent examples of integrated discussion on the historical contexts (some noted that the novel covers a wide time span), the place of religion, town v country, families, Victorian expectations, and so on.

### ***War of the Worlds***

The question asked candidates to consider the presentation of the Narrator in the novel. The extract focused on the Narrator's experiences in hiding in the abandoned dwelling. It proved to be an excellent springboard for some, with a secure understanding of the extract and its significance in terms of presenting the Narrator. There were various interpretations of the curate's fate, with the best describing the Narrator as a man capable of anything in a desperate situation. The tool used to dispatch the curate was subject to much debate, with everything from a knife, club, end of a gun and a heavy stick being used to describe the butt of a "meat-chopper" that was actually described by Wells in the novel. Many candidates made the most of the rich opportunities for AO2 in the extract, including Wells' contrasting use of language to describe the simultaneous fascination and repulsion felt by the Narrator towards the Martians.

There were some superb essays which managed to discuss the Narrator as a structuring device and to explore the multiple timelines in the book with some insight into their effect. Discussion of the anonymity of the character could be credited here, too. Candidates often then went on to discuss the events of the wider novel and the Narrator's involvement and reaction to them. Most commonly referenced the cylinder and the Narrator's relationship with the curate and the Artilleryman. Many mentioned his various encounters with the Martian creatures.

Discussion on the presentation of the Narrator often acted a springboard for candidates to discuss contextual details. Valid references to Tasmania; the British Empire; the media of the time; and divided Victorian attitudes to science and religion were all validly and skillfully used. Biographical details on H.G. Wells' life and background were often integrated into essays, but lower band essays tended to focus in isolation and for too long on these and other aspects of context, to the detriment of showing detailed knowledge of the text's events.

### ***Pride and Prejudice***

*Pride and Prejudice* proved to be relatively popular once again, and was studied right across the ability range. As might be expected, there were some very able candidates studying this text and they clearly relished the opportunities offered by the novel and the set question, which called on candidates to consider the presentation of Mr. Darcy in the novel.

Nearly all candidates were able to place the extract precisely in the timeline of Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship and it allowed many candidates to discuss Darcy's role in terms of the marriage, prejudice, pride and social status. Darcy's anger in the extract was discussed in detail, with relevant points made around Austen's portrayal of the character's body language and dialogue. This was often tracked through to his incredulity and astonishment. The best answers framed this discussion in an appreciation of Austen's crafting of this event as a turning point for the character in the novel.

Many then discussed Darcy's early opinions and prejudice towards Elizabeth and the Bennets (and vice-versa) and often tracked skillfully through the relevant events of the novel, often picking up on how his real character is revealed to Elizabeth. Answers typically drew on his initial appearance at the Meryton Assembly; revelations surrounding Wickham; the different proposals and the role of the Gardiners. Many showed real engagement by relating the reader's view of Mr. Darcy gradually changing in parallel with Elizabeth's, allowing us to share her changing views on Darcy.

The best answers linked discussion with AO3 context points seamlessly woven in, through comments on the social and economic standing of Darcy in the novel; attitudes to marriage and how Darcy's presentation fitted in with Austen's original title for the novel, 'First Impressions'.

### ***Jane Eyre***

The question focused on the presentation of Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and the majority of candidates were able to discuss the character in assured, confident and evaluative ways.

The extract, came shortly after Mr. Rochester's first appearance in the novel and provided candidates with a springboard into the rest of their essay. Most, quite sensibly, dealt with it first, often as part of Jane's first encounter with Rochester and the presentation of a reversal of traditional roles in this event. Many picked up on Rochester's physical appearance and linked this to context with discussion of Rochester as a Byronic hero and the contemporary 'science' of physiognomy. Rochester's initial distant attitude in the extract was also fully explored, often with discussion around the simile of Rochester as a "statue". There were some more tenuous points made around reference to him as "master" and ordering the tea which some candidates took to show his rudeness and revealed a weaker understanding of nineteenth century conventions.

Broadly, candidates were very familiar with the novel and often tracked through major events concerning Rochester: detailing his first meeting with Jane to the final part ("Reader I married him"). His moral education was generally well discussed and most thought that he and Jane developed an equality by the end. Rochester's deception and disguise as a Gypsy, relationship with Blanche and Adele; his marriage to Bertha; the aborted wedding to Jane; the fire, blindness and the restoration of sight following his reconciliation with Jane were all regularly discussed, as were Brontë's use of symbolism throughout these events to present the character.

AO3 was mainly well integrated. This was not only in terms of the extract, as mentioned earlier, but also at other times. References to gender, religion, economic status, social class and sensitive parallels between Mr. Rochester and Jane and the real life situation of Charlotte Brontë in her post as a governess were made. Indeed, Brontë's views on independence for women often led to engaged discussion.

Overall, this was a very successful question for the candidates who studied the novel.

## ***The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

The question focused on the presentation of the theme of good and evil in the novel. This allowed candidates to respond in a variety of valid ways.

Most candidates were aided by the extract which featured Jekyll's own impressions of Mr. Hyde. The extract provided a clear focus on good and evil through the conflicting characters of Jekyll and Hyde and this proved useful to candidates. There was sometimes some confusion in terms of where the extract occurred in the novel and this was probably due to the structure of Stevenson's non-linear narrative. Even in these cases, this did not prevent candidates from engaging fully with the extract, often picking up on the physical differences representing good and evil and the ideas in the extract of all humans being "commingled out of good and evil".

A discussion of the extract often led into the rest of the text, with the majority of responses referencing the trampling of the young girl and the murder of Sir Danvers Carew. Hyde's "ape-like fury" and the manner in which he "trampled calmly" on the little girl were both invariably cited and used to target AO2. Candidates often widened the scope of their discussions to consider and contrast the descriptions of the main characters' dwellings and London itself. These ranged from simple comments to the fog in London at the time, to more analytical discussions of the blistered door, the abandoned dissection room, plus the use of light and darkness as imagery to represent the theme. The top band responses widened their scope to bring in other characters, notably Utterson and Lanyon, as figures representing a sort of goodness, compared to Jekyll as a divided figure and Hyde as the epitome of evil. Surprisingly perhaps, there were relatively fewer references to the ending of the novel. It may be that candidates would benefit from a reminder to cover the whole text in their answers.

As noted at the start of the report, film versions seemed to be less prevalent this year, though were still occasionally present.

On the whole, the use of context was secure, relevant and accurate and at its best, well developed and sensitively applied. Occasionally candidates used context to drive their essays, and whilst this can be a valid approach, often led to a bolted on approach. For example, there seemed to be a greater use of biographical information about Stevenson, including sometimes confused information about his childhood and various theories about his inspiration for writing the novel. These were often 'bolt-ons' and rarely fully focused on the question or integrated into textual references. As such, they served a limited purpose. For similar reasons, discussions of Freud and the id and ego theories had limited value. Better approaches tended to be discussions on the ideas of Victorian societal expectations leading to repression and hypocrisy; Darwin's Theory of Evolution; the conflict between science and religion; the Victorian fascination with physiognomy; and literary links to Gothic novels and 'shilling shockers' – all of which could be directly linked to, and exemplified by, textual details.

### **Points to remember:**

- The first key question for the examiner is: 'Does the candidate know the text well?'
- The second key question for the examiner is: 'Has the candidate answered the question in a focused and sustained way?'
- AO2 and AO3 are worth a third of the marks but are not expected to take up a third of the essay.

### Characteristics of good Section B essay responses:

- Clear and sustained focus on the question asked
- Wide-ranging coverage of the extract, with relevant selection of short references to support points made
- The extract is used sensibly at a relevant point of the essay
- Reference to a range of relevant points across the wider text
- Critical probing of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas
- Close analysis of how the language, techniques and imagery in the extract and wider text help to present the focus of the question
- Clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and themes
- Suitable analytical style of writing.

### Ways in which performance could be improved:

- Plan where coverage of the extract will be best placed in the essay
- More detailed coverage of the extract and wider text, including the beginning, middle and end
- More selection of detail supporting references rather than general impressions
- Avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story
- More practice on probing subtext and interpretation
- Practise creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked
- More focused and integrated discussion of how contextual factors influence writers' characters, themes and ideas. Avoid contextual 'bolt-ons'
- Careful adherence to the rubric requirements of the paper to ensure that candidates are only answering questions on the texts that they have studied
- Avoid reference to plays and films when discussing prose texts
- Practise and develop an analytical style of essay writing.

## Section C – Unseen Poetry

### General Comments

The two linked poems on this untiered paper, *Teacher* and *Change* were extremely well received and the pairing was successful. The familiarity of the subject matter allowed all candidates to engage on some level and proved to be accessible for all, with plenty of opportunities to stretch all abilities when discussing AO1 and AO2.

It is doubtful whether most candidates had, as advised, devoted an hour to this question, perhaps owing to the timing issues previously discussed in Section A. There were a significant number of candidates providing short or partial responses. A number of candidates dealt relatively briefly with *Teacher* in 3.1 in order to fully discuss the comparison in 3.2. This perhaps limited the marks of some candidates in the first part. A very small minority of responses focused only on one text in response to 3.2 whilst some mixed the two questions together and did not answer 3.1 and 3.2 discretely. These responses were self-penalising.

Across both poems, various similes and metaphors were well probed and whilst there was still some feature spotting and line-counting, candidates of all abilities were addressing imagery, pathetic fallacy, similes, irony, dramatic irony, contrast, and so on in a sensible way with clear reference to their effects. Juxtaposition was often used inaccurately and some candidates appear to believe that the two poems were written as a pair, with the poets comparing notes. A number of candidates seemed to start their analysis by looking for enjambment and counting lines rather than engaging with the ideas and meaning of the poems in terms of content and imagery. Clearly, centres need to train their candidates

against this.

It is important for candidates to engage with the broader ideas presented in the poems and the overall meaning. Also, it is advisable for candidates to spend time reading and attempting to fully understand the ideas behind the poems before commencing a response. The best responses contained a clear and brief overview of the poem as well as thoroughly tracking through details. Though they were in a minority, some candidates ignored the statement at the top of the section that these were two poems about teachers, and came up with a range of abstract interpretations such as magic, dreams and love between candidate and teacher. This inevitably hindered candidates' understanding and responses to both questions.

### **Question 3.1**

*Teacher* was explored in every way from the most basic understanding to perceptive, sensitive and original responses. There was widespread understanding of the key ideas and engagement with the very familiar subject matter. Many candidates wrote quite touchingly on what teachers had meant to them and it is pleasing to note that there is a lot of love out there for the teaching profession! Some saw it as a love letter to the teacher or a letter of thanks for the way she had opened the writer's mind to learning and knowledge. One or two responses saw the teacher as boring, interpreting the metaphors as the daydreams of a bored candidate who spent the lessons doodling in her book. Some candidates used their knowledge of Carol Ann Duffy from their study of the anthology to inform their answer (not always helpfully). Her reputation, in their eyes, as a 'love poet' occasionally led some candidates to interpret the poem as a love relationship. Whilst these were obviously less successful, there was still general engagement and often things to reward.

Candidates enjoyed the poems and nearly all saw the poem as a positive portrayal of a significant and memorable teacher and related them to their own experiences. The poem provided opportunities for rich and interesting discussions of the imagery, such as "your hands bless the air" and "the chalk dust sparkles" (quite a few citing this as evidence of the poem being "very old" as it referenced chalk rather than an interactive whiteboard). Many explored the power of the imagination as revealed in the poem and the reference to "bridesmaids" was interpreted in several ways, with some linking weddings to the reference to the "giant cakes". The tiger often led to thoughtful probing, with candidates seeing the animal as symbolic of danger, excitement and awe.

Most successful candidates were able to discuss the end of the poem with sensitivity and probe the nuances of the meaning behind "learn what love is". Some discussed the development into adulthood, the nostalgia for simpler times and the pains of growing up and understanding the complications of life beyond the classroom. Some thought it represented boredom, others saw it as more evidence of the teacher catching the imagination of the student and so she doodled what was in her mind.

Candidates often felt obliged to discuss the structure of both poems and often interpreted the similarity in the stanzas as the layout of the classroom or the ordered structure of the school day.

Overall, *Teacher* worked very well, perhaps because its themes and content were so familiar to candidates. Candidates found the poem accessible and were able to track through the poem with insight and relevance.

### Question 3.2

The pairing of *Teacher* with *Change* gave the candidates plenty to discuss in terms of comparison and worked well across the entire ability range.

*Change* was well understood, with many candidates recognising the hesitancy and uncertainty of experiencing a new teacher and then exploring the gradual process of teacher and students coming together to understand each other. The metaphors within the poem were confidently addressed by candidates, with many seeing the swirling butterflies as emblematic of the students' liberation and joy at achieving their goal. Inevitably, not all understood the metaphorical significance of the butterflies in the jacket – some candidates took it literally (with one candidate fearing that storing butterflies inside your jacket posed a health and safety risk). In a similar respect, there were also a number of interesting interpretations about the teacher in *Change*. These included seeing him as a gardener, caretaker, butterfly keeper or homeless person.

The majority however made thoughtful and perceptive points in discussions about whether the title referred to change in the teacher, the students, or both. They saw that the “gauzy bandage” veiled their knowledge because they couldn't yet grasp it, but gradually understood the concepts as represented by what fell from the teacher's jacket until its eventual opening to reveal the magic of the butterflies within.

The central idea that the pupils grew to understand him and the linking of this to growth and change in nature was steadily seen. The higher levels discussed the idea of transformation and the beauty of knowledge and understanding. For those who saw nurturing and an evolution of the natural imagery throughout the poem, there was much to say. The very highest responses were able to articulate how the change in the teacher was reflected in the language used to describe him and how both writers were showing what it's like for students being on a journey of discovery within a classroom and how teachers can influence that journey.

It is worth noting that the vast majority of responses took the integrated approach when answering 3.2. This is a valid approach that gives a good sense of overview and constant focus on comparison and linking, but for some candidates led to a superficial treatment of *Change* and an imbalance of direct references that might have been avoided if the candidate had dealt with the second poem discretely. Nevertheless, most candidates made thoughtful links and contrasts between the poems and were engaged by their content. Most did this in a sustained way, with the majority noting that Calder's poem begins with negativity (or uncertainty) yet shifts to share a similar positivity with that of Duffy's poem. The magical elements of the first poem were linked to the magical image of the butterflies and many contrasted the two teachers: one being inspirational and outgoing and the other, stiff-faced and withdrawn. A large number linked *Teacher* to experiences at primary school due to the curriculum references and the idea that primary school is imaginative and fun, whilst the second poem was more commonly linked to secondary school, in being boring, confusing and tedious! Most could relate to both kinds of teachers and many assumed he had changed to become a better teacher or relaxed as the students changed and grew in understanding.

Finally, many commented on the poem's apparent messages, including ideas about not judging a book by its cover, hard work eventually paying off and personal engagement with how a good teacher can make a difference to your life.

Overall, candidates gave every impression of having enjoyed writing about the poems and levels of engagement were very high.

**Characteristics of good poetry responses:**

- A thorough examination of the first poem in 3.1
- A thorough examination of the second poem in 3.2, either as a discrete element or as part of the comparison
- Clear comparison of ideas, mood and some reference to how the poets use language
- Detailed selection from each poem and comments on these selections
- Spend about an hour on the poetry questions.

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

- Ensure that the first poem is adequately analysed in 3.1
- Ensure that the second poem is adequately analysed in depth in 3.2
- Practice using a range of poems and poetic techniques, including imagery and figurative language
- Avoid spotting techniques and patterns with no reference to meaning
- Develop the use of supporting references to support understanding of subtext
- Avoid 'over reading' of hidden meanings in the poems
- Experience in reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets
- Practice timings across the exam to ensure sufficient time is given to the poetry.



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