



GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LITERATURE
AS**

SUMMER 2019

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE AS

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1: PROSE

General Comments

There were some excellent responses to a variety of challenging and often lengthy texts. It was pleasing to read that most candidates demonstrated a confident understanding of their chosen texts, discussing how meaning is shaped with growing sophistication and taking into account the influence of relevant contexts and different interpretations. However, there were some candidates who did not address the AOs effectively and some who seemed determined to write a pre-rehearsed answer.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A:

Q.1 Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

Although there were a limited number of responses on this text, some interesting ideas were explored.

Q.2 Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Again, *Jane Eyre* was the most popular choice in Section A of this component and there was some perceptive discussion of religion in the novel. The best answers considered a range of characters and how they were used to explore different representations of religion. There was some useful discussion of Brontë's exploration of the difference between spirituality and religion.

Q.3 Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

No responses seen.

Q.4 Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*

No responses seen.

Q.5 Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

No responses seen.

SECTION B:

Q.6/7 Joseph Conrad: *The Secret Agent*

No responses seen.

Q.8/9 E M Forster: *A Room with a View*

Both questions were popular and candidates responded well to the critical statements given. Candidates demonstrated an ability to range around the text with some interesting points made about the significance of setting.

Q.10/11 Emyr: *A Toy Epic*

No responses seen.

Q.12/13 Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Candidates did very well with both questions but seemed to respond especially well to the question on the faults of the Victorian male. The best responses offered a wider focus than just Rochester.

Q.14/15 Kazuo Ishiguro: *The Remains of the Day*

This text remains popular with centres. It was pleasing to see some confident answers on question 14 which considered Ishiguro's choice of narrative point of view.

Summary of key points

Section A: Prose Fiction Pre-1900

Points for Consideration: Extract

AO1

- It is possible for candidates to 'build' their ideas using context elsewhere in the novel. For example, for this year's question on *Jane Eyre*, the candidates could have argued that Brocklehurst is a symbol of evangelical Christianity.
- Although it may be useful to put the extract in to context i.e. discuss where it takes place in the novel, candidates should be clear to link this to the question. A description of events before the extract without saying how these events have affected the presentation of setting/character/relationship in question serves only to waste time.
- Some candidates lost focus on the question and drifted away from, for example, the **relationship** between two characters to talk generally about characterisation or plot.

AO2

- It was pleasing to see many candidates comment on writers' techniques, in addition to the use of language, when exploring how meaning is created. In some cases, however, candidates simply embedded quotations in order to produce a narrative re-telling of the extract with very limited analysis. It can be useful to think why a writer has used a specific word or technique and to discuss the connotations explored. Digging deep on individual words is a useful skill.
- Feature spotting should be avoided as well as simply naming grammatical functions such as "Austen uses the fronted adverbial". The candidates should be discussing *how* meaning is created by the writers' choice of language.

Points for consideration: Essay

AO1

- Effective planning is essential for candidates to produce a concise and clearly structured essay. There was some evidence of planning where candidates had taken time to think about their approach to answering the question. There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel. Both are valid approaches.
- In a minority of cases, candidates relied too heavily on writing what were clearly pre-rehearsed answers. Centres should encourage candidates to take an independent and individual approach to the **specific** question.
- Centres should advise candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their essay response. Candidates should not spend too long re-visiting the extract and should be discouraged from using textual references from the given section.
- Candidates should be conscious of embedding their contextual references (AO3), critical views (AO5) and their supporting comments from the text (AO2) with subtlety, clearly linking to the topic in question. Some candidates lacked both sophistication and relevance when attempting to integrate critical views and contextual information.

AO2

- As with the extract responses, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing how meaning is created. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).
- Centres should advise candidates that although this is a closed-book exam, there is an expectation that they will integrate and analyse textual support. It is not the case that a candidate must use a great deal of quotations, but those they do use should be relevant and should support the argument that they are making.
- An understanding of the characters as constructs through which the writer explores ideas is important. Candidates should stay away from writing about the characters as though they are real people.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as a springboard for AO3 and AO5 and that the most successful answers were when these three AOs were co-dependent and were used to answer the question directly.

AO3

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- Centres should advise candidates that the closer the link between the contextual point and the text, the more successful the answer is likely to be. For example, the strongest responses linked specific contextual ideas to specific exchanges/textual support from the prose.

AO5

- Similarly to AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinions to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Indeed, some candidates quoted lengthy sweeping statements from critics and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to pick up marks for AO5:
 - i. Offering **and engaging with** critical views (literary criticism)
 - ii. Using critical perspectives such as Feminism or Marxism to offer alternative readings of characters/events etc. However, it should be noted that sometimes this can be quite a reductive approach as it often leads to sweeping statements about perspectives.
 - iii. Offering multiple readings/interpretations of events/characters etc. This includes using tentative language to explore alternative interpretations of the text.
 - iv. Engaging with the critical comment in the question.

Section B: Prose Fiction Post-1900

Points for Consideration

AO1

- As with Section A, planning is essential for candidates to construct a perceptive and coherent discussion of the text. As stated on the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Component 1 exam paper, it is advised that candidates spend **45 minutes** on Section B. Strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing brief and underdeveloped responses for Section B.
- The questions are designed so that they offer candidates a contextual focus and a critical comment with which to engage. Centres should advise candidates that to score highly for ideas and concepts they should engage with the critical comment rather than just explore the theme that may also be included in the question.
- It was noticeable that with some candidates who had studied texts with a narrative link such as *Jane Eyre*/*Wide Sargasso Sea*, there was sometimes the tendency to conflate the two narratives. Whilst it is possible to use the other text as a contextual source, candidates should remain focused on the core, set text for that section.
- The strongest answers kept focus on the question throughout the essay, using the beginning and end of each paragraph to develop a perceptive argument.

AO2

- As with Section A, a significant number of candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created. These essays tended, therefore, to slip into narrative which undermined critical engagement.
- Centres should advise candidates that although this is a closed book exam, there is an expectation that they will integrate and analyse textual support. It is not the case that a candidate must use a great deal of quotations, but those they do use should be relevant and should support the argument they are making.

- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as a springboard for AO3 and AO5 and that the most successful answers were when these three AOs were co-dependent and were used to answer the question directly.

AO3

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- As with the Section A part (ii) responses, some candidates tended to drift in to long discussions of historical/social context which ultimately affected the direction and accuracy of their argument.

AO5

- As with AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinion to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Indeed, some candidates quoted lengthy sweeping statements from critics and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to pick up marks for AO5:
 - i. Offering **and engaging with** critical views (literary criticism)
 - ii. Using critical perspectives such as Feminism or Marxism to offer alternative readings of characters/events etc.
 - iii. Offering multiple readings/interpretations of events/characters etc. This includes using tentative language to explore alternative interpretations of the text.
 - iv. Engaging with the critical comment in the question.
- It was, however, pleasing to see more autonomous candidates take the opportunity to engage with relevant critical opinion in order to link it directly to their own appreciation of the text.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE AS

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 2: POETRY AND DRAMA

General Comments

There were fewer candidates for the AS exam this year, with some texts and questions not being chosen by any candidates. However, there were some excellent responses, showing that many candidates had been well-prepared for the exam.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Poetry (open book)

Notes on Texts

Thomas Hardy: *Poems Selected by Tom Paulin*

Q.1/2 A small number of candidates responded to this question and, in the main, the essays were impressive and demonstrated pleasing academic style. The poem had clearly engaged the candidates and provoked some sensitive and thoughtful ideas and connections.

Ted Hughes: *Poems selected by Simon Armitage*

Q.3 Responses to this question were lively and engaged. Candidates chose some interesting poems to compare with 'Her Husband' which enabled them to explore different kinds of conflict.

Q.4 This was a popular question and candidates had obviously enjoyed writing about animal poetry. Many chose to partner the poem with 'Pike' which produced some very rewarding comparisons.

As was the case last year, in responses to both Hughes questions, there was some reliance upon comparison of structural features, such as line length and enjambment. Candidates had obviously been taught to do this and it tended to be quite assertive and limit their time on other types of more productive comparison.

Seamus Heaney: *Field Work*

Q.5 A very small number attempted this question. Candidates engaged well with the poem and most chose to pair it with poems such as 'The Otter' and 'The Skunk', which enabled them to focus on desire.

Q.6 No responses seen.

Gillian Clarke: *Making Beds for the Dead*

Q.7 No responses seen.

Q.8 No responses seen.

Carol Ann Duffy: *Mean Time*

- Q.9** As has been the case in previous years, *Mean Time* was the most popular of the poetry texts. This was the more popular question and candidates favoured poems such as 'Brothers' which allowed them to explore family relationships. The unusual perspective of the persona in 'Before You Were Mine' stimulated some very thoughtful and fruitful comparisons.
- Q.10** This powerful poem produced some very interesting responses and candidates found much to say about the persona's voice and Duffy's use of language. There were some thoughtful choices of a poem for comparison, with 'Stafford Afternoons' being a popular one. As has been noted in the general comments, some candidates seem to be spending a considerable amount of time making assertions about structure and what the number of lines or verses or rhyme patterns might symbolise.

Notes on Texts

Section B: Drama

Q.11 Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

In the extract question, candidates made good use of the stage directions to inform their analysis and, also, the impact of the 'DEVILS' entering and exiting. There was clear focus on the presentation of Faustus and real engagement with his tortured psychological state. Some of the essay responses to this text were quite outstanding and drew upon a variety of contexts to answer the question.

Q.12 Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

A small number of centres chose to study this play. In the extract question, some candidates were spending a considerable amount of time linking to contexts, which is not rewarded in this question but is, of course, the dominant AO for part (ii). This was also the case last year. In part (ii), candidates responded well to the question on 'gossip and reputation' but should be reminded that successfully used context is always linked to the text and not added in as a separate paragraph.

Q.13 Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

As was the case last year, this was overwhelmingly the most popular choice of drama text. Candidates responded sensitively to the presentation of Mitch and Blanche in the extract and found much to say about Williams' use of stage directions. In part (ii), most candidates wrote well on 'relationships between men and women'. Some ignored the focus on 'relationships' and wrote an essay on Blanche. Candidates need to be reminded that biographical context must be used carefully as an over-reliance on this can be quite limiting. There was, however, some sophisticated use of an impressive range of contexts.

Q.14 David Hare: *Murmuring Judges*

A minority of candidates studied this text, possibly those who were re-sitting. Responses to the extract were good, with careful attention paid to the detail in the stage directions. Part (ii) responses dealt with 'power and authority' successfully, but there was a tendency to include critical viewpoints (AO5 is not rewarded here) at the expense of context, which is the dominant AO.

Q.15 Joe Orton: *Loot*

There were a small number of responses to this text. In the extract question, candidates clearly grasped the absurdity and contradiction inherent in the presentation of Truscott and McLeavey. The essay question on 'hypocrisy and corruption' allowed candidates to refer to a range of contexts and these included the literary as well as the social.

Summary of key points

Points for Consideration:

Section A: Poetry

AO1

- Both questions on this section name a poem and require candidates to select another poem/poems themselves. A small number of candidates chose to use 3 or 4 poems, which can sometimes lead to a dilution of AO4.
- Across the texts, it was pleasing to see candidates being thoughtful and individual in their choice of second poem/other poems.

AO2

- As was the case last year, a significant number relied heavily upon looking at structural features of poems and produced extensive analysis of these features. Much of this was assertive and candidates should guard against making lengthy claims about what the number of lines in a stanza, or the regular line length, might signify.
- Similarly, many assertive claims were made about the impact of enjambment.
- Centres should encourage candidates to limit their use of terms taken from English Language study, as these can often distract from literary analysis.

AO4

- As noted above, it is worth reminding candidates that the question requires that comparison should always be between the named poem and another. A small number of candidates utilised several poems and were often engaging in extended comparison that did not involve the named poem.

Section B: Drama

Points for Consideration: Extract

AO1

- Candidates had generally been well prepared for this task. Stronger candidates used quotations to support AO1 as well as their AO2 points.
- Some candidates seemed to be under the impression that context is rewarded in the extract question and were using precious time to explore an AO which is not relevant in part (i).

AO2

- Many candidates were adept at choosing quotations which allowed them to engage in close analysis of language and techniques. Less successful responses were the ones where candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created.
- Candidates should be reminded that it is often more productive to use short quotations to dig below the surface meaning, rather than quoting several lines of dialogue without specific focus.

Points for Consideration: Essay

AO1

- There were many excellent essays on the whole play. These were well-structured and fully engaged with the question. Most candidates were able to range around the plays and draw upon material from several scenes in order to build their argument.

AO2

- Yet again, the use of quotations was very impressive given that this is a closed-book question. Not all candidates write about the text as drama, whilst others make full use of their knowledge of props and staging and frequently refer to the audience.

AO3

- This is the dominant AO for part (ii). Candidates need to be able to draw upon a range of contexts so that they are equipped with enough material to select contexts which are appropriate to the question.



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