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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LITERATURE  
GCSE**

**SUMMER 2023**

## Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' reports offer valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. They are written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and detail how candidates have performed.

This report offers an overall summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It goes on to look in detail at each question/section of each component, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.<sup>i</sup>

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

## Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive annual programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	<a href="https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/">https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/</a>
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 6 months after the examination.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a> or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the overall subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	<p>For unitised specifications click here:</p> <p><a href="https://www.eduqas.co.uk/Results-and-Grade-Boundaries">Results and Grade Boundaries (eduqas.co.uk)</a></p>

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC secure website. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a>
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	<a href="https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/">https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/</a>
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a> or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC / Eduqas.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with invaluable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	<a href="#">Exam Marking jobs   Examiner &amp; Moderator Vacancies From Eduqas</a>

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## Subject Officer's Executive Summary

The Eduqas GCSE English Literature papers reverted to the pre-pandemic form in 2023. Candidates responded well to the range of questions and the Principal Examiners deemed the paper to be accessible to all. Rubric infringements continue to be an issue across the paper and centres are reminded of the importance of ensuring candidates see a full paper before sitting the exam. Legibility was also an issue this series. Centres are reminded that candidates can use word processors in exams if their handwriting is illegible and creates a barrier to success. There is further detailed commentary and areas of success and areas for improvement at the end of each section.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
<b>Approaching the Shakespeare extract question</b>	<a href="#"><u>Approaches to Shakespeare</u></a>	Approaches to teaching the Shakespeare extract question
<b>Contextual knowledge of the poetry anthology for question 72.</b>	<a href="#"><u>Using contexts effectively in response to poetry</u></a>	A set of resources to support the teaching of context in the poetry anthology.
<b>Knowledge of the AOs assessed in Component 2a</b>	<a href="#"><u>Blended learning resources</u></a>	A range of blended learning resources on the most popular texts on Component 2a.
<b>Additional practice in responding to Unseen Poetry.</b>	<a href="#"><u>Unseen Poetry resource</u></a>	A blended learning resource containing interactive self-study covering Unseen Poetry.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### GCSE

Summer 2023

### COMPONENT 1

#### Overview of the Component

After last year's reduced content and the necessary separation of the Shakespeare and Anthology Poetry elements, it was good to get back to a normal Component 1 paper in a summer series for the first time since 2019. Feedback on the paper was overwhelmingly positive, with examiners feeling that questions were straightforward and accessible, with nothing to restrict or mislead candidates. The less able were able to engage with key elements of the texts and show their knowledge of narrative, character and theme, while those working at higher levels had plenty of scope for sustained exploration and analysis. In Section A, the popularity of *Macbeth* continued to grow, with *Romeo and Juliet* chosen a little less often than in previous years. *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Merchant of Venice* all continued to be taught by a reasonable number of centres.

Despite the accessibility of the questions and the focus on key characters and themes across the paper, examiners did note that there were more examples of questions not attempted and rubric infringements than in recent series, perhaps reflecting lost learning time during the pandemic and the subsequent dip in attendance figures that has been reported. In a subject where knowledge of the texts is paramount, it is a concern that a minority of candidates felt unable to respond to some questions, or appeared to approach extracts and Blake's "London" as if they were unseen texts.

Having said this, it is important to highlight how impressed examiners were with the enthusiasm and depth of knowledge the vast majority of candidates showed across the component. The high levels of engagement with the Shakespeare plays continue to do English teachers great credit and demonstrate just how well candidates are prepared for the paper. Once again, many examiners felt that it was the Shakespeare essay questions that were addressed most successfully, belying the challenges that teaching such complex texts for a closed book exam present.

For Section B, "London" proved to be an accessible choice for most candidates, who were able to select and comment effectively on the poem for 71, often with real engagement. For 72, "Living Space" proved to be popular for a comparison on the theme of place; however, a range of other poems from the anthology were also utilised to good effect in this question. However, exam technique tended to be a factor in this section, with examiners noting that timing was sometimes an issue, with answers to 71 longer than those for the more valuable 72. Another issue was that textual and contextual knowledge of "London" demonstrated in 71 was not always replicated in the comparison question.

AO3 continues to be an area for development across this component, with context often finding its way into Shakespeare responses where it is not assessed, yet being neglected where it is necessary in the poetry questions. While an appreciation of context is often helpful when looking at characters and themes in a Shakespeare play and can garner some reward under AO1 when relevant, it sometimes leads candidates away from a clear focus on the question. Meanwhile, candidates who neglect contextual factors in 71 and 72 are limiting their overall marks significantly.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### Extract questions

All six extracts selected for the Shakespeare plays were of key moments from the plays and were therefore familiar to the vast majority of candidates. As always, placing the extract within the play's events is an effective way into an answer. It is also important for candidates to remember that an audience has seen the events that lead up to the extract. For example, examiners noted that many candidates thought that the audience would be "shocked" at the discovery of the corpses of Romeo and Paris, despite the fact they had witnessed their deaths earlier in the scene.

It is important to note that the question phrase "how an audience might respond" is an invitation to consider how any audience might respond to events in an extract, not exclusively an Elizabethan or Jacobean one. Some candidates choose to look at how a contemporary audience might react compared to a modern one, which can be very useful in plays such as *The Merchant of Venice* or *Macbeth*; however, those who exclusively consider a contemporary audience's perspective can be led into offering extraneous contextual information that takes them away from the events and language of the extract, thereby wasting precious time.

Stronger extract answers tended to track through the text, identifying the characters' thoughts and feelings and selecting and commenting on language choices and their possible effects on an audience. Those who were able to identify turning points or changes in mood (such as the sudden shift from humour to seriousness in the *Much Ado About Nothing* extract) did well. Plenty of students were able to see the effects of dramatic irony and foreshadowing and therefore gained valuable AO2 marks. Some appreciation of the use and importance of stage directions, such as the asides in the *Macbeth* extract, or the "Noise within" and exit of Friar Lawrence in the *Romeo and Juliet* extract, enabled many to get relatively easy credit. Typically, candidates who focused on the connotations and effects of individual word choices were able to access the higher bands for AO2. The tendency for candidates to spot language techniques without commenting on their effects appears to be diminishing, for which teachers deserve credit.

Weaker responses tended to only cover part of the extract and therefore missed the opportunity to comment on key lines, so a key message remains that it is advisable for candidates to comment on something from the beginning, middle and end of the extract to ensure proper coverage. Examiners noted that some candidates lost focus on the extract at times, either by discussing contextual factors such as the Divine Right of Kings or the patriarchal society in excessive detail or by moving outside the extract to discuss events elsewhere in the play at length. Reference to contextual factors or events outside the extract can certainly be helpful to mention, but only briefly, and only as a means of illuminating something within the extract itself. Overall, examiners felt that the biggest cause of underachievement in extract responses was a lack of AO2 analysis: many candidates offered a commentary of events without the close focus on language choices and devices used by Shakespeare to support and develop their points.

### *Romeo and Juliet*

The extract was from the climax of the play and was clearly very familiar to candidates, although a small minority seemed to confuse this moment with Juliet taking the sleeping draft in Act 4. Examiners felt that the question was accessible, and candidates could focus on Juliet, the Friar or both in their responses. Some wasted time discussing how events had led up to this point, but many were able to track through the extract, from the Friar's initial shock at finding the bodies of Romeo and Paris through to Juliet's suicide.

The Friar's reactions on entering the tomb enabled many to gain AO2 marks with analysis of his use of short sentences, rhetorical questions and exclamations. His comment about the "unkind hour" proved useful for candidates to write about the power of fate, although this led some outside the extract to discuss fate elsewhere in the play, to the detriment of their answers. Examiners noted the wide range of views on Friar Lawrence and his involvement in the scene, with some seeing him as selfish and fearful, and others more sympathetic to his devastation at the loss of Romeo and his involvement in the play's tragic outcome. Those who were able to explore such differing reactions tended to achieve higher marks.

Many were able to discuss Juliet's actions in the extract, often with awareness of the dramatic irony involved. Most looked at her initial confusion, her devotion to Romeo and her realisation of how (and how recently) he had met his end. Almost all students wrote about the "happy dagger" quotation with good understanding of how this reflected Juliet's feelings. Comments on the audience's possible reactions to the conclusion of the extract were mixed: while many wrote successfully of the pain the audience would feel at witnessing the suicide, others felt that there was consolation in Juliet taking control of her destiny and being reunited with Romeo in death, with some highlighting details such as the way she "falls on Romeo's body" to show their togetherness.

Successful responses tracked through the extract carefully, selecting key words and phrases from both the Friar and Juliet. Many were able to show appreciation of Shakespeare's stagecraft by highlighting the growing tension and urgency created by the "Noise within" and the imminent arrival of the Captain of the Watch. Some weaker responses tended to be brief or lacking in coverage, but the main limiting factor in many answers was a lack of focus on language, with many students providing a commentary of events but without the close focus on specific details to support and develop their points. Juliet's use of the word "lord" sometimes served as a distraction, with candidates digressing by looking at religious connotations or discussing the patriarchal society.

### ***Macbeth***

The chosen extract was a key moment in Act 1 of the play involving Macbeth and Banquo after Macbeth is told he is now Thane of Cawdor, thus fulfilling one of the witches' prophecies. Most candidates were able to place it successfully, although a small minority thought that it occurred after the murder of Duncan, resulting in confused commentary. On the whole, though, examiners felt it was an accessible extract and noted that some candidates identified it as the moment we first glimpse Macbeth's ambition. It certainly provided candidates with the opportunity to look at both Macbeth and Banquo, comparing their differing reactions to the prophecies.

Better responses understood Banquo's role as a foil to Macbeth and appreciated how their contrasting attitudes to the witches' prophecies created dramatic tension. Much was made of Macbeth's opening line "Do you not hope your children shall be kings...?", with stronger candidates exploring possible subtexts here, ranging from Macbeth sharing his excitement with his friend, to feeling out the extent of Banquo's ambitions, to suggesting the start of the jealousy that culminates in Banquo's murder in Act 3. Other key lines included Banquo's "instruments of darkness tell us truths", which led to some fruitful language analysis, and Macbeth's "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good", which was frequently used to illustrate Macbeth's confusion and mixed feelings about the prophecies. Good work was done on "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical", foreshadowing later events, and Banquo's "Look how our partner's rapt", showing how the "truth" of a prophecy has changed his friend. Examiners felt that the appreciation of Macbeth's frequent asides was crucial to the quality of response, with those who ignored or misunderstood this stage direction inevitably struggling, as they saw much of the extract as an open discussion between the characters.



Weaker responses tended not to dig into the language choices in the extract, or to miss out the middle section where Macbeth is struggling to make sense of his feelings and describing the physical effects of the prophecies that “unfix (his) hair” and make his “seated heart knock at (his) ribs” – a section that was ripe for analysis. There was frequent misunderstanding of several lines, including “The greatest is behind” and Banquo’s innocuous “Cousins, a word, I pray you” which some believed to be Banquo praying to save Macbeth’s soul from the evil of the witches. Macbeth’s “If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me / Without my stir” was also often misunderstood as Macbeth deciding he’d take any chance to murder Duncan. Examiners felt that contextual details on Jacobean belief in witchcraft, Shakespeare’s willingness to gain favour from James I and even the Gunpowder Plot made unnecessary and unhelpful appearances here, distracting candidates from the business of exploring the events, ideas and language of the extract itself.

### ***Othello***

The extract from Act 2 Scene 3 is full of action and offered the opportunity for candidates to comment on the behaviour of Cassio, Iago and Montano in the aftermath of the destruction of the Turkish fleet. Prior knowledge of Cassio’s promotion and Iago’s response to this was essential to understanding the dynamics and nuances of the scene though, and a sizeable minority of candidates struggled to grasp the events and their significance. Most, however, could see both the humour in Cassio’s claims of sobriety and the malevolence in Iago’s manipulation of events. Views on the extent to which an audience might sympathise with Cassio’s situation were wide-ranging.

Stronger responses were able to track through the extract, commenting on both Cassio’s protestations (fatally undermined by his pursuit of Roderigo at the end of the extract) and Iago’s orchestration of the situation. Some were able to see the significance of Cassio’s use of prose here, in contrast to the blank verse used by Iago and Montano, and commented on the use of stage directions as well as Iago’s subtly undermining use of language. Some also commented effectively on Montano’s gullibility. Most successful responses were able to explore Iago’s skilful manipulation of him and the almost farcical entrances and exits that contribute to the dramatic impact in this part of the scene.

Weaker responses were often limited by candidates not seeing Iago’s cunning here, or the significance of the extract’s events, which underpin his strategy for the destruction of Othello’s relationship with Desdemona in the rest of the play. Some candidates selected phrases in isolation, for example taking “I am drunk” from the first line “Do not think, gentlemen, I am drunk”, and therefore drawing false conclusions. The main reason for under-performance tended to be a lack of AO2 comments, which frequently limited the overall mark.

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

Examiners felt this extract worked very well, with a strong focus on audience response maintained across all abilities. Almost all candidates were able to pick up on the humour in the first part, although the effect of Dogberry’s initial lines was sometimes over-explained to the detriment of overall coverage. Don Pedro’s mimicking of Dogberry was confusing for some, who read it as serious, whereas others were scathing of what they saw as the Prince’s cruelty and vehemently defended Dogberry. Indeed, many had strong views on the impact of class divisions and inequality on this scene, some commenting that Shakespeare was exposing the hypocrisy of the ruling classes here, given that it is Dogberry who uncovers the plot.

Many showed appreciation of this moment in the play as the turning point the audience has been waiting for, and stronger candidates could see the shift in mood from humour to seriousness, thus generally enabling higher performance at AO2, although examiners were surprised by the lack of comments on the effect of the change from prose to blank verse. More thoughtful candidates tackled key phrases in Borachio's confession, seeing "sweet Prince" as an attempt at flattery and the focus on his "master" Don John an attempt to evade responsibility for what was, as many noted, his own plan. More effective readings also looked at the imagery in the later lines, such as 'iron' and the "poison" Claudio feels he has "drunk". A few astute candidates were able to link Claudio's use of the word "semblance" to act 4 scene 1 and felt that his use of the word "image" was telling.

Weaker candidates generally lacked coverage of the extract as a whole, perhaps getting bogged down in the opening or electing to ignore Borachio's lines. There were several lines mis-read by quite a few candidates, with some thinking that Borachio is pleased to get his "reward" and others believing Claudio to have literally "drunk poison" during the scene. Quite a few candidates who showed reasonable understanding were nevertheless limited somewhat by a lack of attention to AO2.

### ***Henry V***

Most candidates seemed familiar with this extract from Henry's speech to the Governor and citizens of Harfleur and were able to identify its position and significance in the play, although a small number seemed to think it was one of Henry's motivational speeches to his own men. Lots of responses sought to contrast Henry's violent threats here with the more measured and responsible attitude to war earlier in the play. Many saw Henry as having been changed by war and felt that audiences would be repelled by the shocking language he employs. Surprisingly few saw the speech as another example of Henry's rhetorical skill, this time seeking to bluff or manipulate the Governor into surrender and thus avoiding further bloodshed.

Stronger responses tended to track through the speech, taking some of the abundant opportunities to analyse the vivid imagery employed, in particular looking at Henry's juxtaposition of innocence with descriptions of violence and brutality. Many were able to see the more conciliatory notes he strikes in the middle section, ("Therefore, you men of Harfleur, / Take pity...") and at the end of the speech, offering the Governor a way out, ("What say you? Will you yield, and this avoid?") Less successful responses tended to miss the purpose of the speech, waste time going beyond the extract itself or make sweeping generalisations without offering much support or engagement with the language of the extract.

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

This question enabled candidates of all abilities to engage, offering both a strong narrative thread and plenty of imagery to work with. Respondents were generally approving of Portia's behaviour and argument, and many saw this as a key moment in the play where any audience might lose sympathy with Shylock. Examiners reported that they thought that most candidates dealt reasonably well with Portia's speech - the most challenging part of the extract, given that it describes an abstract concept in formal, four-hundred-year-old language.

Weaker responses tended to struggle with interpreting Portia's treatise on mercy, although they often generally grasped Shylock's intransigence. Some became too caught up in the context to make the best use of their time, though. While it's difficult avoiding contextual factors in this play, it's vital to stay focused on the events depicted and language used within the extract as far as possible. Similarly, some candidates expanded their response too far beyond the selected part of the play, mostly at the expense of a sharper focus on AO2.

Stronger answers tracked the extract closely, commenting on both Portia's persuasive rhetoric and Shylock's terse dismissal of her argument. Many picked up on her warning, "We do pray for mercy, / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy", seeing that she is offering him a way out, but also realising that Shylock is too consumed by the need for revenge here to take it. A few were less impressed with Portia's role-playing and commented on the fact that, despite the fact that Shylock tells her his name in the first line, she still calls him "Jew". As always, a close focus on word choices paid off.

### **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
- practice in responding to both soliloquies and extracts with characters interacting
- and responding to each other.

### **Essay questions**

Essay questions focused on key characters, relationships or themes, and examiners felt that all successfully enabled candidates of all abilities to demonstrate their knowledge of the play they had studied. Indeed, many noted that this question was often where candidates showed most confidence, with responses often ranging across the text with clear focus, quoting accurately and engaging with key aspects.

Stronger responses tended to make use of a brief plan or track through relevant moments in the chronology of the play to structure discussion. Examiners were pleased to see that many candidates selected an effective range of relevant textual quotations in support. Furthermore, those who were able to probe the connotations of word choices and explore the imagery within these selections were able to accrue good AO2 marks. The highlighting of turning points and key moments and the use of contrasts and structural devices were also fruitful sources of AO2 credit. Overall, we saw a range of enthusiastic and highly engaged responses on all six plays offered, and teachers are to be congratulated on how thoughtfully and evaluatively many respondents explored the texts.

Less successful answers tended to be brief, or perhaps only considered one or two parts of the play. Others fell into re-telling the narrative rather than making supported points about the character, relationship or theme in question. Textual references don't have to be quotations, but those who didn't make use of them made it difficult for themselves to address AO2: as always, learning a range of key quotations is extremely beneficial. A fairly common area of weakness was getting a play's events in the wrong order, so sequencing tasks and the use of timelines would also be worthwhile revision activities.

A key message to centres for this question continues to be that contextual content still seems to be over-prioritised. Contextual understanding is clearly valuable in the teaching of all of the Shakespeare plays, and aspects of context will always be relevant to the questions set. However, while contextual information can often demonstrate understanding that receives credit under AO1, it must be remembered that there are no AO3 marks awarded in the Shakespeare questions. Examiners are still reporting that detailed explanations of Elizabethan gender roles or James I's obsession with witchcraft are dominating essays to the detriment of final marks. Looking at key moments in the play and probing the language choices Shakespeare uses to present them should always be the main priorities for candidates in these questions.

AO4 plays an important part in essay questions, and examiners saw the full range of performance. Inevitably, very brief responses do not give candidates the opportunity to show a range of technical skills, so brevity limits the AO4 mark. As always, a lack of capital letters for proper nouns and inattention to punctuation tended to cost marks. Convoluted sentence structures and an informal register were also cited by examiners as factors, and once again the use of abbreviations (for example LM for Lady Macbeth) contributed to the latter: candidates should be discouraged from losing formality in attempt to save a few seconds of time. Overall, though, there was plenty of evidence of candidates proof-reading their work and correcting errors, which in itself sends a positive message to examiners. For those that continue to mis-spell "Shakespeare", it is worth reminding candidates that they can check their spelling of it against the paper itself.

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

The majority of candidates seemed well-prepared for this question, featuring a central character who appears in four of the play's five acts, and examiners reported that a majority of candidates responded with enthusiasm, tracking Romeo's actions and aspects of his presentation across the play. Many made good use of last year's extract, beginning their discussion with Romeo's unrequited love for Rosaline and gaining AO2 marks for probing oxymorons such as a "brawling love" to establish aspects of his character and situation. Other popular moments selected were the Capulet ball, the balcony scene, the fight in Act 3 scene 1 and the final scene. Examiners were generally impressed with the coverage of the play and felt that AO2 was addressed more confidently than in previous years, with some good use of key quotations and identification and sometimes exploration of turning points for Romeo, such as seeing Juliet for the first time and the death of Mercutio.

Candidates viewed Romeo as emotional, loving, immature, impulsive, changeable and violent. Some tried to present a sympathetic reading, seeing him as a victim of fate; others felt his impulsive behaviour and tendency to be driven by his emotions meant that he was the architect of his own (and Juliet's) downfall. Surprisingly few seemed to see him as collateral damage from the "ancient grudge". Stronger responses ranged widely across the text, quoted accurately, and explored the nuances of Romeo's behaviour. In these, there was often a willingness to explore the changes in Romeo and whether or not he grows as a character. Some looked at how Romeo contrasts with other male characters in the play, and how he uses his anger in defence of love, as opposed to Tybalt who uses his to maintain hate. There were some interesting explorations of his devotion to Juliet and attention to details such as his placing of the dead Paris near to Juliet.

Weaker responses were often brief, or only considered part of the play, for example Acts 1 and 2. A significant number fell into re-telling the story, with varying degrees of focus on Romeo himself. Of these, those that could select some key moments and probe a few quotations to gain some AO2 marks did better; those that offered more general narration fared less well. Being able to discuss and at least begin to dig into some specific detail, as always, is essential for getting to Band 3. Some candidates had gaps in their knowledge which were often filled by erroneous connections. For example, a few wrote that Romeo kills Tybalt because he stands in the way of his marriage to Juliet, or Tybalt wants to kill Romeo because he's heard about the marriage.

### ***Macbeth***

This question was accessible for candidates of all abilities and prompted enthusiastic and sustained responses, tracking Lady Macbeth's presentation across the play from many candidates. The focus on "changes" in her character allowed many students to compare her at key moments in the play, mostly accompanied by well-selected quotations. Candidates mostly explored Lady Macbeth's ambition, using her response to Macbeth's letter as a springboard into discussion, her control and manipulation of her husband around the murder of Duncan, and her subsequent loss of power, leading into her change into the guilty and haunted individual we see in Act 5. Examiners felt that AO2 was addressed more effectively in this question than in previous years, with candidates making good use of last year's extract and her soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 5 when discussing Lady Macbeth at the start of the play. They then contrasted this with focus on her fragmented, tormented language and the symbolism of blood in the sleepwalking scene. Whether or not candidates looked at key moments in Act 3 ("Nought's had, all's spent" and "be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck" in Act 3 Scene 3; the banquet in Act 3 Scene 4) tended to be a key discriminator between responses.

Weaker students tended to focus mainly on the start of the play rather than showing good coverage, or perhaps had spent too long on the extract and could only offer a brief response. Some managed a simple juxtaposition of Lady Macbeth in Acts 1 or 2 with Act 5, without further coverage or development of textual detail. Sometimes events were muddled and quotations misattributed. Examiners were surprised to read comments from some candidates about Lady Macbeth being a gentle, subservient wife before reading the letter, despite this being her first moment in the play. A significant minority limited themselves by seeing Lady Macbeth as a two-dimensional character: simply ruthless and evil at the start of the play, then paying for it by becoming a weak and guilty shell in Act 5. While many candidates explored her through the lens of gender in Jacobean times quite successfully, others prioritised sweeping contextual discussion over more focused exploration of her character.

Higher level responses tended to be characterised by better coverage and the identification of key turning points in her character. Many were able to compare her use of "a little water" to wash her hands in Act 2 Scene 2 with her attempts to wash the "damned spot" from her "little hand" in Act 5 Scene 1, allowing change to be discussed in terms of language and structure as well as characterisation. The variations in her relationship with Macbeth were also discussed effectively by many. Those who could see Lady Macbeth as a complex character rather than simply a "fourth witch", acknowledging the more supportive and protective elements of her relationship with Macbeth were able to offer more rounded, evaluative responses, as were those who picked up on details such as her need for a drink to make her "bold" and the comment that she could not murder someone who looked like her father in Act 2 Scene 2. For some, her short soliloquy in Act 3 Scene 2 was the key moment in her change. Really well-sustained responses often explored her presentation after her death, such as Macbeth's ambiguous "she should have died hereafter" and Malcolm's condemnation of her as a "fiend-like queen".

A number of examiners felt that Lady Macbeth was subject to more sweeping and at times inaccurate comments than any other character across the six plays on this component. Many candidates argued that she is solely responsible for Macbeth's downfall; a few even seemed to believe she stabbed Duncan herself and / or ordered the murders of Banquo and Lady Macduff. Candidates frequently asserted that she asks the spirits to *become a man* (despite her use of the verb "unsex" and the textual detail that suggests she wants her femininity removed, not masculinity added). Others described her as "barren", despite the line "I have given suck...". It's clear that Lady Macbeth is a character that many candidates love to hate, but it feels as though a little more balance and nuance would be beneficial in future candidates' approach to her character.

### ***Othello***

This was an open, accessible question which examiners found particularly enjoyable to mark. Candidates generally responded with enthusiasm and were able to take a range of approaches. Some concentrated on one relationship in detail – almost always that of Othello and Desdemona - tracking through key scenes across the play in order to discuss the changing dynamic between them, often making good use of well-chosen textual evidence. Many compared this central relationship with that of Iago and Emilia. A few also considered the relationships between Cassio and Bianca, or Desdemona and Brabantio, often to good effect as a means of further contrast. Overall, examiners saw plenty of thoughtful discussion of gender roles and misogyny without much intrusion of unnecessary contextual detail.

Better responses tended to be sustained explorations of one or more relationships between male and female characters, with those looking at two or more of them perhaps managing a more evaluative approach, seeing relevant contrasts and parallels. Some candidates explored other character's responses to male / female relationships, for example Iago in Act 1 Scene 1 and Cassio in Act 2 Scene 1. A few noted the class differences between Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca and how that affected their treatment by men. At the upper end of the mark scheme, examiners noted some really perceptive comments on the nature of the play's male/female relationships that were grounded in Shakespeare's language choices as well as the play's events. Weaker answers were generally characterised by their brevity or simplicity, sometimes only looking at an act or two of the play. They also tended to lack specific textual reference and attention to AO2.

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

Examiners felt that this question enabled candidates to respond to the play with relative ease: answers mostly looked at romantic love, with Beatrice and Benedick naturally being the main focus in many responses, often compared with Claudio and Hero's relationship. However, some candidates also explored love between family members and friends, often to good effect, although those who tried to cover every relationship inevitably produced rather superficial results. Overall, examiners felt that candidates were most able to shine when exploring the complexity of Beatrice and Benedick's relationship. AO2 was explored through structure by many through tracking character development and identifying the different turning points for the two central pairings. Language analysis often began with various interpretations of "Can all the world buy such a jewel?" with most candidates able to make sensible comments about this. Benedick's early dismissal of love was contrasted with his declarations in the gulling and both wedding scenes, often with plenty of insight shown. Beatrice's declaration that she will "tame her wild heart..." was explored with insight into her character and there clearly remains fondness for her as a character. "Kill Claudio" was also widely discussed as a key moment in their relationship with some in-depth exploration of this part of the play.

Stronger responses tended to offer good coverage of the play and explore differing attitudes to love over time and across different relationships. Such responses often explored Shakespeare's intentions, including the idea that he was trying to expose the problems of courtly love and the positives of unconventional love. There was some confident work on Leonato and Hero, particularly in the first wedding scene: "pit of ink" was widely explored here. Other successful approaches explored the friendships between the male characters, including Don Pedro's matchmaking and Benedick's line "get thee a wife!". Weaker essays tended to suffer from brevity, a lack of coverage or misunderstandings; unnecessary contextual detail, too, sometimes crept into the discussion for very little reward.

### ***Henry V***

This question offered candidates plenty of scope to discuss Henry in relation to a wide range of other characters across the whole play. Popular selections included Canterbury and Ely, Exeter, the young Henry's former associates such as Falstaff and Bardolph, the treacherous lords, Llewellyn, Williams and Katherine. The frequent selection of the Dauphin was perhaps stretching "relationships" a little, but certainly enabled candidates to contrast the two figures effectively. Henry's relationships with God and his men were also sources of focused and at times thoughtful discussion.

Weaker responses were usually brief or lacking specific references, and some confused characters (for example, the traitors Scroop, Cambridge and Gray were sometimes mixed up with commoners such as Bardolph, Pistol and Nym). In many such responses, a lack of attention to AO2 was often a major factor. Better essays tended to use the play's chronology to examine several key relationships from across the text and discuss their importance, identifying turning points and exploring key images and language choices in order to address AO2.

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

Examiners reported that this question was handled very well by candidates of all abilities, providing them with an opportunity to discuss a key theme that is also intrinsic to the play's plot. It allowed for wide interpretation of the text and enabled most to consider several characters, such as Antonio, Bassanio, Shylock, Portia, and Jessica. In particular, examiners felt that exploring the character of Shylock with the focus on wealth elicited some thoughtful, often sympathetic readings. Other successful responses explored the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio, with some candidates arguing that Bassanio matures and adopts a healthier attitude towards material wealth as the play goes on; others, though, were less convinced of this. Portia's excessive wealth was discussed thoughtfully by some, who noted how it enables her to free Bassanio from debt and try to release Antonio – yet she does not feel free, constrained as she is by other societal factors.

In better responses AO2 was often covered as much through structure as through word choice, with candidates identifying turning points in the plot and key moments of character development as well as the contrasting of characters. The symbolism involved in the casket scenes and with the rings was another source of AO2 credit. Weaker essays were brief, did not know the plot very well or lacked coverage of the play, while those who showed reasonable focus and knowledge of the play were sometimes let down by a lack of specific reference and attention to language and structure.

#### **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 the play
- more focus on including short quotations that can be analysed for AO2; fewer contextual comments
- practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question posed
- practice in selecting detailed textual evidence for ideas
- practice in proof-reading responses to avoid technical errors, such as forgetting use of capital letters for character names, neglecting punctuation abbreviating character names.

### **Anthology Poetry**

This was the first time since 2019 that all centres had candidates responding to the Anthology Poetry questions, and while examiners felt the questions themselves were successful, they nevertheless saw more 71s treated as unseen and 72s not attempted at all than in previous years. This may well be a consequence of lower attendance levels in schools and this being the first year in four with a normal summer series. Exam technique seemed less assured than in the smaller entry of last year, with responses to 72 often a similar length or even shorter than those to 71. Examiners also noticed that knowledge on the chosen poem, Blake's "London" was often not replicated across both questions, causing them the frustration of being aware of a candidate's knowledge but being unable to credit it in one or other of the questions.

Both the chosen poem "London" and its attendant theme of place proved accessible for candidates of all ability. Most were able to work their way through "London" – even some who seemed to be approaching it as unseen – through selection and comment. They generally showed appreciation of the mood and could grasp some key ideas. For 72, the most popular choice for comparison, "Living Space" worked marvellously well, and a wide range of other poems were used successfully. In both questions context was probably addressed more often than in some previous years, although not always entirely accurately. More attention to specific contextual factors that can be linked to the poems would certainly be an effective way of pushing marks higher.

### **Question 7.1**

Examiners reported that candidates found "London" and the theme of place an extremely accessible combination, and one for which many had been well-prepared; it was often addressed with real confidence. Most candidates were able to track through the poem from start to finish, and Blake's use of language enabled higher ability candidates to demonstrate their analytical skill, while those working in the lower bands were able to show clear awareness of the main ideas in the poem. On the whole, AO2 was successfully addressed, with many candidates discussing the use and impact of repetition ("mark / marks", "in every", "charter'd", "cry"), although examiners noted a wide range of interpretations of the word "charter'd". Phrases like "the black'ning Church appalls" and "mind-forged manacles" were often explored to good effect; the closing image of the "Marriage hearse" was tackled by many, though with varying levels of success. Happily, examiners felt that technique-spotting was a rarity, and comments on the poem's structure and form were generally more successful than in previous years, with many commenting on the rigid use of quatrains, iambic tetrameter (for the most part) and ABAB rhyme scheme, and how these related to the idea of London's population being controlled and restricted. On the whole, context was addressed more frequently than in previous years, although not always entirely accurately.



To the surprise of many examiners, a significant majority of candidates claimed this was a Victorian poem, despite the fact that it was written in the 1790s and therefore in the reign of George III. This may have been partly to the reference to “the Chimney sweeper’s cry”, which was an opportunity to link to context taken by many. Indeed, examiners reported that contextual details were integrated into discussion more effectively than in the past, with some appreciation of Blake’s views as a Romantic informing his attitude to nature (“the charter’d Thames”) and contemporary institutions (“the black’ning church”, “Palace walls”) and his sympathy with the French Revolution. There was generally sound understanding of Blake’s antipathy to the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the population, particularly linked to the “black’ning church”, the “Chimney sweeper’s cry” and the “youthful Harlot’s curse”. The reference to the “hapless Soldier” did, however, seem to confuse some candidates and encourage the idea that “London” is a war poem, although there were virtually no references to contemporary wars such as the American War of Independence, the French Revolutionary Wars or the Anglo-Spanish War.

Weaker responses tended to be limited by a lack of engagement with the language and many of these struggled to comment on subtext, focusing mainly on surface meaning. Perhaps understandably, there were misunderstandings of “charter’d” and “hapless”, and some candidates were limited a little by equating “Man” with males rather than mankind and “cry” with weeping. Coverage was, as always, an issue for some, with the latter part of the poem being neglected in some cases, but, on the whole, this was less of an issue than in previous years. Stronger responses generally began by showing secure understanding of the opening lines and went on to explore key images such as the “mind- forg’d manacles”. Many interpreted the “youthful Harlot’s curse” thoughtfully and recognised Blake’s anger at the loss of innocence. A few examiners were struck by how well some candidates were able to offer astute comparisons between Blake’s London and our present-day situation, citing the current cost of living crisis and the state of the NHS to underline the poem’s relevance today.

### **Question 7.2**

By far the most popular poem selected for this question was Imtiaz Dharker’s “Living Space”, which provided considerable scope for comparison with “London” on the presentation of place. In most cases, candidates seemed to know the poem very well, with a range of key quotations being used effectively. AO2 was often addressed thoughtfully through discussion of the symbolism of the “eggs in a wire basket”. Other key references included “just not enough / straight lines”, “Beams / balance crookedly”, “Nails clutch”, “dark edge / of a slanted universe” and “gathering the light”. Furthermore, as with “London”, comments on structure and form yielded greater reward than in previous years, with many seeing Dharker’s use of free verse reflecting the haphazard construction of slum dwellings and contrasting this effectively with the rigidity of “London”. Better candidates were able to compare the glimmers of hope offered by the “fragile” eggs and the “bright thin walls of faith” with the despair of Blake’s Londoners. Context was usually addressed well, mainly through an understanding of geographical and biographical details, although in some cases this was a little muddled.

Another popular choice for comparison was “Ozymandias”. This was generally used successfully, although focused more on Ozymandias as a person than the place that was being described. Overall, examiners were pleased with the range of poems that were selected for comparison, often to good effect, including “Hawk Roosting”, “The Prelude”, “Afternoons”, “Mametz Wood”, “Death of a Naturalist”, “A Wife in London”, “Dulce et Decorum Est”, “The Soldier” and “Cozy Apologia”.

Stronger responses featured comparison across the AOs, and often the best were rooted in exploration of AO2 in both poems, with comparison of effects of language providing opportunities for those working at higher levels to achieve their potential. There were some insightful comparisons of AO3 too, often integrated into sustained discussion of the poems. Less successful responses, on the other hand, were often characterised by their brevity, and tended to struggle to sustain comparison between “London” and their chosen poem. Generalised comments without specific textual references or links to appropriate context often contributed to responses being getting stuck in Band 2. For some, a lack of clear focus on the presentation of place was an issue – and this was a frequently a consequence of the choice of poem. As always, the ability to select a poem that the candidate knows well and fits the focus of the question is the most significant factor for this question.

Disappointingly, examiners reported that there were more incomplete or unattempted responses to 72 than ever before, perhaps as a consequence of higher absence rates reported in schools since the pandemic. There was a general feeling that stronger exam technique would increase outcomes for this question in particular, whether through better use of timings across the paper – for example, not spending too long on 71 at the expense of 72 - or by ensuring that knowledge shown in 71 is reproduced effectively in the comparison. Examiners also felt that more attention to the bullet points included in the question could help candidates organise and sustain their responses.

#### **Characteristics of good poetry responses:**

- careful tracking of the poem set for 71, 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 72
- detailed, developed comparison of ideas, language and context in 72.

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

- more detailed coverage of the whole poem set in 71
- 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
- practising a structured approach to comparison, ensuring effective coverage of both poems and detailed comparative comments in 72
- incorporation of relevant contextual detail to support overall discussion in both 71 and 72.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### GCSE

Summer 2023

### COMPONENT 2

#### Overview of the Component

The most popular Section A texts studied were *Lord of the Flies*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Blood Brothers*. A sizable minority of candidates also studied *The Woman in Black* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Smaller numbers tackled the other texts, but all the texts were studied across this year's cohort.

The paper contained a range of character, relationship and theme questions within Section A. As intended, the resource-based essay format was again successful in offering support in the closed book, untiered exam. The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. Candidates were clearly very familiar with their key characters and most were able to show knowledge of their development throughout their texts. A small minority of candidates need to remember to discuss events and characters of the text in any given question: however there was a lesser tendency this year to discuss wider, contextual aspects of the text (e.g. Golding's perceived motives in writing *Lord of the Flies* or the Victorian Gothic pastiche of *The Woman in Black*) at the expense of discussing events and characters in detail. Candidates need to be reminded that although context can be relevant as part of discussion of the question, AO3 is not explicitly assessed in Section A of the paper.

#### Rubric infringements

On an untiered paper, it is to be expected that some candidates will attempt all of the questions. This is still more evident at the start of the paper. 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 layout of the paper and are reminded of the rubric before entering the exam hall. There was an increase in the number of responses where candidates simply copied the extracts out and an increase in candidates writing responses unrelated to any text studied. Centres should please remind candidates that they should not use the exam as an opportunity to vent their feelings or frustrations about the exams system in general.

#### The Paper

This year, there seemed to be an engaging and focused variation in how candidates used the extract within their essays, though many still dealt with the extract and then moved on to discuss the text as a whole. Many took a more linear approach and placed the extract within the events of the text, dealing with it at the appropriate point of discussion. A growing number took a more integrated approach by dipping in and out of the extract to make links across the whole text. All approaches are valid and effective. Following previous reports and CPD advice, most candidates now avoid spending too much of their time focusing on the extract and allow themselves more time to demonstrate their knowledge of the wider text.

The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate some good AO2 analysis and evaluation skills with relevant subject terminology. CPD advice has also been followed here as there was less emphasis on feature spotting and less forced subject terminology in responses to the extract which aided the fluency of responses. More able pupils demonstrated exceptional AO2 analysis across all texts, striking 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 previously reported, common errors include misspelling of character and author names with numerous variations of Priestley, Russell, Sheila, Arthur, Woman, Johnstone etc. Run-on sentences, or comma splicing and quality of vocabulary and expression also affected AO4 marks across the ability range. Similarly, missed capital letters and apostrophe misuse could be addressed when preparing pupils for Section A. Increased informal expression and illegibility also caused problems for even the most able candidates and are self-penalising.

#### **Timing Issues**

CPD training and more familiarity with the paper appear to have addressed issues of imbalance between Section A and Section B responses. It remains something to reinforce with candidates when preparing them for the examination. Candidates should be advised and given opportunities to rehearse answering on their set texts within 45 minutes and be reminded of the 45/45/60 timings when familiarising themselves with the overall paper structure.

#### **Comments on individual questions/sections**

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

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

The extract proved to be very accessible and a good opportunity to discuss the breakdown of civilisation in the novel. Many candidates used it as a springboard into thoughtful discussion of the deterioration of civilisation over the course of the novel, often tracking this theme through reference to Jack's changed character and quest for power. Stronger candidates linked these ideas to the overall breakdown of civilisation in the text. AO2 was generally tackled assuredly. This passage evoked some perceptive close reading, with most candidates exploring pathetic fallacy, ritualistic behaviour, mob mentality and the behaviour of the individual boys. More straightforward responses tended to chart the breakdown of society throughout the text, with variable success; however, many responses did not track fully through events from the whole text. Context is not required in this section but some candidates appear determined to refer to WW2 background and Golding's biographical detail which is often unnecessary. A significant number of candidates include unhelpful discussion of ids, egos and superegos which often hinder rather than enhance their responses to the text. The very best accurately placed the extract and went on to write analyses which were both forensic in terms of attention to detail and sensitive in their interpretation. Plenty commented on the civilisation as reflected by the boys' leadership skills, priorities and their roles as representative of civilisation or the decline thereof, with the majority of responses pinpointing key moments to chart turning points in the presentation of the theme. Most led up successfully to the arrival of the naval officer (or policeman, according to some) where the best responses were able to comment on how Golding shifts the perspective and restores a sense of civilisation at the end of the novel through Ralph and the boys' rescue.

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.

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

A very small minority of candidates studied this text. Most responses were rubric infringements that tackled the question and text as 'unseen' with very little knowledge or understanding of the way Syal presents Meena's experiences of trying to fit into two different ways of life in Tollington. The candidates that did study this enjoyable text engaged well with its characters, events and themes. The extract provided a rich opportunity for analysis, with many candidates exploring and acknowledging the covert racism in the opening dialogue. Indeed, even candidates who tackled this without prior knowledge of the text were able to gain a little credit by discussing this aspect. The rich description of the "Aunties" also proved to be fertile ground for discussion.

The best candidates then selected well from the text to show an understanding of how Meena traverses the two ways of life, often contrasting Meena's familial relationships with those she had with her English friends.

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

This complex novel clearly continues to engage and is often used with the most able candidates. The question elicited some very thoughtful and sensitive discussions of lies and deceptions in the novel. There were also a significant number of rubric infringement responses where candidates had clearly not read the text but responded to the extract.

The extract proved to be very accessible and a good opportunity to discuss the different layers of deception. Many candidates sensibly dealt with it first and then used it as a springboard into a discussion of the wider text. The extract was an opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of the lies represented by Hailsham and the student experiences of this. Many candidates showed an appreciation of the way lies and deception underpin the extract and novel as an essential foundation "you built your lives on what we gave you" whereas telling the truth is dismissed as "idealistic". There was also discussion of the way lies and deception were presented in a positive way for "sheltering" and to "protect" characters. Candidates often dealt with Miss Emily's mis-remembering and dismissive recollection of Miss Wainwright very successfully.

Many candidates explored the more complex deceptions linked to the concepts of "completion" and "deferral". Many also made clear and often sensitive links between the lies and deceptions in the three stages of the novel, commenting in depth on the lies told either by or to students while at Hailsham (including the truth about the pencil case) ; the time in the cottages, including responses to deceptions related to "possibles" and the lies exposed or admitted in the lead up to Ruth's death were also all well discussed.

Weaker responses tended to make sweeping statements about the lies and deceptions in the extract and/or had little discussion of the latter stages of the novel. These responses tended to contain little commentary on events at the cottages or beyond this point.

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

The question, on sympathy for the main character in the novel, gave candidates a very open opportunity to show off their knowledge of the events and characters of the novel.

There was a tendency to explore the extract first. This was perhaps sensible, as it provided a rich seam of exploration in terms of AO1 and AO2. The shocking death of Arthur Kipps' first wife and son provided candidates with a very strong opening to a discussion on sympathy. Many picked up on the very extreme and intense emotions Kipps feels in the extract, through the use of first-person narrative. Hill's graphic imagery of Stella's injuries also provided fertile discussion. Sound imagery and the use of emotive language were often examined in a thoughtful manner.

Occasionally, candidates struggled to widen out the discussion into the wider text, but the majority were able to select meaningfully from the story, often selecting the "conspiracy of silence" Kipps is faced with, his terror at the various encounters with the woman in black and his obvious discomfort at Monk's Piece when he is reluctant to tell his ghost story. The best answers tended to reference the complex structure of the novel in terms of a 'framed narrative', impressively tying this to the focus of the question. Similarly, successful candidates were able to discuss Hill's manipulation of the reader's sympathy for Kipps through various Gothic devices such as pathetic fallacy and isolation.

Inevitably, there were candidates who relied heavily on film adaptations of the novel and these were obvious because of discrepancies between the book and the film.

A final note in terms of SPaG (AO4): many candidates would benefit from learning the key words in the text. 'Woman', 'Arthur' and 'Crythin Gifford' are all frequently still being misspelled.

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

The relationship between Jeanette and her family is central to the novel and the vast majority of candidates engaged well with the question.

Sensibly, many candidates used the question as an opportunity to discuss Mrs Winterson's character and beliefs, with many references to her forthright views and apparent hypocrisy. Most candidates had a good sense of Jeanette's changing relationship with Mrs Winterson as she grows up, with the best candidates providing very detailed and nuanced examinations of this. Many candidates also included discussion of the character of Elsie and her "maternal" support for Jeanette.

The extract provided a rich opportunity to discuss Jeanette's relationship with Mrs Winterson including her motivation to adopt Jeanette. Those that used the extract well noted the "angry voices" and conflict between Jeanette's adoptive and natural mother and Jeanette's distress and physical reactions. Many also commented on the humour in the extract and throughout the novel: the adoption papers hidden under flannels; reference to the "fornication occasion" and the "War Cupboard".

It was also pleasing to note the frequent references to the mythic elements of the novel, with these allegorical elements used to support the best responses.

Weaker candidates struggled to include a range of detail from across the whole text, but many responses focused their response on the 'parenting' of Mrs Winterson as a way to discuss the family dynamics. Many were also able to comment on the reconciliation between Jeanette and Mrs Winterson at the end of the novel.

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

The question on Christopher's relationship with his mother, Judy, was very successful in providing the opportunity for 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. Often, these candidates contrasted this with the character we actually meet later in the play. There was lots of interesting discussion about how Christopher remembers her on the beach and this frequently led to discussion on the importance of the way the play is structured.

In discussing the presentation of Christopher and Judy's relationship, candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the text. Many wrote sensitively about the complex, often difficult, relationship. There was some very detailed analysis of the language in the extract, with a particular focus on the stage directions showing the emotional states of the two characters.

Whilst some responses saw Judy's departure from Christopher as a simple demonstration of her selfishness most candidates were far more understanding of her motives. Better candidates were often quite empathetic towards her situation, acknowledging that the relationship was a complex one, without a totally happy ending and that Judy and Christopher both had many flaws. More successful candidates discussed the idea that Judy left Christopher because she felt ignored, powerless and marginalised in the relationship between her husband and son, whereas weaker candidates tended to take a more simplistic view that Judy was a bad mother because she left Christopher. However, Judy was frequently praised for simply trying her best and candidates often appreciated and understood that she does try.

Amongst these less successful candidates there were many who relied far too much on the extract, particularly focussing on the cancellation of the exam and what the lolly represents.

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

The extract provided a good basis for some very confident and sensitive responses about Jo and Geof's warm and close relationship.

In response to the extract many candidates commented on the domestic tone of Jo and Geof's exchanges with reference to "what's cooking?" and their discussion about insurance. There was thoughtful discussion of Geof's love and affection for Jo in contrast to Helen, in particular, that Helen "always used to pull away" and was not able to provide love for Jo. There was some discussion of the stage directions in the extract and wider play which also reflected the domesticity of the relationship including the repositioning of furniture "pushing the couch back into position" and "Geoffrey chases her with the mop".

Outside the text, candidates often provided wider references and thoughtful discussion of the platonic love Jo has for Geof and the supportive nature of the relationship between them including the financial support Geof provides for Jo. Strong responses also went on to mention Geof's support of Jo's pregnancy and the unconditional love Geof has for Jo and promises for her child. The best responses also integrated discussion of the unconventional nature of the relationship given the "outsider" status of the two characters in a 1960s setting: Jo as an unmarried mother about to give birth to a mixed-race child and Geof as a homosexual.

Weaker candidates lacked broader reference to the wider events in the play and stayed within the focus of the extract. There were fewer instances than previously of candidates referencing the 1961 film version rather than the original text, which cannot be valued as textual support by the examiner. Weaker responses also tend 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, 'bolted on' context or extended discussion about the characteristics of a kitchen sink drama, for example, are often unhelpful.

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

The question's focus on how the characters react to the discovery of truths worked well and its open nature allowed the vast majority of students to readily engage with the extract and demonstrate secure knowledge of the text. The whole play is really about how the characters respond to the various revelations and the steer towards 'reactions' worked in the majority of cases to prevent candidates from merely listing what is revealed. Inevitably, some candidates tried to crowbar the whole play into their discussion in chronological order, whereas those candidates that used their planning time to select judiciously were inevitably rewarded with a higher mark as they were able to discuss their selections in more depth.

Understandably and pleasingly, a range of approaches were used. Some candidates chose to write about the extract first, focussing on Mrs Birling's response to the Inspector's interrogation and the discovery of the truth about Eric. Many candidates were able to bring Sheila's reaction into this, contrasting her early understanding with that of her mother. Some candidates used the extract as a 'springboard' to make additional points from across the text to support or expand upon points based on the extract. For example, Sheila's attitude and behaviour in the extract was often contrasted with her attitude and behaviour at the start of the play. Other candidates chose to deal with events in the order that they are revealed in the play. Inevitably, some candidates tried to crowbar the whole play into their discussion in chronological order, whereas those candidates that used their planning time to select more judiciously, were inevitably rewarded with a higher mark as they were able to discuss their selections in more depth. However, the openness of the question allowed all approaches to be valid. In general, the most popular approach was tackling each character in turn. This allowed candidates to demonstrate knowledge of characters and the whole text. Discussion of Sheila's character was often the most extensive, exploring her development throughout the play and her role as Priestley's secondary 'mouthpiece' (a term that is now used well by many candidates).

Whilst some candidates avoided discussion of Gerald (presumably because he wasn't a Birling, or perhaps because he didn't fit neatly into one 'side' or the other), others included both his response to the Inspector's interrogation regarding his affair with Eva and his reaction to the discovery that the Inspector was not real. A number of candidates mentioned Gerald in terms of Sheila's reaction to the discovery of the truth of his affair, which generally worked well. Others appreciated the subtleties of Eric's reactions and often skilfully combined AO1 and AO2 discussion of how the character accepts the blame, but in his language tries to excuse himself by placing significant blame on Mr and Mrs Birling. Individual character discussion often led on to a wider sense of the contrasting reactions between the different generations, as well as Priestley's message and intentions in terms of Capitalist and Socialist viewpoints.

Although context is not rewarded in Section A of this component, it understandably has an integral part to play in the teaching of this text, leading some candidates to discuss aspects of this at length, with long paragraphs about the Edwardian (sometimes called Victorian or Shakespearean) era 'bolted on' to the discussion. This is time that could have been used more meaningfully.



Overall, this text continues to remain popular, engaging and accessible to the complete ability range of candidates.

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

Responses to this text were, on the whole, of a very high standard and it seems to be a text that is well chosen by centres who know their candidates' ability to respond positively to its humour, themes and messages.

There was some excellent analysis of the extract which provided a useful way into discussion of Hector and Irwin. Responses focused on the contrast between Hector's attitude towards education and exams as "the enemy of education" and Irwin's acceptance of examinations as a "fact of life". This often provided an excellent springboard into a wider discussion of the differences between the two teachers, their respective teaching styles, approach to results and the dynamics of their relationships with other characters.

Candidates were well prepared to discuss the two characters, judging by the mainly assured selection of pertinent quotations selected from across the text. Most responses moved beyond the extract to evaluate the presentation of Hector and Irwin, and their relationships with other staff and the boys, often in a detailed, mature and confident way. Some of the most successful responses included thorough discussion of Hector's anger and frustrations and Irwin's thoughtless remarks including the holocaust lesson in particular. Fewer candidates discussed the ending of the play in terms of what happens to the teachers and the boys and centres should remind students to comment on texts in full.

Weaker responses (and there were not that many) tended to over-simplify and be a little formulaic in their assessment, making assertions that Hector is old fashioned and Irwin is cutting-edge. These responses tended to crowbar in quotes that they were determined to use (very often, these contained the swear words contained in the play).

### ***Blood Brothers***

The question worked extremely well across the full range of abilities. The extract gave candidates a useful reminder of the ending of the play. More able candidates were able to discuss Mickey's different emotions at learning he is Edward's twin and many successfully also commented on his sense of self-worth as reflected in the repetition of "useless". Some candidates commented on the use of stage directions and Mickey's emotional upset and hesitation when asking "How come you got everythin' ... an' I got nothin'". Mostly, candidates were clear about the reference to and role of Mrs Lyons in revealing Edward and Linda's affair. Coverage was much improved this year. There was also improved reference to the songs such as 'That Guy' and the "Summer Sequence". Reference to the songs remains a useful way to access AO2 marks and they are an important aspect of the text.

Many candidates were able to demonstrate a selective approach this year in order to avoid simple retelling of the story. When discussing the wider text candidates adopted a balanced, nuanced response to the character of Mickey without simply labelling him as working class. The majority had tremendous sympathy for him and wrote in an engaging and empathetic way about the challenges he faced throughout the play. These responses clearly understood and showed a sensitive awareness of the anger Mickey felt particularly when doubting the parentage of his child and in the betrayal he felt at Eddie's "affair" with Linda.

A significant number of effective responses discussed comparisons between Mickey and Edward, therefore allowing candidates to make evaluations of Mickey's character by focusing on his character at different ages, times and turning points in his life. The most effective responses were focused on Mickey and made use of the structure of the play and the changes in time frame to follow Mickey's character development in some detail. Many responses included details from throughout the text from his growing up with his mother and siblings, his meeting and friendship with Edward, and his friendship and developing relationship with Linda. Many responses also continued to sensitively discuss Mickey's emerging resentment of Edward and his opportunities to go to university in stark contrast to Mickey's low paid job and his later loss of employment. In the best responses there was some excellent, sensitive and evaluative discussion of the impact of Mickey losing his job, his involvement in crime, subsequent prison sentence and the toll this took on his mental health.

Weaker responses often focused very simply on the differences between Mickey's use of slang and Edward's more "proper speech" often losing sight of the focus of the question at times.

Context is obviously not explicitly rewarded here and while some stronger candidates dealt with this efficiently, mentioning class, arguments about nature and nurture and poverty to support points they were making, there was a useful decline in less successful candidates over-reliance on context and sweeping generalisations regarding the rich and poor were also evident.

## **Summary of key points**

### **Characteristics of a good Section A response:**

- use the extract purposefully, highlighting key details that help focus on the question and provide useful AO2 comments
- use the extract as a springboard into a wider discussion of the text
- focus on well-chosen key events or scenes, significant characters/relationships to link to the question and wider themes
- have a sustained focus and direct textual references with good coverage of the text (referencing events spanning the beginning, middle and ending of the story)
- clear planning and progression of the response, with development of ideas and supporting references, rather than assertions and general impressions.

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

- Remind candidates of the bullet points built into the start of every question and use them to shape responses.
- Encourage candidates to be selective in their use of the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills. There is no requirement on Component 2 to analyse the extract in detail. Instead, use the extract as a springboard for a wider discussion, with a few key words or images explored that can then be broadened out to show knowledge and understanding of the whole text.
- Avoid 'over analysis' of vocabulary. 'Mrs Lyons says Edward was a 'tiny baby'. The adjective 'tiny' suggests her problems and life with her husband were 'tiny'.
- Avoid repeatedly labelling or naming every word class. Be selective. Also, avoid forcing techniques and subject terminology into their responses to the extract – either incorrectly or very tenuously: 'The use of a descending tricolon causes Ralph and Jack to seem much closer to each other'.

- Similarly, avoid focus on analysis of sentence length, punctuation features or more non-fiction rhetorical devices, which again, can be an unproductive use of the extract. It also would be better to avoid unnecessary terms such as semantic fields or lexical sets and replace with simple reference to 'words' or 'phrases'.
- Contextual details should only really be included in Section A if relevant to the question and then still need to be closely tied to discussion of the characters, events and details. For example, Priestley's intentions in writing *An Inspector Calls* but still needed to be closely tied to discussion of the play. Too often, context is confused and very general (e.g., 'During the 1960s, or the Industrial Revolution, women were seen as failures if they didn't stay home and have babies'). These are not particularly helpful, relevant or accurate.
- Encourage pupils to learn key spellings such as character names and authors, as well as key words associated with each text and so likely to be employed. Proof-read responses to Section A to eradicate simple errors such as capital letters or missing apostrophes and avoid combined words such as "alot" and the increasingly prevalent "eachother".
- Responses must be legible.

## Section B – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Prose

### General Comments

The most popular texts continue to be *A Christmas Carol* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. However, *War of the Worlds* is also popular and *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Silas Marner* all have a significant minority of candidates studying them.

The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. Although the minor texts tend to be attempted by more able candidates, this is not always the case. There was clear engagement with the texts and more able candidates were able to demonstrate higher level evaluation skills. 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 candidates included the extract at the start of their response; many used the extract as part of 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 did not use the extract at all, though some treated it with a light touch, preferring to focus on the wider text. This too was acceptable, although potentially a wasted opportunity. Relatively few candidates made no reference at all to the wider text.

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 reference used to enhance discussion of the text.

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

## Comments on individual questions

### *A Christmas Carol*

The deliberate linking of ‘supernatural’ with ‘ghostly’ in the question meant that candidates were very clear as to what the question asked and there were very few instances where the question had been misinterpreted.

The extract was taken from near the start of the novel and many candidates correctly identified it as the first supernatural incident in the novel. It was therefore understandable that the vast majority of the candidates used it as a starting point for their discussions. There were inevitable misreadings and confusion amongst weaker candidates, who thought that Scrooge was completely unaffected by the sight of Marley’s appearance as a door knocker (misunderstanding the sentence, “To say that he was not startled ... would be untrue.” Some believed that he could see Marley’s pigtail sticking out of the back of the door and very, very few understood the “bad lobster in a dark cellar” image as a reference to a glowing light, though many had a go at an interpretation. However, the majority of candidates appreciated that the incident in the extract was intended to show that Scrooge was unsettled, and foreshadowed later changes in his character. A vast majority naturally went on to discuss the appearance of Marley’s Ghost in the same stave with generally sound understanding of the purpose and importance of this character in establishing and understanding of what is at stake for Scrooge in the story. The details of Marley’s presentation such as the chains ‘forged in life’ and Scrooge’s attitude and initial rejection of Marley were referenced in many answers.

The open focus of the question allowed candidates free rein to select from most parts of the novel. Many candidates chose to write about only one or two of the ghosts, allowing them to consider these in more detail, whilst others gave an overview of all of them. With more able candidates, this second approach did not mean a lack of detail, leading to some very long responses. There was sometimes occasional confusion about what each ghost looked like, or what they showed Scrooge – and even the order in which they appeared. Candidates had different interpretations of what each ghost showed and taught Scrooge; for example, some considered that the Ghost of Christmas Past showed Scrooge enjoying himself, whilst others focused on young Scrooge’s loneliness and sadness. Better candidates appreciated that both of these were true.

The vast majority of candidates were able to address how ‘important the ghosts are to the novel as a whole’ by discussing the impact they had on Scrooge’s character. More able candidates discussed the slight changes that were evident from the very first supernatural encounter, and looked at all the markers of change with each ghost. Others felt that the changes did not take place until much later, with a number citing the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come as the most significant. Popular events to discuss were young Scrooge alone at school, Fezziwig’s party, Belle leaving Scrooge, the visit to the Cratchit house, Fred’s party, the visit to the graveyard and the revealing of Ignorance and Want.

The question provided lots of opportunities to meet the context requirements of AO3. Most candidates commented on the significance of charity and helping others, particularly in relation to the Ghost of Christmas Present repeating Scrooge’s words on “reducing the surplus population”. There was often thoughtful discussion of poverty, wealth and social class in a Victorian context, linked to the Cratchits as well as Ignorance and Want. Many were able to reference the Victorian tradition of ghost stories at Christmas and Dickens’ personal story was mentioned frequently, with varying degrees of success. However, there continue to be bolt-on passages about Malthus, the Poor Laws and Dickens’ father. Film references still persist, particularly in common misconceptions that Scrooge meets Belle at Fezziwig’s party and the Ghost of Christmas Past is presented as a candle. Happily, though, references to Kermit seem to have been eradicated!

## ***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 sensitive, perceptive and insightful. Most candidates were clearly engaged with the importance of the Cass family in the novel and commented on the theme in a well prepared and highly evaluative manner.

There was often a detailed and forensic analysis of the extract and much discussion of how it introduced the reader to Godfrey and Nancy's relationship, in particular Nancy's positive influence on Godfrey and the stability of their marriage despite the challenges they faced. Many candidates took the opportunity to explore AO2 points through the extract, with many discussing Godfrey and Nancy's emotional speech, affectionate and stoic behaviour and how Godfrey's broken syntax reveals his distress and the significance of his reference to "debts" which cannot be repaid. Most candidates consolidated their responses with reference to the wider text and various turning points in Nancy and Godfrey's relationship. Candidates successfully and sensitively discussed Nancy and Godfrey's courtship, subsequent marriage, disappointment at not becoming parents and their attempts to adopt Eppie often successfully discussing Godfrey's redemption and better nature at the end of the novel. Some of the best responses often included assured and sensitive discussion of Godfrey within the wider framework of his relationships not just with Nancy but with his father and brother and drew on the influence his childhood had on him in all subsequent relationships.

There was often thoughtful discussion about Godfrey and Nancy's childlessness and attempt to reclaim Eppie leading to conclusions about the relative importance (or insignificance) of money. Many candidates traced Godfrey's growth through the novel, with original and insightful evaluations of his character and the influence Nancy had upon his character development.

AO3 was well discussed and mostly perceptive and assured. The vast majority provided excellent examples of integrated discussion on historical context (e.g., poverty and the value of family in contrast to monetary wealth) while some candidates commented on the novel's links to religious beliefs, families, Victorian expectations and the contrast between social classes. Candidates also discussed attitudes towards children born out of wedlock, the lack of a maternal figure in the Cass household and Godfrey's changing attitudes and redemption often within the wider context of attitudes to religion and forgiveness.

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

The question asked candidates to consider the ways the Martian invasion causes law and order to break down in the novel. The extract focused on the Narrator's brother rescuing the Elphinstones from three men attempting to steal their pony and chaise. Some candidates seemed unfamiliar with the extract and got a bit muddled over the word 'fugitives', which many took to mean 'escaped prisoners' rather than 'people running away'. Many more though, placed the extract well as part of the brother's narrative perspective and were able to examine the rich AO2 in pleasing detail, particularly examining the violent nature of verbs such as, "slashed", "struck" and "gripped". Occasionally, the use of "whip" was linked to how the Martians had enslaved humans like animals as law and order broke down, which was quite a thoughtful point for those that made it. Often, much was made of the "pugilistic chivalry", leading to discussion around attitudes to women at the time and how the invasion had led to a breakdown of this aspect of order in society.

Discussion of the wider text often successfully focussed on Wells' descriptions of the panic and violence that broke out following the invasion, often with very perceptive selection of key moments from the "Exodus" section of the novel. Lower band responses were quite generalised and commented on ways in which, "there was panic", or how, "violence broke out", but these comments were not always then linked to specific characters or incidents.

Many candidates sensibly used the question to focus on key minor characters and show how the breakdown in law and order is presented through the Curate and the Artilleryman. These were often linked well to AO3 points of context and led to discussion on how they represent Wells' critical views on Victorian pillars of society such as the Church and the Military, as well as valid references to the survival of the fittest; Tasmania; the British Empire; and Imperialism which were all often skillfully used.

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

*Pride and Prejudice* proved to be relatively popular once again and was studied right across the ability range. Candidates studying this text responded well to the opportunities offered by the novel and the set question, which called on candidates to consider the turning points in Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship in the novel. Fewer candidates relied solely on the extract with only very brief reference to the rest of the text and more candidates tracked fully to the end of the novel. Responses were discursive and though there was increased specific support from the text (either paraphrased reference to events or direct supporting reference) this remains an area to develop and improve. Most candidates were able to place the extract precisely in the timeline of events. Many responses unfortunately remained overly reliant on film adaptations of the novel and took a narrative approach which lacked depth and detail of direct evidence/quotation from the text.

The extract allowed many candidates to discuss both characters and their attitudes to marriage, prejudice, and social status; however overall, there was limited exploration of AO2.

Many candidates discussed Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship and route to marriage in contrast to the marriage between Mr Collins and Charlotte Lucas which was often somewhat forced into responses. More successful responses used the contrast between Charlotte's marriage as a springboard to discuss marriage within the wider text linking it to Elizabeth's expectations, prospects of marriage, rejection of marriage proposals and eventual marriage to Darcy. The top band answers framed discussion of Darcy and Elizabeth's unconventional courtship within the wider frame of Austen's presentation of women, marriage, status and class. Most candidates included reference to Darcy's early opinions and prejudice towards Elizabeth and vice-versa and often tracked skilfully through the turning points in their relationship. A significant number of responses focused only on Darcy's proposals, missing opportunities to discuss turning points as indicated in the question. The best answers linked discussion with AO3 context points seamlessly woven in, through comments on the social and economic standing of Darcy and Elizabeth, their respective behaviour, demeanour and attitudes to marriage in the novel. Comments on structural features such as the use of letters in the novel were commented on by a minority of candidates to help illustrate the turning points of Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship.

Centres should remind candidates to express their ideas and comments using a suitable style and tone and avoid oversimplifications such as Mr. Darcy "catches feelings for Liz".

## ***Jane Eyre***

*Jane Eyre* continues to be relatively popular once again, with a fair ability range amongst candidates. This open question focused on conflict between the characters in the novel and this allowed the majority of candidates to provide assured, confident and evaluative discussion.

The extract was taken from near the start of the novel and saw the first physical and mental conflict that Jane endured, so it was understandable that the vast majority of the candidates used it as a starting point for their discussions. The extract allowed for perceptive discussion of AO2 features such as John Reed's imperative language and the violent lexis such as, "cut", "pain" and "hurl". This often led to discussion of Jane's time in the red room (with all its metaphorical and symbolic interpretations) and Jane's inferior societal position as a "dependent".

A common approach for many candidates was to track the places Jane spent her life and reference the conflict she suffered in these places. As a result, there was much appropriate discussion of Jane's conflict with the Reeds, Mr Brocklehurst, Rochester and St John. Often, these were done in detailed, thoughtful and perceptive ways. A significant number of responses sensibly featured detailed reference to Bertha Mason's treatment and this was often used as an opportunity to skillfully weave in AO3 references to gender, religion, economic status, social class and sensitive parallels between Jane and the real-life situation of Charlotte Brontë.

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 ways Stevenson creates fear at different points in the novel and worked well. All candidates were able to incorporate their knowledge of plot and character and respond to the question in a variety of valid ways. Most candidates were aided by the extract and referred to the pathetic fallacy, "deserted" streets of London and the distress of Poole and Jekyll's servants and how they were used by Stevenson to create fear. Film versions seemed to be less prevalent this year, though were still occasionally present. Candidates engaged fully with the extract, discussion of which at times, also led to full coverage of the text and Jekyll/Hyde's eventual death. Much was made of the atmosphere, the weather, the moon and the way the servants were "huddled together like a flock of sheep". Candidates also commented on the fear of Poole, Utterson and the servants and the way they speak and behave in the extract.

The majority of responses referenced key aspects of the wider text e.g., Jekyll's scientific experimentation or "heresies" and Hyde's character. Many invariably cited Hyde's "troglodytic" appearance, "ape like fury" and "Satan's signature" to target AO2. Candidates often widened the scope of their discussions to consider the murder of Sir Danvers Carew and Lanyon's death. The top band responses widened their scope further with some nuanced and sensitive discussion of Utterson's gradual discoveries and Jekyll's fear and dread over what he has become in his transformative state. There was also some sensitive discussion of the way different points of view and first-person narratives, such as the accounts left by Dr Lanyon and Dr Jekyll, added to the growing fear. Some candidates surprisingly did not mention Hyde which limited their responses significantly. Many candidates did not refer to the main concept of the novel and the fear associated with transforming from one person into another or, despite the extract, to Jekyll's death at the end of the novel. Candidates should be reminded to discuss the main concepts of the text.

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, it often limited reference to the whole text. There was again less use of biographical information about Stevenson 'bolted-on'. There was also less reliance on discussions of Freud and the id and ego theories, both of which allowed candidates to focus more fully on events in the text. Better approaches tended to include discussion of the text linked to the ideas of Victorian societal expectations, respectability, repression and hypocrisy; Darwin's Theory of Evolution; the conflict between science and religion; the Victorian fascination with physiognomy; and links to contemporary literary trends all of which could be directly linked to, and exemplified by, textual details.

## **Summary of Key Points**

### **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
- responses must be legible.

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

- clear and sustained focus on the question asked
- use of the extract at a relevant point of the essay
- appropriate selection of short references to support points made
- coverage and 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, writer's techniques 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 detailed supporting references rather than general impressions
- avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story
- more practice on exploring 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, *Nettles* by Vernon Scannell and *Swimming with Aidan, aged 4* by Luke Wright were well received and the pairing was extremely 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. Understanding of the first poem was perhaps more assured than the second given its slightly more straightforward narrative, but there were still many confident and assured responses to both poems.

Pleasingly, CPD messages have got through to centres and many more candidates are taking time to explore the second poem before comparing with the first, which wasn't the case in the early days of the specification. However, a significant minority of responses did not contain comparison in 3.2 or left it out completely. Centres need to reinforce the requirements of the exam with candidates.

There is still a significant amount of feature spotting and line-counting by candidates of all abilities. There were a number of unhelpful references to enjambment and counting lines rather than engaging with the ideas and meaning of the poems in terms of content and imagery. However, pleasing recognition of the sonnet form and meaningful comments on imagery, similes, metaphors, tone, contrast, and so on were referenced in a sensible way with clear reference to their effects.

Though they were in a minority, it is clear that many candidates are not using the statement in the question which gives an overview of what the poems are about at a surface level. This year, this stated that these were two poems about the experiences of fathers with their young sons, but many candidates referenced mothers instead. While this did not significantly affect their marks, candidates should use the format of the paper to aid their understanding and responses to both questions.

### Comments on individual questions

#### Question 3.1

*Nettles* was accessible to the vast majority of candidates. The relatively straightforward narrative meant that most candidates identified that the poem was about a young boy falling into nettles, being comforted by the father who then cut down the nettles. Many related to their own experiences with nettles and empathised greatly with the child.

Candidates often focussed on the father's love for his son and their close relationship; with a majority also exploring the violent war-like imagery. Perceptive responses intertwined these two ideas and explored how the war imagery arose from the father's love. There was much discussion of the bed image, usefully explored by the persona in the poem itself.

Whilst most candidates were able to understand the ending, in which the nettles grow back and the child is potentially hurt by them again, better candidates tended to offer a deeper meaning that the father would not always be able to protect the son, that the son was going to encounter further, more serious hurt in the future.

Inevitably, some candidates proposed that the poem was actually about a real war, with a number of responses promoting this idea at the expense of full engagement with the poem. There were a number of responses which suggested that the nettles symbolised school bullies or decided that the child had died and the parent was holding a vigil for them.

On the whole though, this poem was well received, and most candidates were able to produce a relevant response.

### Question 3.2

The pairing of *Nettles* and *Swimming with Aidan, aged 4* gave the candidates plenty to discuss in terms of comparison and worked well across the entire ability range. As the more challenging poem, candidates were generally less secure with the second poem compared to the first, but most were able to grasp the main key ideas of the poem. Some of this may have been due to timing issues.

The best candidates fully understood the father's relationship with his son and the poignancy of the final lines. Many appreciated that Aidan "struggled more" with life in general compared to when he was in the pool, with some thoughtful appreciation of the choice of the word "magic". There was often good appreciation of the alliterative "grace, grit, guts and get-me gusto", successfully linking this with the power of Aidan in the pool. There were some lovely interpretations of the title, with some linking it to something akin to a label in a photo album and a snapshot of a moment in time. Recognition of the pride concerning Aidan's accomplishments against other children tended to signify a top band candidate.

There was real engagement through interpretations of the father's relationship with his son. Some candidates read the poem as the father being overcritical of his son and highlighting all his faults to encourage him to be independent. Other thoughtful responses suggested that Aidan might have some kind of disability or be autistic, which were well supported by close reference to the poem. There were also inevitable confusions. A number of candidates thought that this was Aidan's first swimming lesson and that he was not very good at it.

Even the weakest candidates made a link in the mention of the two children's ages. There was also a significant recognition of the children's physical imperfections, with "blisters" linked to "scabs". Many successfully linked the physical pain of the child in the first poem with the more emotional pain of the child in the second. Responses often discussed the character of each boy, with some saying that Aidan was far braver and more adventurous than the son in *Nettles*, others that they were both clumsy. Whilst these tended to be the most obvious/straightforward comparisons, some candidates were able to explore these in great depth and on a more sophisticated level.

The comparisons were often illuminating and, given that hardly anyone sitting the paper would have been a parent, there was some remarkable understanding of parental concern and guilt.

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

### Summary of Key Points

#### 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
- recognition of the stated overview of the poems (found underneath the question on the paper)
- clear comparison of ideas, mood and some reference to how the poets use language
- detailed selection and coverage from each poem with supporting comments exploring the meaning and effects of these selections.

**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
- practise commenting on a range of poems and poetic techniques, including imagery and figurative language
- avoid spotting and labelling 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
- gain experience in reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets
- rehearse timings across the exam to ensure sufficient time is given to the poetry
- make sure a range of comparative points are made in 3.2
- responses must be legible.

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