



GCSE Examiners' Report

English Literature
GCSE
Summer 2024

Introduction

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

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

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

Further support

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

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

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
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.	https://resources.edugas.co.uk/
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.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner Eduqas

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Executive Summary

Component 1

Section A - Extract question which assesses AO1 and AO2

Section A - Essay question which assesses AO1, AO2 and AO4

Section B - Poetry question which assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3

Section B - Poetry comparison question which assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3

Overall Performance and Accessibility:

- The paper allowed candidates of all abilities to showcase their potential.
- Examiners praised the accessibility of the questions and the high engagement levels.
- Candidates were able to approach the questions in diverse ways.
- Both less able and higher-level candidates had clear opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and analytical skills.

Section A - Text Popularity – please refer to the item level data for a full breakdown:

- "Macbeth" was the most popular text, followed by "Romeo and Juliet."
- "Othello," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "The Merchant of Venice" had reasonable engagement.
- "Henry V" made its final appearance.

Question Engagement and Rubric Infringement:

- Fewer candidates skipped questions compared to the previous summer.
- Question 72 saw increased engagement.
- Some candidates continued to infringe the rubric by attempting every extract, often with little success.
- Handwriting continues to be an issue and centres are reminded that candidates can use word processors in examinations.

Shakespeare Questions:

- Examiners were impressed with candidates' enthusiastic and knowledgeable responses.
- Shakespeare essay questions highlighted candidates' skills effectively.
- Responses to extract questions were stronger and more focused than in the past.

Poetry Questions:

- **Question 71 ("The Manhunt"):**
 - Popular among candidates who engaged well with the themes of war's physical and mental effects.
 - Better incorporation of contextual details compared to previous series.

- **Question 72:**
 - Some effective comparison.
 - Reference to the theme meant marks could be awarded in the higher bands.

Areas for Improvement:

- Candidates need to balance contextual discussions with analysis of language, structure, and form in Shakespeare questions.
- More contextual information is needed in response to question 72, especially in comparisons.
- Learning more textual quotations to support discussions and provide material for language analysis is crucial.

Key Recommendations:

- Focus on analysing language, structure, and form in Shakespeare extracts.
- Incorporate relevant context in responses, particularly for question 72.
- Memorise key textual quotations for supporting discussions and analysis.

Component 2

Section A – Essay question which assesses AO1, AO2 and AO4

Section B – Essay question which assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3

Section C – Unseen poem which assesses AO1 and AO2

Section C – Unseen poem comparison which assesses AO1 and AO2

Overall Performance and Accessibility:

- Performance levels were consistent with previous years.
- There was a slight increase in illegible scripts.
- There were improved completion rates for questions 3:1 and 3:2.

Text Popularity – please refer to the item level data for a full breakdown:

"Lord of the Flies," "An Inspector Calls," "Blood Brothers" were the most popular texts in Section A, and "A Christmas Carol," "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" in Section B.

'Never Let me Go' and 'A Taste of Honey' were assessed for the last time this year.

Question Engagement. There was:

- Strong knowledge of key characters and their development.
- Effective AO2 analysis with relevant terminology.
- Improved fluency in responses due to reduced emphasis on feature spotting.
- Relevant and well-integrated contextual understanding, particularly in Section B.
- High engagement and enjoyment in responding to poems in Section C.

Areas for Improvement:

- Pay attention to question bullet points.
- Be selective in using extracts for AO2 demonstration.
- Provide comprehensive coverage of texts, including beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid over-analysing vocabulary.
- Ensure contextual details are relevant to the question.

Key Recommendations:

- Plan responses to cover extracts and the broader text.
- Balance analysis with relevant contextual integration.
- Focus on clarity and legibility in writing.
- Utilise exam structure to aid understanding and improve responses.

Item level data for Component 1 and Component 2.

The table below shows a detailed analysis of the performance of candidates on each item (question or part question) that can be used for comparing performance.

The mean score will be close to the maximum mark if all candidates perform well on a particular item. Conversely, if candidates as a whole perform poorly on the item there will be a large difference between the mean score and the maximum mark. For questions with different maximum marks, the facility factor should be used to compare performance.

The facility factor (F.F.) for an item expresses the mean mark as a percentage of the maximum mark (Max. Mark) and is a measure of the accessibility of the item. If the mean mark obtained by candidates is close to the maximum mark, the facility factor will be close to 100 per cent and the item would be considered to be very accessible. Conversely, if the mean mark is low when compared with the maximum score, the facility factor will be small, and the item considered less accessible to candidates.

The Standard Deviation of the marks attained (S.D.) measures the spread of the data about the mean score. The larger the standard deviation is, the more dispersed (or less consistent) the candidate performances are for that item. An increase in the standard deviation points to increased diversity amongst candidates, or to a more discriminating paper, as the marks are more dispersed about the centre.

For each item the table shows the number (N) and the Percentage of candidates who attempted the item (Attempt %) When comparing items on this measure it is important to consider the order in which the items appear on the paper.

All Candidates performance across questions						
Question Title	N	Mean	S D	Max Mark	F F	Attempt %
11	18317	6.5	2.3	15	43.0	31.3
12	17705	11.1	4.0	25	44.4	30.3
21	38442	6.4	2.1	15	42.5	65.7
22	37951	11.4	4.0	25	45.5	64.9
31	1619	4.8	3.3	15	32.0	2.8
32	1248	10.6	6.0	25	42.5	2.1
41	1129	4.6	3.1	15	30.8	1.9
42	895	10.0	6.1	25	40.1	1.5
51	467	3.0	2.7	15	20.0	0.8
52	307	6.5	5.7	25	26.1	0.5
61	1132	5.0	2.8	15	33.6	1.9
62	1028	9.8	5.2	25	39.3	1.8
71	56421	6.5	2.1	15	43.6	96.5
72	52556	9.5	4.2	25	38.2	89.9

All Candidates performance across questions						
Question Title	N	Mean	S D	Max Mark	F F	Attempt %
01	3495	23.4	9.7	40	58.6	6.0
02	295	3.6	3.5	40	9.0	0.5
03	447	17.3	12.9	40	43.2	0.8
04	711	17.9	11.1	40	44.9	1.2
05	181	12.2	12.0	40	30.5	0.3
06	154	7.8	8.5	40	19.6	0.3
07	313	16.0	10.4	40	40.0	0.5
08	44949	24.0	7.0	40	60.1	77.1
09	266	24.2	12.8	40	60.6	0.5
10	8331	22.7	7.0	40	56.7	14.3
21	47342	22.6	6.5	40	56.5	81.2
22	335	25.5	10.7	40	63.7	0.6
23	739	24.2	9.4	40	60.6	1.3
24	228	22.8	11.5	40	57.0	0.4
25	349	22.7	9.5	40	56.7	0.6
26	8256	23.2	7.0	40	57.9	14.2
31	54993	8.1	2.5	15	54.0	94.3
32	53065	12.9	4.7	25	51.5	91.0

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Analysing language, structure and form in Shakespeare extracts	Approaches to Shakespeare.	Approaches to teaching the extract question.
Using context effectively in poetry responses	Using contexts effectively in response to poems in the anthology.	A set of resources to support the teaching of context in poems in the anthology.
Knowledge of key characters and themes	A series of blended learning resources on a wide range of texts including Lord of the Flies, Macbeth, An Inspector Calls and A Christmas Carol.	Blended learning resources contain interactive self-study content.

EDUQAS ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2024

Component 1

Overview of the Component

General Comments

The paper was successful in allowing candidates of all abilities to achieve their potential: feedback from examiners was extremely positive regarding the accessibility of the questions and the high levels of engagement in the texts shown. Examiners also felt that the questions tended to afford candidates opportunities to take a wide range of approaches, many observing that the paper was enjoyable to mark as a result. Less able candidates were able to engage with key elements of the texts and had clear opportunities to show their knowledge, while those working at higher levels had ample scope for sustained exploration and analysis of the texts. In Section A, “Macbeth” remains the most popular text, followed by “Romeo and Juliet.” “Othello,” “Much Ado About Nothing” and “The Merchant of Venice” all continued to be taught by a reasonable number of centres, and “Henry V” made its final appearance on the paper.

Overall, examiners felt that, compared to last summer, fewer candidates missed out questions, with many noting that question 72 benefitted from greater engagement and coverage of the specification. However, there remains a relatively small but nevertheless significant minority of candidates who infringe the rubric of the exam by writing about each extract across the paper, usually for little reward. The frequency of those employing this approach is still higher than in the early years of the specification.

Once again, though, examiners were overwhelmingly impressed with candidates’ enthusiastic and often knowledgeable responses to the Shakespeare questions in this component, testament to the excellent teaching and exam preparation from English teachers across the country. Just as last year, examiners tended to identify the Shakespeare essay question as perhaps best highlighting candidates’ knowledge and skills; happily, this year they also reported that responses to the extract questions were stronger than in the past, with generally better coverage and focus compared to the last series.

“The Manhunt” was clearly a popular choice for question 71: not only did most candidates know it well, but many clearly felt able to engage with the presentation of a relationship dealing with the physical and mental effects of war. Examiners felt that candidates seemed more able to incorporate contextual detail into their responses than in recent series. However, this was less apparent in question 72, with the chosen poem not always linked to relevant context, and, surprisingly often, with contextual knowledge that was shown in 71 not being replicated in 72. Focus on the specified theme was also an issue for some candidates, who ignored how the relationship between Laura and Eddie was presented, and instead wanted to discuss the presentation of war in both questions, inevitably limiting their mark.

Key areas for further development across the component relate to AOs 2 and 3. Examiners continued to report that candidates often wasted valuable time discussing contextual factors in the Shakespeare questions – particularly the extracts – often at the expense of analysis of language, structure, and form.

Meanwhile, not enough context was woven into responses to 72, particularly relating to the poem selected for comparison with “The Manhunt”. Another key message is that responses to the Shakespeare essay questions and 72 would benefit from candidates learning more textual quotations, however brief, to support AO1 discussion but also, crucially, providing material for AO2 language analysis.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Extract questions

As always, the extracts selected for the Shakespeare questions were key moments in the plays, and examiners reported that they were clearly familiar to most candidates. Those who were able to place the extract successfully within the play tended to do well, as they were clear about the events that lead up to this part of the text and understood what happens subsequently. It is important for candidates to look out for changes in mood or tone in the extracts (for example, Macbeth seeing Banquo’s ghost, or Lord Capulet’s reaction to Tybalt’s defiant “I’ll not endure him”), as these offer plenty of scope for rewardable comments. Similarly, comparing the differing attitudes of characters on display in these extracts (for example Tybalt and Capulet, Othello and Brabantio, Claudio, and Benedick) can enable candidates to earn significant credit.

It is important here to re-iterate the message that the audience response element of the extract questions is an invitation to consider how *any* audience might respond to the events in an extract – just like a reader’s response to a prose extract – and not just an Elizabethan or Jacobean audience. All too often, candidates that only consider how a contemporary audience might react become side-tracked by contextual issues that are difficult for examiners to reward. For instance, in 21 many examiners noted how much needless discussion of Jacobean attitudes towards the supernatural and the role of women was offered, usually at the expense of AO2 analysis.

Typically, stronger responses to the extract questions tracked through the extract, identifying characters’ thoughts and feelings, then selecting and commenting on language choices and their possible effects on an audience. The more textual selections made, the more opportunities for language analysis were opened up. Other successful routes to gaining AO2 credit were the identification of turning points and changes in mood, examples of dramatic irony and foreshadowing, and comments on stage directions and stagecraft. Once again, discussion of aspects of form, such as the use of blank verse, rhyming couplets or prose, and Shakespeare’s possible reasons for employing them, were a rarity. Happily, though, examiners felt that the tendency for candidates to simply spot techniques without commenting on their effects was less apparent than ever in this component. Weaker answers were often a result of a lack of coverage, with candidates sometimes missing out on key aspects such as Capulet’s anger at Tybalt in 21, or Portia’s racist comment about the departing Prince of Morocco in 61. As always, the advice to select from the beginning, middle and end of the extract is a good maxim for students practising extract questions. Another reason for less successful responses was a loss of focus, either as a result of straying into unnecessary contextual discussion or going outside the extract. For example, in 11 some candidates enjoyed discussing Tybalt’s anger so much that they made forays into the events of Act 1 Scene 1 or Act 3 Scene 1. However, examiners felt the most significant limiting factor in extract responses was a lack of explicit AO2 analysis. A willingness to dig into language choices and explore their connotations and effects is therefore key to success here.

Romeo and Juliet

The extract, from a key scene in Act 1, was very familiar to candidates and caused few problems, although a small number were under the impression that Tybalt's anger was due to Romeo's relationship with Juliet. Examiners felt that the question was extremely accessible, with almost all candidates able to see the contrast between Tybalt's vitriolic reaction to Romeo's presence at the Capulets ball and his Uncle's more tolerant approach to the situation.

Most candidates tracked Tybalt's aggressive response to Romeo's incursion with success, picking out the imperative "fetch me my rapier" to show his urge to violence, the repetition of "villain" to describe Romeo and the rhyming couplet "Now by the stock and honour of my kin / To strike him dead I hold it not a sin". The latter did however cause some to spend too long on contextual issues of honour and religion in Elizabethan England. Many, however, were able to contrast Tybalt's aggression with Capulet's calm tolerance of Romeo and attempts to placate his nephew. Examiners enjoyed the varied and sometimes thoughtful interpretations of Capulet's motivation here: is he trying to obey the Prince's edict? Or keen to avoid a scene to protect his reputation? Or suggesting to Tybalt that there might be a better time to deal with Romeo?

Successful responses tracked through the extract carefully, selecting key words and phrases from both Tybalt and Capulet and recognising the sudden change in Capulet's mood triggered by Tybalt's defiant "I'll not endure him," with its volley of exclamations and pointed rhetorical questions, some drawing parallels between both characters' predisposition for quickly losing their temper. Many weaker responses tended to not get as far as this point; others misinterpreted phrases such as "goodman boy" and "You must contrary me!" Overall, though, examiners felt that the main limiting factor in many answers was a lack of focus on specific language choices, with some candidates providing a reasonable commentary on the events without including AO2 analysis.

Macbeth

The extract chosen from Act 3 is a pivotal moment in the play, and the majority of candidates were able to place it successfully and understand its significance, with many seeing the appearance of Banquo's ghost as a manifestation of Macbeth's guilt. A small minority were under the impression that this was the ghost of Duncan, despite the opening stage direction but, overall, examiners felt that it was an extremely accessible extract with plenty of material to for candidates to explore.

Better responses were able to see the various levels of dramatic irony in the scene, beginning with Macbeth's duplicitous comments on Banquo's absence from the feast and their effect on an audience. Many looked at the polite, respectful language of the thanes towards their new king, before focusing on the sudden change in mood when Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo. There were thoughtful comments from some on the significance of the ghost sitting "in Macbeth's place" and most candidates were able to achieve good coverage, with lots of attention given to Lady Macbeth's intervention in the latter part of the extract. While many only saw this as further evidence of her controlling nature, stronger responses had a more nuanced understanding that recognised her embarrassment and desire to protect their newly acquired power. Most candidates saw Lady Macbeth's comments at the end of the extract as a continuation of her manipulation and emasculation of her husband in Acts 1 and 2, though more assured responses were able to note Macbeth's assertive response "Ay and a bold one" and could see this as evidence of her power diminishing in their relationship.

Weaker responses tended to misunderstand the opening of the extract, believing that Macbeth sees the ghost immediately, or struggling to say much about his interaction with the thanes. While most looked at Macbeth's reaction to the ghost with "never shake / Thy gory locks at me," the most scrutinized line, examiners noted that some seemed reluctant to dig further into language choices. Some pounced on Macbeth's use of the word "devil," though rarely with a clear idea of why he uses it. Lady Macbeth's significant intervention prompted plenty of discussion, though some missed the stage direction "to Macbeth" and therefore didn't realise that the Thanes and Macbeth were addressed separately, with a marked change in tone. Predictably, much was made of "Are you a man?," although for some it led into a contextual cul-de-sac, and opportunities to explore the final speech, with its exasperated tone and imagery, were not taken as a result. The clear message from examiners is that candidates must resist the temptation to discourse on James I's obsession with the supernatural and expectations of Jacobean women and instead explore the events, ideas, and language of the extract.

Othello

Most candidates recognised this extract from Act 1 Scene 2 and were aware that it gives the audience an early view of Othello's character while under pressure from an angry Brabantio. Othello was seen as a calm, eloquent peacemaker in the face of Brabantio's vitriolic, racist accusations. Most candidates were able to explore Brabantio's racism and claims of Othello's use of black magic, with popular quotations including "foul thief," "stowed my daughter," "chains of magic" and "sooty bosom." Many focused on possible audience responses to his discriminatory language and the objectification of Desdemona.

Stronger responses tracked through the whole extract, commenting on the presentation of characters, and picking up on the clear contrasts between them, often exploring this through AO2 analysis. There was a sense of the significance of the extract, and some saw foreshadowing of later events. Examiners noted that understanding of Brabantio here was often quite perceptive, with higher level responses seeing his mounting frustration at his lack of agency when faced with Othello's polite, quietly commanding presence.

Weaker responses tended not to look at the latter part of the extract, and some barely considered Othello's part in the exchange at all, instead looking exclusively at Brabantio's main speech. Othello's "Were it my cue to fight..." was frequently misunderstood, and some candidates lost focus either by moving beyond the extract into later events or getting bogged down in contextual comments, usually on the treatment of women in Shakespeare's time. As with other extract questions, a reluctance to address AO2 was the most limiting factor here.

Much Ado About Nothing

Examiners felt that the extract was handled well, with candidates across the ability range appreciating its significance in the play and maintaining a clear focus on an audience response. A range of viewpoints on Claudio and Benedick were expressed, with the former seen as love-struck, innocent, and polite by more sympathetic candidates, or superficial, naïve, needy, and misogynistic by others. Similarly, Benedick was viewed as either witty, honest, and grounded, or cynical, annoying, and judgmental (particularly about women). The most popular quotations focused on views of Hero, particularly "modest young lady," "Can the world buy such a jewel?" and "In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on," which all provided ample opportunity for AO2 analysis. However, Benedick's "she was unhandsome" was often viewed outside the complex sentence it sits within and was therefore frequently misunderstood.

Stronger responses worked through the whole extract, paying attention to language choices, and addressing structure through appreciation of the use of questions, changes in tone and foreshadowing, with Benedick's comment on how Hero's cousin "exceeds her... in beauty" noted as a clear hint to what is to come. Examiners were pleased to see how many candidates had a good appreciation of the humour in the extract, and some higher-level responses did well with some of Benedick's more outlandish and obscure imagery.

Less successful responses generally struggled to cover the latter half of the extract, or perhaps didn't take the opportunities to engage with the language and imagery used by the characters beyond "such a jewel": examiners mentioned that a significant number of candidates showed reasonable understanding but were nevertheless limited by a lack of attention to AO2. Inevitably, for some, the views on Hero expressed by the characters led to extended comments on the position of women in Elizabethan England that didn't add much to marks.

Henry V

This extract, from early in the play, seemed familiar to most candidates, and many saw its importance in setting up the audience's view of Henry before we see him on stage, particularly given his recent "reformation." However, some candidates would clearly have preferred it to have been taken from elsewhere in Act 1, with Canterbury and Ely's earlier discussion of the possible loss of "half of (their) possession" to the crown or their subsequent attempt to persuade Henry to lay claim to France making frequent intrusions into answers. Nonetheless, most candidates were able to discuss the bishops' views of Henry's impressive start to his reign, with some able to infer their self-interest and condescending attitudes towards Henry's "unlettered, rude and shallow" former associates. Popular quotations included "Never came reformation in a flood," "we are blessed in the change" and "The strawberry grows underneath the nettle," the latter metaphor often enabling candidates to get an instant foothold in the AO2 column of the mark scheme.

Less successful responses misunderstood Canterbury's criticism of Henry's past actions as being current misgivings, often leading candidates into a false juxtaposition of Canterbury as a negative voice and Ely as a positive one. A few responses frustrated examiners with their brevity, sometimes only making a couple of textual selections. Better responses were able to track through the extract, showing sound appreciation of the bishops' delight at Henry's kingly qualities and probing language choices, for example biblical and religious imagery, Canterbury's contrasting of Henry's past and present and Ely's use of natural imagery.

Merchant of Venice

The extract enabled candidates of all abilities to respond: a key set-piece moment from the play, it has a clear narrative and plenty of imagery with which to engage. Most candidates could place this scene within the play and understood the significance of the casket test. Morocco was viewed quite negatively by many candidates, who interpreted his behaviour as bombastic, judgemental, greedy and materialistic; others were more sympathetic, given his disappointment at his incorrect choice of casket and Portia's attitude towards him. Candidates were empathetic to the position of Portia but disapproved of her racist attitude shown clearly at the end of the extract. Her matter-of-fact response to Morocco's opening speech, "There take it, prince, and if my form lie there / Then I am yours" was interpreted in a variety of ways, with some believing that she is pushing him towards an incorrect choice and others seeing it as a clear expression of her cold disdain for him (and indeed the casket test itself). Popular textual selections included "ten times undervalued", "angel in a golden bed", "all that glisters..." and "all of his complexion". There were few misunderstandings, although some candidates mistook the writing in the scroll read aloud by Morocco for his own words.

Weaker responses tended to lose focus, with some keen to revisit Portia's earlier comments on Morocco in Act 1 Scene 2 or instead move ahead to Bassanio's turn at the test, and others drifting into generalised discussion of gender roles or religion in Elizabethan society. While it's difficult to avoid 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. Stronger answers managed to maintain sharp focus on AO2, exploring fruitful areas such as the descriptions of the caskets, Morocco's objectification of Portia and the contrast between Morocco's two speeches. Attention to Morocco's frequent use of rhetorical questions, exclamations and use of imagery related to religion and wealth paid off for many, but it was unusual to see candidates address aspects of form such as the pivotal split iambic line as the casket is unlocked, or the use of rhyming couplets in the latter half of the extract.

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.
- Less reference to contextual factors when AO3 is not addressed in this question.
- More practice on probing figurative language, connotations and key words to accumulate AO2 marks.
- Practice in responding to both soliloquies and extracts with characters interacting and responding to each other.

Essay Questions

Examiners felt that the focus on the main characters, relationships and themes in the essay questions enabled candidates of all abilities to show their knowledge and understanding of the play they had studied, and many were impressed with how well-prepared candidates were. Always open to a range of approaches, examiners reported that the relatively open nature of questions such as 12 and 22 provided wide scope for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and ideas.

Successful answers tended to either utilise brief plans, or track a character, relationship, or theme across the text chronologically, selecting key moments, as a means of structuring their response. They made good use of textual quotations to support discussion and then probed details for connotations and explored imagery to gain AO2 credit. The fact that so many noted that the use of previously set extracts seemed to feed into this process was particularly pleasing: thus, responses to 12 were enhanced with use of details of Romeo and Juliet's shared sonnet in Act 1 Scene 5 from 2018 and Juliet's suicide from last year's paper. Other reliable means of scoring AO2 marks included highlighting key moments and turning points, the use of contrasts (in characters, events, and references from across the plays), dramatic irony and foreshadowing.

Overall, examiners were impressed with the levels of enthusiasm and engagement they saw. Many cited 22 and 32 as the essay questions which produced a particularly high proportion of evaluative, thoughtful responses, though these were evident across all six plays, and teachers are to be congratulated on the high quality of so many responses here.

Less successful responses were often brief or limited in their selection of relevant events and details. Many candidates wrote well on the first couple of acts of the play they had studied but struggled to make use of the remainder of the text, thereby limiting their discussion. Frustratingly, in many cases this seemed more to do with planning or pacing, rather than a result of gaps in knowledge. Therefore, working on planning and encouraging students to be more selective in preparation for this question would be beneficial, as would sequencing tasks to improve confidence in tracking key elements across the play. Candidates who re-told the narrative of a text rather than making points with textual support missed out on credit for both use of textual support in AO1 and a lack of attention to AO2, and therefore stayed firmly rooted in Band 2, when a few brief, well-chosen quotations committed to memory could easily have elevated them into Band 3. Textual references don't have to be quotations; nevertheless, the employment of quotations has the twin virtues of providing apt support for AO1 and useful material for AO2 analysis.

The teaching of relevant social and historical contexts when studying a Shakespeare play is of course important, but examiners continue to be concerned by the disproportionate part that contextual discussion plays in a question where AO3 is not assessed. While contextual awareness can undoubtedly help candidates demonstrate understanding that can receive credit for AO1, teachers need to ensure that students understand that focus on key moments in the plays and analysis of the linguistic and structural choices made by Shakespeare should always be their main priorities in this question.

A fifth of the marks for the essay questions are for AO4, and as usual examiners saw the full range of performance. Brevity is always a limiting factor here, with candidates unable to access high marks if they write very little. The omission of capital letters and misspelling character names were detrimental factors, as was a lack of attention to punctuation. Several examiners reported an increase in comma-splicing, and it is important to note that a lack of paragraphing also had a negative impact on some AO4 scores. Some candidates continue to abbreviate character names, presumably in an attempt to save time, but seem unaware that this is also factored into their AO4 marks. It was, however, encouraging to see an increasing number of candidates reviewing and correcting their responses, often gaining a mark or two as a result.

Romeo and Juliet

Examiners felt that this question on the play's central relationship was extremely accessible, and candidates seemed well-prepared, approaching it enthusiastically and tracking the presentation of Romeo and Juliet's relationship across the play. Many began with the description of them in the prologue as "star-crossed lovers," introducing the idea of dramatic irony and often seeing fate as the defining factor in the relationship. Many candidates looked briefly at the lovers prior to their meeting, noting Romeo's depressed state over Rosaline and Juliet's lack of interest in marriage before focusing on Act 1 Scene 5, thus enabling them to comment on the changes that their love at first sight brings. Many explored the use of light imagery, religious language, and the shared sonnet for AO2 credit. Popular moments included the balcony scene, their marriage by Friar Lawrence and his cautionary comments, the impact of Romeo's killing of Tybalt and their deaths in the Capulet tomb. Examiners felt that the coverage of the play was generally good, although some candidates taking a narrative approach limited themselves by not selecting enough specific textual detail to support their discussion and help them address AO2.

Candidates viewed the relationship as doomed, hasty, lustful, impulsive, and tragic. Some examiners were surprised at how many candidates viewed the couple as entirely responsible for their own demise, rather than seeing them as innocent victims of the “ancient grudge.” Stronger responses ranged widely across the text, identifying, and exploring key moments and turning points. They were able to look at the couple’s motivations and the pressures imposed on them by the feud rather than simply re-telling the plot and were equipped with key quotations to support discussion and garner AO2 marks. Those that looked beyond the couple’s deaths to see the impact of the relationship on the families did well.

Weaker responses tended to be brief or only looked at part of the play. Some clearly struggled with the timeline of the play and were confused about the sequence of events, or in some cases with the nature of the events. A significant number re-told the story, sometimes without a clear focus on the relationship itself. The ability to select some key moments and probe a few quotations to gain AO2 credit was essential to get into Band 3; therefore, sound knowledge of the play’s events and retention of key quotations were integral to success.

Macbeth

Examiners felt that this was an extremely open and accessible question, which allowed for a variety of different approaches. Most candidates opted to look at a single character, tracking them across the play and looking at where they might gain or lose sympathy. Others looked at several characters before deciding which of them most deserves sympathy. While the majority answered on Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, examiners saw some excellent responses on Macduff, with Banquo and Duncan also featuring, although candidates that wrote exclusively on one of the latter two were often self-limiting, due to these characters’ deaths in Act 2 and Act 3, respectively. Examiners reported that the question encouraged candidates to use their evaluative skills, and some noted that responses sometimes included considered, personal justifications.

Weaker students tended to not cover the whole play, sometimes confining their responses to the first half of the play. A lack of textual references inhibited marks, and there were a few narrative responses on the main characters that neglected a clear focus on sympathy or offered little textual support, or both. Higher level responses were able to cover the whole text, sometimes comparing specific details across scenes to show changes in the selected character(s), as well as providing opportunities for language analysis. Such responses also tended to be evaluative, appreciating the complex nature of their character(s) and making nuanced judgements on sympathy.

In last year’s report, examiners raised the issue of Lady Macbeth receiving a disproportionate amount of criticism, whether due to inaccurate readings or misogyny. This year there were many responses that argued for sympathy for Macbeth that blamed almost everything on his wife, conveniently ignoring details such as his thoughts of murdering Duncan as soon as he is made Thane of Cawdor and his “black and deep desires” when Malcolm is named Prince of Cumberland – not to mention her lack of involvement in any of Macbeth’s murders after the killing of Duncan. Interestingly, some candidates took the opportunity to argue for sympathy for Lady Macbeth, some very successfully. However, candidates sometimes based their argument on Lady Macbeth losing a baby before the start of the play or got involved in extended contextual discussion of the restrictions on women in Jacobean times. Both tended to lead to underachievement. To re-iterate: more balance and nuance in discussion of Lady Macbeth would be beneficial, but it must be rooted in the play’s events and language.

Othello

Examiners felt that candidates wrote well on Iago and were able to recall a range of quotations and key events. Some tracked through the play, identifying moments of deception, whereas others discussed different characters in turn. Roderigo was a popular starting point, with candidates exploring his gullibility and Iago's clever manipulation of him for money and use in his wider machinations. Othello was widely discussed, as expected and, for many, it was at this point that their essays really warmed up. Emilia and Cassio were also discussed, with last year's extract clearly helping with the latter. Popular moments included the opening scenes, the fight scene, the handkerchief scenes, the manipulation of Cassio and Desdemona's "affair", Iago's soliloquies and the ending. AO2 was often confidently handled, for example how Iago manipulates Othello's downfall and the contrast in his language towards Desdemona at different points of the play. The use of soliloquy and importance of dramatic irony were widely discussed. Some candidates felt that Iago was deceiving himself, which was an interesting line of analysis. Many candidates discussed Iago's final line and the lack of knowledge the audience has of his true motivations, with some exploring possible reasons for his actions.

Better responses tended to be sustained, secure discussions of Iago's deception of others ranging across the play, and examiners noted that many candidates seemed fully invested in exploring his behaviour and motives. They made good use of key quotations, with clear awareness of the importance of probing language choices within them to address AO2. Weaker responses were often brief or simple and lacking in textual support, sometimes confusing characters (for example mixing up Cassio and Roderigo) or being unclear on the sequence of the play's events.

Much Ado About Nothing

Ever popular characters, Beatrice and Benedick were written about with confidence by most candidates and at all levels. There was attention to the changes in their relationship and the complexity of their bond, often in comparison with Hero and Claudio. The most popular moments selected for discussion were the opening scenes where their dynamic is established, the masked ball, the gulling scenes, the aftermath of the first wedding and the ending. In particular, examiners felt that candidates wrote well about the gulling and the mirrored reactions of the characters. AO2 was explored through structure by many through tracking character development and identifying the different turning points for the couple. Frequently selected quotations included "merry war", Signior Mountanto", "I would rather hear my dog bark at a crow...", "She speaks poniards and every word stabs", "I do love nothing in the world so much as you" and "Kill Claudio".

Better responses were selective and were able to explore language, structure and form at key moments. Some were able to show evaluative skills by contrasting Beatrice and Benedick's relationship with that of Claudio and Hero. The ability to track the couple right across the play, selecting judiciously, led to high marks, particularly with some comments on the ending and whether Benedick's "Peace! I will stop your mouth" might signal a change in Beatrice's behaviour once married. Weaker responses tended to be brief or struggled to cover the whole play. Those who couldn't bring specific textual references into their responses didn't get beyond Band 2, while those who wandered into generalised contextual discussion tended to miss greater opportunities for reward in AO1 and AO2.

Henry V

Examiners felt that this was an extremely open, accessible question, offering candidates the chance to discuss Henry's internal conflicts as well as the presentation of the more obvious physical conflict of the battles with the French. Popular selections included Henry's conflict with the Dauphin, particularly his reaction to the "gift" of the tennis balls, his decision to go to war with France, his reactions to the behaviour of the traitors and his former associate Bardolph and his speeches before and in the midst of battle.

Weaker responses were usually brief or lacking in specific reference to the text, and there was sometimes confusion over minor characters, the various battles, and the sequence of the play's events. In many lower band responses, a lack of attention to AO2 was often a factor. More successful responses looked at a range of relevant moments from across the text with apt support, identifying turning points and exploring key images and language choices to address AO2.

The Merchant of Venice

Examiners felt that this question on a controversial figure in the play afforded plenty of scope for candidates to engage and respond. Most showed secure knowledge of Antonio, tracking him across the play, starting with the opening scene. Some, however, took a more selective approach and looked at key moments in non-chronological order to support their view of him. More positive readings of Antonio focused on his love for and loyalty towards Bassanio, sometimes including discussion of the possible homosexual relationship between them, the views of his many friends, his wealth and success, his sadness and his loneliness at the end of the play. Focus on his negative traits included his antisemitism, the hypocrisy of how he treats Shylock, his inability to change or develop, and his lack of remorse over his treatment of Shylock, underlined by his behaviour towards him at the end of the trial. Some candidates looked in detail at the relationship between Antonio and Shylock, with sympathy for Shylock usually predominating.

Better answers drew out the two sides to Antonio and the contradictions in his character, often leading to thoughtful evaluation of his varied behaviour in the play. AO2 was covered through language, with effective use of key quotations, and structure (for example, his importance in driving the plot and his opening of the play, the symbolism and significance of the bond, and the cyclical structure of his sadness at both the beginning and the end of the play). Weaker responses tended to be brief or narrative driven, often lacking in specific textual detail and paying only cursory attention to AO2. Contextual reference is often necessary in this play, but those who allow it to dominate discussion tend to lose out by wasting time that would be better spent accumulating AO1 and AO2 marks.

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

Last year there were concerns that a significant minority of candidates seemed to treat 71 as if it were an unseen text, and some candidates were not attempting 72. This year, examiners were pleased to report that there was a marked improvement in engagement with the Anthology poetry questions, with exam technique seemingly stronger. Context was addressed with greater confidence, particularly in 71; however, there does still appear to be an issue with knowledge being demonstrated on the chosen poem – in this case Armitage’s “The Manhunt” – not being replicated across both questions.

Both the chosen poem “The Manhunt” and the theme of relationships were accessible for the whole ability range, and examiners got the sense that it was a popular choice that candidates enjoyed writing about. Some, however, chose to ignore the focus on relationships, instead discussing the presentation of war, and missed out on AO1 marks as a result. Many of the poems in the Anthology have several themes, and it is essential for candidates to focus on the one specified in the question to achieve success in these questions. Most candidates, though, were able to track through the poem, selecting and probing key metaphors and phrases, commenting on how the relationship is presented and grasping some key ideas. For 72, a wide range of poems were selected, with popular choices including “A Wife in London”, “Sonnet 43”, “Valentine” and “Cozy Apologia”. “Afternoons” was a choice that tended to work well, and there were some perhaps less obvious selections that proved effective, with Heaney’s relationship with nature explored in “Death of a Naturalist” and the soldiers’ relationship with the earth discussed in “Mametz Wood.” Context was addressed more frequently than last year, though often less securely on the comparison poem than “The Manhunt.”

71

Examiners reported that “The Manhunt” seemed like an extremely popular choice of poem and candidates across the ability range were able to write about the presentation of the relationship, showing understanding and, at the highest levels, sensitivity. Candidates seemed generally well-prepared, and many tackled the question with genuine enthusiasm, tracking through the poem and selecting from the array of metaphors and key phrases on offer: Armitage’s language enabled higher ability candidates to show their analytical skill by unpicking images and probing connotations, while those working in the lower bands were able to show clear awareness of the main ideas in the poem and could discuss Laura Beddoes’ slow exploration of her husband Eddie’s physical and mental health following his return from war – with many naming the characters as a matter of course and therefore gaining AO3 credit.

There were, of course, a few misunderstandings, with the opening couplet often assumed to have taken place pre-war, rather than recognising the “passionate nights and intimate days” as a physical connection immediately after Eddie’s return which pre-empted the emotional reconnection. Some candidates confused Armitage with Eddie, thereby missing out on some contextual knowledge, and a small minority were under the misapprehension that Eddie died, which tended to limit AO1 marks. However, overall, examiners were impressed with candidates’ understanding of the poem.

Popular quotations included “passionate nights and intimate days”, “only then”, “the frozen river that ran through his face”, “handle and hold”, “grazed heart”, “foetus of metal” and “a sweating, unexploded mine / Buried deep in his mind”, which provided an array of opportunities to address AO2. Examiners were pleased to report that structure tended to be discussed more successfully than in previous years, whether this was on the rhyme scheme, the “ladder”- like stanzas, the use of enjambement or the journey of the bullet and movement from physical to mental injuries.

Context was generally handled better than in previous years, perhaps due to the Channel 4 documentary for which the poem was originally written, although there was still some confusion with the war in which Eddie served, mainly due to the mixing up of contexts of another war-related poems in the anthology. Examiners noted that contextual information tended to be “front-loaded” in introductions, and candidates tended to do better when it was interleaved throughout the response and linked to particular parts of the poem (for example linking the “unexploded mine” to Eddie’s PTSD). Perhaps more could have been made of the fact that Eddie was a UN Peacekeeper, and therefore often unable to intervene in a war that was characterised by its appalling brutality towards civilians, particularly women and children.

Weaker responses tended to not get all the way through the poem, or not engage with the language, despite the many opportunities the poem offered. Some candidates tracked the surface of the images used to describe Eddie’s damaged body without probing connotations or looking for metaphorical meaning, while others neglected or confused contextual details. Stronger answers were usually characterised by careful tracking through the poem and exploring the sub-text of Armitage’s imagery with a clear focus on Laura’s gentle but determined search for the source of Eddie’s problems, while integrating their contextual knowledge. Often, a nuanced understanding of the final line and its implications for the relationship was a key marker of a higher-level response.

72

Examiners felt that responses to 72 were generally stronger than in last year’s paper, with fewer candidates missing or offering very brief responses, which is encouraging. As always, choosing a poem that enables a clear focus on the theme was important, and examiners were pleased to report that the theme of relationships worked with a wide range of poems, with no single choice dominating. Most responses considered romantic relationships in poems such as “Valentine”, “Cozy Apologia” and “Sonnet 43”. “A Wife in London” and “Afternoons” were also popular choices, while relationships with nature were considered in “Death of a Naturalist”, “Hawk Roosting” and “The Prelude”. Some looked at the relationship between country and self in “the Soldier”, while the relationship between the dead soldiers and the land was considered by others in “Mametz Wood”. Examiners also felt that context was handled better this year, although less well with the poem chosen for comparison than for “The Manhunt”.

Dove’s “Cozy Apologia” proved a good choice, also sharing a wife’s perspective and featuring a strong – though not perfect – relationship that has also had to deal with some (admittedly less traumatic) adversity. Candidates generally engaged with textual detail and context confidently here, with “I could pick anything and think of you”, “chain mail glinting” and “thin as licorice” were popular quotations, and contextual links were generally made effectively.

Most candidates who chose Duffy’s “Valentine” were able to engage with the unusual gift and the idea of an unconventional relationship.

Better candidates were able to compare the violent imagery in both poems and saw that both poems show the difficulties in their relationships with honesty, while lower-band answers struggled with quoting detail beyond “I give you an onion” and rather generalised discussion of “layers” which owed more to Shrek than the poem. Examiners also noticed the lack of contextual detail offered on “Valentine” beyond Duffy’s sexuality, sometimes cited as a reason for the poem’s “negative” depiction of love and relationships.

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s depiction of a joyful love against the odds was a great choice to compare with Laura Beddoes’ devoted mission to heal her husband, and candidates did well with lines such as “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways” and “depth and breadth and height” to compare the devotion of the speakers towards their husbands. This choice also benefitted from good use of contextual details, which could be linked to phrases such as “lost saints” and “old griefs”.

Hardy’s “A Wife in London” was another good choice, with both poems’ speakers the soldiers’ wives, and candidates were able to engage with the clear narratives in the two poems. Many contrasted the poems’ moods, the universality of the message in Hardy’s poem (with the reference to “a” wife) compared with the more personal, specific presentation of Laura and Eddie in “The Manhunt” and the writers’ use of linguistic and structural methods, for example Hardy’s use of pathetic fallacy versus Armitage’s list of metaphors.

Stronger responses made a good choice of poem: one they knew well, and had learned key quotations and contextual details for, and that featured a relationship to focus on. They rooted comparison in both ideas and language choices, and managed to identify similarities and differences throughout, linking to contexts at various points. Less successful answers sometimes lacked a clear focus on relationships, and instead wanted to talk about another theme, for example war. They were often not secure in their knowledge of their chosen poem, perhaps not recalling many specific quotations or textual details to support discussion and give them opportunities to address AO2. They tended also not to show much contextual knowledge. In a few cases, they confused textual and contextual details – and sometimes even titles – between poems. As ever, given the number of marks 72 carries, candidates need to revise the Anthology poems effectively and manage their timings across the paper as a whole to achieve success here.

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.

EDUQAS ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2024

Component 2

Overview of the Component

Assessment Objectives

This component assesses AO1 and AO2 in all sections.

AO3 is assessed in Section B only.

AO4 is assessed in Section A only.

Content/Topics/Skills

In Section A, candidates were assessed on one of the following post-1914 prose/ drama texts: *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding; *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal; *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro (assessed here for the last time as it will be replaced with *Boys Don't Cry* by Malorie Blackman in 2025); *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill; *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson; *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (drama) by Simon Stephens; *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney (also assessed here for the last time, as it will be replaced with *Leave Taking* by Winsome Pinnock in 2025); *An Inspector Calls* by J.B. Priestley; *The History Boys* by Alan Bennett; or *Blood Brothers* by Willy Russell.

In Section B, candidates were assessed on one of the following 19th century prose texts: *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens; *Silas Marner* by George Eliot; *War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells; *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen; *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë; or *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson.

In both these sections, candidates were assessed on their knowledge and understanding of aspects of plot, characterisation, events and key themes as well as their evaluation and analysis of how language, structure and form are used by the writer to create meanings and effects. In Section A, candidates were assessed on the accuracy and range of their vocabulary, sentence structures, spelling and punctuation. In Section B, candidates were assessed on their understanding of the various contexts of the text.

In Section C, candidates were assessed on AO1 and AO2 and their consolidation of skills developed across the specification, in a comparison of two unseen poems: *The Newcomer* by Brian Patten and *The Fish Are All Sick* by Anne Stephenson.

Overview of General Performance

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, with the exception of *Anita and Me* (where nearly all the responses to this text were rubric infringements).

The most popular text on Section B continues to be *A Christmas Carol*, with *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* also popular. All the other texts in this section were answered by a significant number of candidates.

The paper contained a range of character, relationship and theme questions within Sections A and B. 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 and the full range of responses were seen.

The two linked poems on this untiered paper, *The Newcomer* by Brian Patten and *The Fish Are All Sick* by Anne Stephenson, were well received and the pairing was extremely successful. The subject matter of humans' impact on the environment was familiar to the candidates and allowed the vast majority to engage on some level, with plenty of opportunities to stretch all abilities when discussing AO1 and AO2.

Comparison to Previous Series

Generally, there seemed to be nothing in the performance of candidates to suggest that this component was more or less accessible than previous years.

There was a slight increase in illegible or hard to read scripts.

There seemed to be an increase in candidates fully completing 3:1 and 3:2 compared with previous performance or issues with timing where candidates only completed 3:1.

General Trends and Patterns

Generally, in both Section A and Section B, most candidates were clearly very familiar with, and were able to show their knowledge of, key characters and their development throughout their texts. Events and details of chosen texts were referenced in varying detail and accuracy.

In all sections, 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.

Although context was not explicitly assessed in Section A of the paper, many candidates used it relevantly as part of discussion of the focus of the question (e.g. Priestley's perceived Socialist motives in writing *An Inspector Calls* or the woman in black's link to Victorian Gothic pastiche in *The Woman in Black*).

In Section B, where context is explicitly assessed, it was generally well integrated and the majority of candidates avoided the 'bolted on' approach, though there were, of course, exceptions.

In Section C, understanding of the first poem was perhaps more assured than the second, given its slightly more straightforward tone and narrative, but there were still many confident and assured responses to both poems. Much was made of the childlike layout and the slight mystery of who or what the "Newcomer" might reference.

In Question 3.2, most candidates took time to explore the second poem before comparing with the first, which has been a steadily improving trend since the early days of the specification. Most candidates were able to engage with the “littered beaches” and the opening and closing lines of the second poem. There seemed to be fewer responses that did not contain comparison comments, perhaps because of the very accessible linking of fish and the repetition at the end of both poems emphasising similarly ominous messages. Discriminators tended to be discussion of the simile comparing the stranded villages “like pearls on the fringe of a coat” and the “big glass views and begonia beds”.

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

Different Approaches to Questions

The vast majority of candidates used the extract within their essays. Because the extracts for *An Inspector Calls* and *A Christmas Carol* (the most popular texts) both came from the end of their respective texts, many candidates took a linear approach and discussed the extracts at the end of their essays, following an exploration of the events of the text. Many, though, still dealt with the extract and then moved on to discuss the text as a whole, particularly in the other minor texts. A minority 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.

Pleasingly, following previous reports and CPD advice, most candidates now avoid spending too much of their time focusing on the given extract and allow themselves more time to demonstrate their knowledge of the wider text.

In Section C, most candidates used an integrated approach to question 3.2, with some discussing the second poem first then making comparative or linking points. Although 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 meant that they missed the unseen “Newcomer” as a human presence.

What worked well

In Sections A and B:

- Using the extract purposefully, at a relevant point in the essay, to support wider discussion of the text and to provide useful AO2 comments.
- Keeping a sustained focus on the question through reference to a range of relevant points across the wider text, with a focus on well-chosen key events or scenes, significant characters/relationships to link to the question and wider themes.
- Supporting discussion with direct textual references showing good coverage of the text (referencing events spanning the beginning, middle and ending of the story).
- Clear planning and progression of the response, with 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.
- Relevant and clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and themes, particularly in Section B.
- Suitable analytical style of writing.

In Section C:

- Providing a thorough analysis of the first poem in 3.1.
- Providing a thorough analysis of the second poem in 3.2, either as a discrete element or as part of the comparison.
- Recognising the stated overview of the poems (underneath the question).
- Clearly comparing ideas, mood and imagery and in some cases writers' intent.
- Discussing and referencing how the poets use language.
- Making detailed selections from each poem with supporting comments exploring the meaning and effects of these selections.

Areas for improvement

In Sections A and B, candidates should:

- Pay attention to the bullet points built into the start of every question and use them to shape responses.
- Be selective in their use of the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills.
- Provide more detailed coverage of the extract and wider text, including the beginning, middle and end.
- Avoid 'over analysis' of vocabulary, e.g. by repeatedly labelling or naming every word class.
- Make sure contextual details are relevant to the question and closely tied to discussion of the characters, events and details.
- Learn key spellings such as character names and authors, as well as key words associated with each text.
- Plan where coverage of the extract will be best placed in the essay.
- Avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story.
- Adhere 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.
- Make sure responses are legible.

In Section C, candidates should:

- Use the format of the paper to aid their understanding and responses to both questions.
- Ensure that the first poem is adequately analysed in 3.1.
- Ensure that the second poem is adequately analysed in depth in 3.2.
- 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.
- 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.
- Make sure responses are legible.

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 Jack's importance to the novel. Many candidates made good use of the extract to comment on Golding's increasingly animalistic and predatory description of Jack as "dog-like...on all fours", "naked", "down like a sprinter", "crouched". Many candidates used this as a springboard into thoughtful discussions of how the extract demonstrates Jack's later near-animal behaviour commenting on his closeness to the ground, his connection to nature, the damage the island has done to his body and his 'nearly mad' eyes. Many candidates also commented on how Golding develops the presentation of Jack's increasingly feral behaviours as the novel progresses.

In the wider text, candidates made good points about Jack's arrival (and the symbolism of his clothes), his connection to Castle Rock, his initial friendship with Ralph and hatred of Piggy, his increasing volatility and then eventual violence and destructive mastery of the island. Not many handled the final scene on the beach, but those who did usually managed to write perceptively about the subtext and Golding's moral messages too. The most successful responses also discussed Jack's character in relation to the pursuit of power and fall of civilisation in the novel.

Anita and Me

Nearly all responses were rubric infringements that tackled the extract and question as 'unseen' with very little knowledge or understanding of the way Syal presents Anita's character in the novel. However, the extract provided a rich opportunity to explore the presentation of character even when responses appeared to be attempting the question as unseen. Candidates focused on Anita's "complete lack of emotion or indeed, social graces", the way she "grunted" and "stifled a yawn". Indeed, even candidates who seemed to tackle this without prior knowledge of the text were able to gain a little credit by discussing the extract and the character. Most responses, however, did not discuss other evidence or events from the wider text.

Never Let Me Go

This is the last time *Never Let Me Go* will be examined on this particular specification, as it has been replaced by *Boys Don't Cry* by Malorie Blackman.

The question elicited some thoughtful and sensitive discussions of Ruth's character 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 Ruth's reaction to her "possible". Many candidates sensibly dealt with the extract by placing it after a discussion of Ruth's earlier experience of Hailsham (including her bossy nature and lies about the pencil case) and her relationships with other characters. Many candidates also explored the more complex aspects of Ruth's character in more detail including the time in the cottages, and in the lead up to her death. Weaker responses tended to make sweeping statements about Ruth's character with little discussion of the latter stages of the novel.

The Woman in Black

The question provided candidates with the opportunity to discuss the woman in black, Jennet Humfrye, in detail. On the whole, candidates understood the character and her story well. Most candidates used the extract effectively to analyse Hill's use of imagery in describing the woman as "dressed in deepest black", "mourning", "extremely pale", and as "a victim of starvation". A surprisingly large minority forgot to mention that she is, in fact, a ghost. She was described as 'ghost-like', 'deathly', 'dead-looking', 'so ill looking she looks near dead' but not often actually as a ghost.

Using the extract to comment on the woman's appearances at Alice Drablow's funeral then led many candidates to use this as a springboard to continue discussion of further events at Eel Marsh House, her backstory and revenge, the impact she has on Arthur Kipps and his beliefs and the deaths of Stella and Joseph at the end of the novel.

Film references are a particular issue for a significant minority of candidates, especially as they often deviate dramatically from the events of the novel. More selective use of the film version as a teaching aid is probably advisable.

Oranges are not the Only Fruit

Jeanette's character is central to the novel and the vast majority of candidates engaged well with the question. Most candidates commented on Jeanette's increasing independence and changing relationship with Mrs Winterson, with the best responses providing very detailed and nuanced examinations of this. Many candidates also included discussion of Jeanette's relationships with other characters such as Elsie, Melanie and Katy and her changing views on religion and the Elim Pentecostal Church. The extract provided a rich opportunity to discuss Jeanette's increasingly independent character. Those that used the extract well noted Winterson's presentation of Jeanette's thinking and emotions in the scene e.g. "I breezed in with more bravado than courage", "In fact I was scared to death", "I knew I had to be hard and white", "It was not judgement day, but another morning". Many responses also commented on the use of humour in the extract and wider novel such as, "I'm not havin' demons here" and "all my relatives ...were revolting".

It was also pleasing to note the frequent purposeful references to the mythic elements of the novel, with these allegorical elements used to support the best responses. Many were also able to comment on the reconciliation between Jeanette and Mrs Winterson at the end of the novel. Weaker candidates struggled to include a range of detail from across the whole text.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

The question, on the discovery of truths in the play, was very successful in providing the opportunity for some very detailed and perceptive responses from stronger candidates. It enabled them to evaluate how the discovery of truths and the subsequent fallout from them enabled Christopher to develop as a character. Understandably, the discovery of Judy's letters to Christopher often played a central role in candidates' essays.

Many candidates commented successfully on the extract, in particular the list-like repetition of, "Then I detected in...", the listing of items discovered and the importance of "finding the shirt box" and subsequently Judy's letters. There was some interesting discussion about how the first person / monologue structure of much of the play was used to present Christopher's thoughts and feelings and the discovery of truths with extra impact for the audience.

Candidates who study this play really seem to engage and connect with it, and answers don't tend to contain the 'bolted on' context (not assessed) that some of the other text choices in Section A seem to attract. However, there were a significant number of weaker responses where candidates either copied the extract completely, or copied large chunks of the extract without making any comment.

A Taste of Honey

This is the last time *A Taste of Honey* will be examined on this particular specification, as it has been replaced by *Leave Taking* by Winsome Pinnock.

The extract provided a good basis for some very confident and sensitive responses about Helen's character. Many candidates commented on key moments such as Helen's reaction to Jo's pregnancy and the way she reacts to and treats Geof. Some candidates also discussed the presentation of Helen as a mother and her relationship with Jo and her relationships with men such as Peter and the tension between her and Geof.

AO2 was tackled well by many candidates by focusing on Helen's reaction to Peter, "Oh! My God! Look what the wind's blown in" and her behaviour towards Jo, "go see to that coffee!", "Turn yourself into a bloody termite and crawl into the wall... make yourself scarce". The most assured responses also commented on Helen's sarcasm and the witty dialogue of different exchanges in the play.

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 as 'bolted on' context or extended discussion about the characteristics of a kitchen sink drama, for example, are often unhelpful.

An Inspector Calls

Candidates of all abilities were able to discuss Mr. Birling and his importance to the play as a whole. The vast majority were able to engage with the extract and demonstrate secure knowledge of the wider text.

A range of valid approaches was used. Some candidates chose to write about the extract first, tracking through to show Mr. Birling's contributions to the extract. Given the extract's position at the end of the play, many candidates understandably chose to explore it at the end of their essays, having dealt with the events of the wider text as they unfold chronologically in the play.

Successful responses focussed on specific examples of what Mr. Birling says and does in the course of the play and what this tells the audience about his character. Some key features of his personality were thoughtfully discussed and considered. These included his arrogance and self-belief as a "hard-headed man of business"; his over-confidence; his lack of respect for others (particularly the lower classes) and his desire to prove his status to others, such as Gerald or the Inspector. There was much discussion of the character's early speeches and the Inspector's refusal to be intimidated by Birling was very often evidenced by the quote, "I don't play golf."

Candidates often made relevant AO2 points by analysing the language used by the author in relation to Mr. Birling in the extract. Many candidates used this evidence to analyse how Birling was purely focused on his social status and reputation, rather than the death of Eva and accepting responsibility. In the wider text, candidates commonly referenced Mr. Birling's role in aiding Priestley's perceived intentions in writing the play. There were many references to Birling's Titanic and World War comments and more able candidates were able to reference the stage directions in relation to Mr. Birling.

More able candidates sometimes discussed other characters and linked them successfully to Mr. Birling's reactions and attitudes. Sensibly, many candidates discussed Eric and his relationship with his father. This often was used to springboard into a discussion on a contrast between the older and younger generations. Less able candidates sometimes took a narrative approach, and these responses did not always focus on Mr. Birling specifically, so were self-penalising.

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. The majority of candidates made at least a passing reference to Capitalism and Socialism. However, occasionally, this led to lengthy paragraphs on these concepts that added little to the candidate's overall mark. There was sometimes confusion over the time period of the play's setting.

AO4 is assessed in this question. As always, there were many variations of the spelling of Priestley and Sheila and many instances of not using capital letters for proper nouns, e.g. Titanic.

Overall, this text continues to remain the most popular of the Section A texts and has proven once again to be 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 sensitively to its humour, themes and messages. There was some excellent analysis of the extract which provided a useful way into discussion of Hector in the wider text.

Candidates were well prepared to discuss Hector's character in the extract and wider play. Most responses used the extract to evaluate AO2 and the presentation of Hector's teaching of, "compound adjectives", the "best moments in reading..." and references to Hardy, Larkin and Shakespeare. Most responses moved beyond the extract to evaluate key moments such as Hector's role-play in lessons, teaching literature by heart, the significance of his motorcycle, his crash and memorial. Candidates also commented successfully on his relationship with the boys and other characters and made contrasts between his approach to education and that of Irwin and the Headteacher. On the whole candidates commented sensitively on Hector's inappropriate behaviour and other character's response to this.

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 tended to over-simplify and be a little formulaic in their assessment of Hector's character. These responses tended to include quotes that contained the swear words contained in the play.

Blood Brothers

The question worked extremely well across the full range of abilities. All candidates, regardless of ability, had a very good knowledge of Mrs Johnstone's character and the play as a whole. Many candidates discussed a selection of key moments such as Mrs Johnstone's decision to "give" a child to Mrs Lyons, her superstitious nature, her relocation/new start, the confrontation with Mrs Lyons, her conversations with Edward, her support of Mickey and Linda and her attempts to intervene at the end of the play. Many candidates also successfully commented on events by framing their discussion around the presentation of Mrs Johnstone as a single mother, giving up and raising her children, and her moving on in the later stages of the play.

Many candidates commented on Russell's use of language to present Mrs Johnstone in the extract and wider play such as her involvement with "the Welfare"; her reaction to Mrs Lyons's suggestion, "What?", and her hesitation in disclosing details, "Erm, well"; and seeming dismissal of the plan, "Oh, it's mad...". Many candidates commented on the use of stage directions and the narrator for dramatic effect such as, "How quickly an idea, planted can take root" ... the thought "grew as surely as a seed in a mother's womb".

Context is obviously not explicitly rewarded here and while some stronger candidates dealt with this efficiently, mentioning class, poverty, nature and nurture 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.

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'.

- Avoid focus on analysis of sentence length, punctuation features or more nonfiction 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* still need 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.
- 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 – 19th Century Prose

Comments on individual questions

A Christmas Carol

Candidates responded well to the question that focussed on Scrooge and how his thoughts and feelings about Christmas change during the course of the novel. Most explored Scrooge's transformation effectively and how his views changed regarding Christmas.

Inevitably, some candidates tried to crowbar the whole novel 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 stave in turn and tracking how Scrooge's views on Christmas change with each supernatural visit. This allowed candidates to demonstrate secure knowledge of characters and the whole text. Less able candidates sometimes tended to consider Scrooge's character at the start and at the end, with little reference to the middle of the novel and the events that actually changed Scrooge. However, the vast majority of candidates knew the text well, with numerous references to Scrooge as a 'solitary child', and the influence of Fezziwig, Belle, the Cratchits' Christmas, Tiny Tim's death and Scrooge's own future death.

In terms of using the extract, a range of approaches was seen. Some candidates chose to write about the extract first, however, given the extract's position at the end of the novel, many candidates understandably chose to explore it at the end of their essays, having dealt with the events of the wider text as they unfold chronologically in the story. All approaches were valid. Better responses often explored AO2 by commenting on the pathetic fallacy of 'golden sunlight' in the extract and comparing the weather with the freezing "fog" at the start of the novel. The similes of, "light as a feather" and comparison to a baby were well discussed and often contrasted with other language points elsewhere in the wider text.

The question gave plenty of scope for the inclusion of context, which was assessed as AO3. The quality of discussion naturally varied significantly. There was much discussion of Malthusian theory and how it related to Scrooge's views, and some discussion of Christmas traditionally being a time of family and giving. There was also consideration of Dickens' purpose in writing the novella, and the ways in which Scrooge and Cratchit represented contemporary society. There were also many varied comments about Dickens' own family experiences of poverty, debtors' prisons and working in a blacking factory. Sometimes context was either 'bolted on' (i.e. provided as stand-alone paragraphs) or 'implicit' (i.e. not consciously included). Both these approaches are self-penalising.

A Christmas Carol is easily the most popular of the Section B texts and continues to remain accessible to the complete ability range of candidates. The numerous film versions are no doubt a big reason for this, and while useful teaching tools, candidates should be cautioned against clear references to film versions that don't appear in the text.

Silas Marner

Silas Marner continues to work well for a range of abilities. The question required candidates to focus on Eppie and her importance to the novel as a whole. All candidates seemed to be able to relate Eppie to Silas and the change and significance she played in his life.

The extract worked well in allowing candidates to discuss stylistic features in terms of Eppie's presentation as a replacement for Silas's love for his gold as well as exploring Eliot's rich evocative descriptions of nature in relation to Eppie. There was plenty here for candidates to explore such as, "new joy" and "seeking and loving sunshine" and most took full advantage.

The majority of candidates focussed on Eppie's effect on Silas, but more able candidates brought in discussion of Godfrey Cass and Aaron Winthrop to discuss Eppie's importance in the novel as a whole.

In terms of AO3, centres had obviously prepared candidates well with regard to context with some good and varied discussion of the romantics, attitudes to women and children born out of wedlock, industrialisation and religion in relation to the novel.

War of the Worlds

The question asked candidates to consider some of the violent events in *War of the Worlds* and their importance to the novel as a whole.

Candidates largely used the extract well and often wrote about the atmosphere created by the first paragraph, the words and actions of the women and the terrible destructive power of the tripods, as well as their steadily increasing numbers and the narrator's description of them.

Many candidates successfully commented on specific examples of violence in the novel and linked this to the ways the Martian invasion caused law and order to break down in the novel. Many candidates focused on the physical and environmental destruction caused by violent events in the novel, but many also successfully explored the effect that violent events had on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of some of the characters such as the narrator, the Curate and the Artilleryman.

Discussions of the theme were often linked well to AO3 points of context and 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 all of which were often skilfully used.

Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice again proved to be relatively popular as a text studied across a large part of the ability range. Candidates responded well to the opportunities offered by the question, which called on candidates to consider the presentation of marriage in the novel.

Most responses were extremely well focussed and provided a wide range of specific support from the wider text (either paraphrased reference to events or direct supporting reference). Most candidates were able to place the extract precisely in the timeline of events and were able to discuss the conflict that Elizabeth's engagement to Darcy created with Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

Many candidates relished the opportunity to discuss Elizabeth and Darcy's changing views on marriage through their unconventional courtship. The most successful responses also referenced a range of other characters and the attitudes to marriage they reflected including Mr and Mrs Bennet, Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins, Jane and Bingley, and Wickham and Lydia.

The best answers were able to link discussion of the text to AO3 by discussing characters' views of marriage within the wider frame of societal views and attitudes to women, marriage, status and class.

A minority of responses remained overly reliant on film adaptations of the novel and took a narrative approach which lacked depth and detail of direct evidence and quotations from the text.

Jane Eyre

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

The extract was taken from near the start of the novel, 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 imperative language, dialogue, superlatives and questions and how these were used by Brontë to elicit sympathy for Jane.

A common approach for many candidates was to track through the text in terms of places Jane spent her life and reference the sympathy for the suffering she endured 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 discussions were detailed, thoughtful and perceptive. A significant number of responses sensibly featured detailed reference to the revelation of Bertha Mason's existence, and this was often used as an opportunity to skilfully 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. However, an overemphasis on different critical interpretations of the text remains largely unhelpful. A number of candidates commented at length on rehearsed readings of the text in “bolted on” pseudo psychological interpretations of the “Red Room”, comparisons of the Reeds to Moses, or Gateshead to the “gates of heaven” at the expense of demonstrating detailed knowledge of the text.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

The question focused on the ways Stevenson creates mystery at different points in the novel and worked well. All candidates were able to incorporate their knowledge of plot and characters and respond to the question in a variety of valid ways.

Most candidates were aided by the extract. 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. The majority of responses referenced key aspects of the wider text e.g., Jekyll’s scientific experimentation or “heresies” and Hyde’s character. Candidates often widened the scope of their discussions to include the mystery of Hyde’s “troglodytic” appearance, “ape like fury” and “Satan’s signature”; the murder of Sir Danvers Carew and Lanyon’s death and the way these were revealed.

The top band responses widened their scope further with some nuanced and sensitive discussion of Utterson’s gradual discoveries. 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, contributed to the theme of mystery in the text. Context was purposefully addressed by many candidates, especially those who commented on the central mystery of the “duality” of man and linked this to concepts of respectability, repression and reputation. Some candidates surprisingly did not mention Hyde which limited their responses significantly.

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.
- Appropriate selection of short references to support the points made.
- Coverage of, 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 and 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, *The Newcomer* by Brian Patten and *The Fish Are All Sick* by Anne Stevenson were well received and the pairing was extremely successful. The subject matter of environmental issues 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. Candidates often were knowledgeable and passionate about the themes and ideas of the poems.

Pleasingly, CPD messages seem to have got through to centres and many more candidates are taking time to explore the second poem before comparing it with the first, which wasn't the case in the early days of the specification. It is also pleasing to see that fewer candidates seem to be omitting comparison comments in 3.2 or leaving the second poem out completely. Centres have diligently reinforced the requirements of the exam with candidates and should continue to do so.

There also seemed to be fewer instances of feature spotting and line-counting by candidates. Inevitably, a small number of candidates make unhelpful references to enjambment and counting lines rather than engaging with the ideas and meaning of the poems in terms of content and imagery. Most made meaningful comments on imagery, similes, metaphors and tone with clear reference to their effects.

More candidates are using the statement at the start of 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 effects of humans on the environment. Those candidates that did not recognise the "Newcomer" as human would have benefitted from using the format of the paper to aid their understanding.

Comments on individual questions

Question 3.1

The Newcomer was accessible to the vast majority of candidates. The relatively straightforward ideas and accessible style allowed nearly all candidates to identify and demonstrate understanding of at least some of the key ideas. Many were able to empathise with the animals and could passionately relate to the issue of the environmental impact of humans, often with a sense of guilt.

More able candidates looked at the content in more detail, discussing the newcomer's ability to bypass the "impassible dam" or to dig deeper than the animals dared, and the animals' varying reactions to it. The "Newcomer" was considered to be variously amazing, foolish, powerful or dangerous, with some candidates suggesting that the animals observed and respected the laws and boundaries of nature whereas the newcomer was disrespectful and dismissive of them. Candidates talked about the unity between the animals, how they were passing on information to each other about the newcomer, and interacting with species they would not normally interact with. The fact that the news was "spreading fast" and had spread throughout the animal kingdom reinforced the idea that the newcomer was everywhere and that it was prolific.

A small minority of the candidates failed to grasp the deliberate ambiguity in the poem and did not understand that the "Newcomer" was human, but they were often able to gain credit for exploring the idea that this was someone or something strange and unusual. However, most understood the central idea well and linked the evidence in the poem to man-made machinery, pollution, litter or climate change with great success. The animals' reactions were often well discussed, with suggestions such as they were curious, confused, in admiration, and frightened.

Many candidates were able to gain AO2 credit for discussion of the repetition at the beginning of the first four stanzas, and the regular pattern of these, contrasting with changes in the fifth and final stanza and the significance of this. Many suggested that the repetition of the first line, emphasised that the newcomer was everywhere in the animal kingdom. They also highlighted the repetition in the final stanza, and discussed the use of 'and' with varying degrees of success. The more successful responses considered how the repetition implied a continuous action, that the killing went on and on and on. There was some sensitive consideration of the change in tone between the first four stanzas and the final one. Some candidates talked about the childlike feel to the first four stanzas, and the contrasting and violent content of the final stanza. The personification of the animals was discussed, with candidates feeling that this enabled them to empathise more with the animals as it enabled the reader to see and understand the effects, we are having on the animal kingdom.

There seemed to be fewer far-fetched interpretations of the poem, though some related the poem to being a newcomer themselves and suggested the poem was about starting at a new school and feeling excluded.

Overall, this poem was very well received, and most candidates were able to produce relevant and considered responses to the text.

Question 3.2

The pairing of *The Newcomer* by Brian Patten and *The Fish Are All Sick* by Anne Stevenson 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. The second poem was felt by many to be more serious and more critical of humans.

Most candidates understood the idea of something bad happening to the environment of the beach and the sea and identified this as caused by humans. The littered beach was often discussed, and the idea of the unknown attacker was interpreted as either humans or often a kind of oil spill. Better candidates engaged with the image of the 'villages stranded', and this was sometimes interpreted as villages that had been victim to coastal erosion, and the 'pearls' an indictment of human's plundering of the natural world for the sake of aesthetics. Another discriminator tended to be discussion of the "big glass views and begonia beds" which were often interpreted as beautiful or out of place, with some candidates linking the glass views to building and construction, tourism or even humans putting wildlife into captivity.

Effective responses compared the poems in a logical way, making clear links between the two texts. The tone of each poem was mentioned quite often, and many students expressed a preference for *The Newcomer* as it seemed lighter and more child friendly in their opinion. Many could pick out the harsher, blunter approach of Stevenson and also the differing focus of the whole animal kingdom in the first poem compared to sea life in the second.

There was lots of discussion about the repetition in each poem, with more able candidates not just highlighting the use of this stylistic feature but exploring its effect and considering the writers' intentions. More thoughtful responses explored the poets' intentions and sense of ongoing doom for the environment and natural world. They highlighted this doom at the end of both poems by linking, "And it kills, and it kills, and it kills," with "And closing its grip, and closing its grip."

Some candidates thought the second poem was more explicit and was clearly blaming humans for the negative impact on the environment, whilst the first poem was considered more subtle and less accusatory. Both had a similar effect on the reader of making them feel sad or guilty about the negative impact humans have on the environment. It was clear that the poems gave candidates the opportunity to reflect on environmental damage and the natural world and many did this in a mature way, with thought and consideration.

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:

- Use the statement at the start of the question as a focus as it gives an overview of what the poems are about.
- 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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