



GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE AS

SUMMER 2017

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GCE AS ENGLISH LITERATURE

Summer 2017

COMPONENT 1: PROSE

General Comments

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

Section A: Prose Fiction Pre-1900

Extract

(i) A01

- It is important that candidates clearly engage with, and track through the given extract, avoiding irrelevant comment on context or other parts of the novel.
- Although it may be useful to put the extract in to context (ie, discuss whereabouts it takes place in the novel) candidates should be clear to link this to the question. A description of events before the extract without saying how these events have affected the presentation of setting/character/relationship in question serves only to waste time.
- Some candidates lost focus on the question and drifted away from, for example, the **relationship** between two characters to talk generally about characterisation or plot.
- Although candidates may choose to use context to inform their points, some relied too heavily on contextual ideas/critical viewpoints and this drew them away from the close analysis of the extract. It should be remembered that AO3 and AO5 are not assessed in Part i of this section.

(i) A02

- It was pleasing to see many candidates comment on writers' techniques, in addition to the use of language, when exploring how meaning is created. However, in some cases, candidates simply embedded quotations in order to produce a narrative re-telling of the extract with very limited analysis. It can be useful to think why a writer has used a specific word or technique and to discuss the connotations displayed.

Essay

(ii) A01

- Effective planning is essential in order for candidates to produce a concise and clearly structured essay. There was some evidence of planning where candidates had taken time to think about their approach to answering the question. There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel: both are valid approaches.

- In a minority of cases candidates relied too heavily on rewriting what were clearly pre rehearsed answers. Centres should encourage candidates to take an independent and individual approach to the **specific** question.
- Centres should advise candidates that the extract should be used as a ‘springboard’ into their essay response: candidates should not spend too long re-visiting the extract and should be discouraged from using textual references from the given section.
- Candidates should be conscious of embedding their contextual references (AO3), critical views (AO5) and their supporting comments from the text (AO2) with subtlety, clearly linking to the topic in question. Some candidates lacked both sophistication and relevance when attempting to integrate critical views and contextual information.

(ii) AO2

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

(ii) AO3

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

(ii) AO5

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

(01) Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

There were some confident and perceptive responses for both the extract and essay question and it was pleasing to see that most candidates used the description in the extract section as a 'springboard' from which they explored different kinds of settings for the Part (ii) question.

(02) Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Again, *Jane Eyre* was the most popular choice in Section A of this component. Although the majority of candidates engaged competently with the presentation of Rochester it was clear that some had not read the full text and therefore struggled with the extract as it came from the end of the novel. There was also a tendency by some candidates to focus more on the presentation of Jane rather than Rochester, whilst the more informed responses discussed how we saw Rochester through the eyes of Jane. A significant number of the responses tracked through the extract and this led to a more fragmented approach to the question – as the presentation of Rochester changes significantly half way through. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of reading the whole extract first and then beginning their response so that they are able to give a more informed response to the passage as a whole. There were some strong responses to the essay question, and the best answers were those who conflated the AOs rather than dealt with them compartmentally. Some candidates countered the statement in the question, and, whilst this is not a requirement of this section, it did allow candidates to score marks for AO5 as this approach allowed them to debate different readings of events/characters.

(03) Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

There were some insightful responses to the extract here, with candidates engaging with the way the passage seems to present a role reversal for Thornton and Margaret. However, there were also some answers which struggled to explore the **relationship** between Margaret and Thornton and focused entirely on them as separate characters. In terms of the essay question, as with the other set texts, the most successful responses took the time to develop a response to the specific question. Therefore, the strongest candidates explored the way in which personal desire and political/social opinion are often conflated in the novel.

(04) Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*

No responses were seen on this text.

(05) Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

This remained a popular choice of text and examiners saw some sophisticated and confident responses which picked up on the awkward nature of the relationship between Henchard and Lucetta. However, this question again reiterated the need for candidates to read the entire passage before beginning to write a response, as many of the weaker candidates tracked through the passage. The essay question produced some perceptive responses here – with Henchard and Lucetta being popular characters for discussion.

Section B: Prose Fiction Post-1900

A01

- As with Section A, planning is essential for candidates to construct a perceptive and coherent discussion of the text. As stated on the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Component 1 exam paper, it is advised that candidates spend **45 minutes** on Section B. Strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing brief and underdeveloped responses for Section B.

- The questions are designed so that they offer candidates a contextual focus and a critical comment with which to engage. Centres should advise candidates that to score highly for ideas and concepts they should engage with the critical comment rather than just explore the theme that may also be included in the question.
- It was noticeable that with some candidates who had studied texts with a narrative link, (ie Jane Eyre/Wide Sargasso Sea) there was sometimes the tendency to conflate the two narratives. Whilst it is possible to use the other text as a contextual source, candidates should remain focused on the core, set text for that section.
- The strongest answers kept focus on the question throughout the essay, using the beginning and end of each paragraph to develop a perceptive argument.

A02

- As with Section A, a significant number of candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created. These essays tended, therefore, to slip into narrative which undermined critical engagement.
- Centres should advise candidates that although this is a closed book exam, there is an expectation that they will integrate and analyse textual support. It is not the case that a candidate must use a lot of quotations, but those they do use should be relevant and should support the argument they are making.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as a springboard for AO3 and AO5 and that the most successful answers were when these three AOs were co-dependent.

A03

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

A05

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

Joseph Conrad: *The Secret Agent*

There was a balance of candidates responding to both questions and there were some sound answers where candidates offered balanced arguments and thoughtful points. One of the weaker areas in the answers to this text was the application of context which was often 'tagged on' or proved irrelevant to the point being discussed.

E M Forster: *A Room with a View*

This proved to be a popular text, with many candidates opting to answer Question 8 and explore the character of Cecil. Weaker responses offered character description, where stronger characters used Cecil and his relationships in the novel to explore wider issues and therefore bringing context in in an appropriate and confident way.

Emyr: *A Toy Epic*

No responses were seen on this text.

Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

This was the most popular choice of post-1900 prose text with many candidates opting to answer Question 12 on power. It was very pleasing to see that almost all candidates engaged with the critical quote rather than just exploring the idea of 'power' as an isolated theme. This approach allowed candidates to weave context and criticism into their answers with confidence.

Kazuo Ishiguro: *The Remains of the Day*

This text was also a popular choice and engendered some heartfelt, personal responses from candidates. It was clear to see that many students had enjoyed Ishiguro's tale and had formed their own responses to the characters and the text as a whole. Question 15 was by far the most popular choice, with many students successfully challenging the statement by debating the nature of 'love' and arguing that duty is in itself a form of 'love'. One of the weaker areas in a significant number of responses was the application of context – with candidates sometimes scoring Band 4 or above for AO1, AO2 and AO5 but struggling to integrate relevant context in a meaningful way.

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COMPONENT 2: POETRY AND DRAMA

General Comments

There were fewer candidates for AS this year but examiners were no less impressed by the quality of responses and the creative ways in which candidates engaged with poetry and drama. In the main candidates were well prepared for the demands of this paper, however, there are still some candidates who are not addressing the AOs effectively.

Section A: Poetry (open book)

A01

- Both questions on this section name a poem and require candidates to select another poem/poems themselves. The majority of responses contained reference to only two poems.
- Across the texts, it was pleasing to see that candidates were choosing the second poem/poems thoughtfully and not always going for obvious pairings.

A02

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

A04

- In this section the mark scheme is weighted towards AO4 and making connections between poems. The best responses had clearly been planned and therefore the candidates were able to build their responses around points of comparison.
- It is worth reminding candidates that the question requires that comparison should always be between the named poem and another. A small number of candidates utilised several poems and were often engaging in extended comparison that did not involve the named poem.

Thomas Hardy: *Poems Selected By Tom Paulin*

A small number of candidates responded to this question and did so very sensitively. There were some sophisticated essays, where candidates showed mature and insightful awareness of Hardy's subtle tone. The biographical nature of the poems was clearly an engaging and appealing feature for those who chose this question.

Q2

This was the less popular question but allowed for some excellent AO2 analysis.

Ted Hughes: *Poems selected by Simon Armitage*

Q3

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

Q4

This was more popular than question 3. Candidates who answered this question successfully did so by discussing the ways in which Hughes uses imagery to convey different kinds of darkness.

Seamus Heaney: *Field Work*

A very small number attempted this question.

Q6

A small number of candidates chose this question and made good attempts to link landscapes and animal metaphors to Heaney's presentation of relationships.

Gillian Clarke: *Making Beds for the Dead*

No centres chose to study this text.

Q8

No centres chose to study this text.

Carol Ann Duffy: *Mean Time*

'Mean Time' was the most popular of the poetry texts. Candidates coped well with the poem and most could make relevant links, with a focus on sensory imagery and changing tone. It was interesting that those students who took on the challenge of 'Moments of Grace' were often able to present fresh and original ideas.

There were some sophisticated answers in which candidates looked at the subtleties of the relationship between the voice of the poem and their memories. The strongest answers did not forget that the question asked about the 'power' of memories.

A lot of candidates talked about how the structure of the poems presents the power of memories, which led to quite limited responses.

Q10

Again, this was a popular choice of text and question. Candidates genuinely engaged with the theme of childhood and wrote lively responses. There were some excellent responses which made use of 'The Captain.' as a second poem. More able candidates addressed the concept of nostalgia. Those who chose 'Stafford Afternoons' for comparison, did so with quite varying degrees of success.

Section B: Drama

Extract

A01

- Some of the extract questions require candidates to look at the presentation of two characters. Where this was the case, it was notable that many candidates jumped straight into an analysis of power play or power struggle between the characters, even when this was not necessarily the case or a feature of the scene.

- As was noted last year, it is important that candidates maintain focus on the extract. Whilst it is likely that some candidates will allude to the wider play, in order to inform their AO1 analysis, there is no requirement for contextualising the extract within the wider play.

A02

- Candidates chose quotations well and were clearly thinking about the extract as a piece of drama. Less successful responses were the ones where candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created.
- Some candidates spent time discussing how the extract 'foreshadowed' various moments in the plays. Whilst this was productive to some extent, often it led to lengthy discussion of what went on in the wider play at the expense of close analysis of the extract. This was less of an issue than last year.

Essay

A01

- There were many excellent whole play essays, which were well-structured and fully engaged with the question. It was pleasing to see that very few relied upon reference back to the extract for this section.

A02

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

A03

- This AO is very heavily weighted and the candidates who score highly on this AO are able to draw upon a range of contextual material so that they are not reliant upon generalised statements about the time periods. Some candidates were able to make thoughtful comments about the contexts of reception.
- It is worth repeating the point from last year's report that candidates should guard against extensive use of biographical material as context. Whilst this can be informative, it needs to be handled carefully and clearly linked to wider contextual issues.

Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

There were some excellent responses to part i) of the play on Faustus' interaction with the Good and Bad Angels. Stronger candidates explored the dynamics in the relationship through Marlowe's choice of language and dramatic structure; many commenting on the significance of the morality play form.

For part ii), a range of relevant contextual factors were considered. The Icarus legend, Lucifer's fall, the Great Chain of Being, Humanism and the Catholic church were just some of the topics used to address AO3. In some responses, large portions of context were used without detailed reference to specific moments from the play.

Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

A few centres chose to study this play. In the extract question, some candidates struggled to focus on the 'relationship' and talked generally about features of the scene. Less successful candidates discussed the relationship as a struggle for power, and little else.

In part ii, there was evidence of a wide range of contextual links and candidates engaged with Mrs Erlynne's predicament.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

As was the case last year, this was overwhelmingly the most popular choice of drama text. The extract proved to be a rich source of AO2 analysis for many candidates and there were especially good comments and analysis on stage directions and the use of physical space in the scene. A few candidates only dealt with Stanley.

In part ii, a significant number assumed it was just a question about Stanley and ignored the part about 'working class life'. Some centres may not be using the prescribed edition of the text, as candidates were quoting lines that examiners did not recognise. They were not penalised for this but would be better served using the correct edition.

Some candidates' part i and part ii responses were of similar length, suggesting that time management is an issue.

Biographical context featured heavily again this year and, as stated above, this is quite limiting. However, there was also some sophisticated use of an impressive range of contexts.

David Hare: *Murmuring Judges*

No responses seen on this text.

Joe Orton: *Loot*

A small number of centres chose to study 'Loot' and those who did tended to handle it very well. Responses to the extract contained some exemplary analysis of elements of humour and farce and both characters were dealt with equally well.

In the whole play question, not many addressed the concept of taste, with morality being a much more popular focus. This was fine, as the question gave options. There were some inspired essays, with candidates being able to demonstrate high level academic style in the way that they integrated AO3.



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