GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCSE

SUMMER 2019

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

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COMPONENT 1

General Comments

The paper worked well across the whole ability range. Examiners felt that it was accessible to the entire cohort, and there was no evidence of questions restricting or misleading candidates. For less able candidates, the questions enabled engagement and empathy, with secure knowledge of narrative and character gaining respectable marks. Meanwhile, for those working at higher levels there was plenty of scope to show focussed, sustained exploration and analysis of the texts. *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* were by far the most popular choices, with the former showing slightly higher numbers. *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing* also had a reasonable uptake.

With the specification now in its third year, examiners reported that time management is improving as centres become more used to the exam structure. Fewer students seemed to have run out of time mid-answer and there seemed to be significantly fewer examples of questions not attempted and rubric infringements.

Once again examiners were impressed with both the enthusiasm and depth of understanding students showed in the responses to Shakespeare across the six plays offered. English departments and teachers deserve great credit for preparing their students so effectively. In the vast majority of cases, candidates knew the play they had studied very well and were able to make detailed and appropriate references to support their comments. Some examiners noted that the Shakespeare essay question seemed to be where candidates seemed most comfortable, which is encouraging, given the closed-book nature of the exam and the relative challenge presented by language and themes in the texts.

In Section B it appears that the choice of poem, Hardy's *A Wife in London*, caused some surprise. It is important to note that most of the poems in the anthology have several themes; therefore it is perfectly possible for a poem to be selected for 7.1 that has a thematic connection with poems that have previously been selected – but the theme of the question itself will be different to those from previous years. Centres should avoid "question spotting", however tempting this may be, and ensure that candidates are prepared for the full gamut of possibilities for 7.1 and 7.2.

Happily, candidates responded well to the theme of loss, which enabled a far wider range of poems to be utilised in comparison than in previous years, many of them proving to be productive selections. Candidates were able to consider a variety of different kinds of loss, and many candidates wrote in detail and with enthusiasm on their chosen poem. Examiners noted that a stronger emphasis on AO2 coverage would be helpful in future, with more frequent comment on language choice a clear route to higher bands. There continues to be a stubborn minority of answers that are limited by a lack of explicit reference to the poems' contexts, despite AO3 coverage carrying a significant reward. A focus on encouraging all students to integrate some contextual comments into their poetry responses would be of considerable benefit to overall student achievement in Section B.

Comments on individual questions – Extract questions

The extracts selected from each play were, as usual, key moments and clearly familiar to the vast majority of candidates, who were able to discuss both their content and their significance within the play as a whole. That said, a small minority of respondents to the *Romeo and Juliet* extract seemed confused, possibly because the scene is cut or significantly reduced in some film adaptations of the play. While films are undoubtedly hugely important to show the play in performance and support students' understanding, they are not a substitute for close study of the text itself.

Better responses tracked the extracts carefully, noting thoughts and feelings, or the reactions of characters to events, selecting and commenting on language and possible effects on an audience. Students commented effectively on the drama of the extracts' events, for example Juliet's terror at the thought of waking in a darkened tomb with her "buried ancestors… packed" around her, or Othello kissing Desdemona one final time before murdering her.

Weaker responses tended to only cover part of the extract – usually the first half, therefore missing out on commenting on Macbeth's meditation on the pointlessness of his existence, or Don Pedro announcing he has a plan to bring Beatrice and Benedick together. It is wise for students to ensure they comment on something from the beginning, middle and end of an extract to ensure proper coverage. Other less successful responses tended to miss the opportunities to look at specific language choices, therefore not achieving much coverage of AO2.

Extracts selected can be soliloquies as well as moments of interaction and dialogue, so it is a good idea for students to practise tracking an individual's thoughts and feelings as well as the interplay between characters and an audience's potential reactions. Candidates should look for changes in mood and narrative direction to comment on.

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

Romeo and Juliet

While the extract from Juliet's soliloquy is clearly a key moment in the play, the fact that it is not included or partially cut from some of the main film adaptations was an issue for a minority of candidates, who seemed to approach it as an unseen piece. However, there was still plenty of scope for those less familiar with this scene to be able to track through the extract and make comments.

The majority of candidates picked up on Juliet's fears that the Friar might be trying to kill her, and many were able to offer good reasons for her doubts about his loyalty. Most candidates understood her feelings of isolation and terror at the thought of being trapped in the tomb, with better responses picking out the language used to create these feelings, many using one-word quotations to good effect, such as "fearful", "strangled" and "desp'rate". There was also effective discussion of rhetorical questions, dashes and repetition. Plenty of candidates wrote sensibly about Shakespeare's use of soliloquy here, and how this passage reminds us that Juliet is a young, vulnerable girl.

More successful responses tracked through carefully, following Juliet's shifting thoughts: her doubts about the Friar and his plan, her fear of the tomb and death, her morbid thoughts of the dead bodies "packed" therein and her panic about going mad. They explored the different ways in which Shakespeare presents her thoughts and feelings, and often had a sense of her rising panic leading to the more superstitious hysteria at the end of the extract. Weaker responses tended to lack consideration of the extract within the context of the whole play, or not deal with the whole extract, with some managing quite well with the opening lines but then stopping short. At times it felt that for many candidates the words "potion" and "poison" were almost interchangeable, causing some confusion, or at least a lack of clarity, and many examiners felt that more could have been made of the gruesome description of the tomb's contents and the use of sensory imagery in the latter half of the extract. There were plenty of misreadings, with some thinking the Friar was present or that Juliet was already in the tomb. Others were perplexed by who was being "dishonoured" by the marriage. For a minority, the references to Tybalt caused some confusion at the end of the extract, with some believing his ghost would exact revenge on Juliet and others seeing "bloody" Tybalt as an expletive demonstrating Juliet's anger rather than a description of his corpse.

Macbeth

Candidates found this extract accessible and straightforward, and were able to engage with the events taking place. Most could place it in context within the play, understood the bravado of Macbeth's initial words and were able to select sensibly to support their comments. This speech was the first of three in the extract, with the other two presenting progressively more challenging opportunities for analysis. Candidates were more successful when they traced the changes in Macbeth's feelings and attitude across these speeches. Perceptions of his attitude towards Lady Macbeth's death varied: the majority thought he didn't care much, discussing the shock this might provoke in an audience, whereas more thoughtful reactions explored his emotions more carefully, sensing his frustration and emptiness. Popular selections for comment included the personification of "Our castle's strength / Will laugh a siege to scorn", his reflection that "I have almost forgot the taste of fears" (with differing interpretations of how Macbeth feels about this), and "slaughterous thoughts".

Stronger responses were able to recognise and explore the changes in Macbeth's temperament over the whole extract, in particular the nuances of his comment that Lady Macbeth "should have died hereafter", and the implications behind this line. Tackling the final section, beginning with "Tomorrow and tomorrow…" allowed candidates to explore the development of Macbeth's character at this point, and elicited some sensitive comments where done successfully.

Weaker responses focused primarily on the opening speech, notably Macbeth's orders to "hang out the banners". Here, candidates tended to focus on Macbeth's confidence in battle, prompted by the Witches' apparitions, but struggled to move beyond this. Some cursory attention was paid to Macbeth's apparently unfeeling reaction to his wife's death, but many did not attempt to engage with the final speech. Examiners felt that some candidates could have done more to get to grips with the language of the extract in order to boost AO2 marks. A surprising number of candidates seemed fixated with the notion that Seyton sounds like Satan and wasted precious time on discussing Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's damnation as a result of this minor detail rather than exploring more of the extract.

Othello

Once again, students responded with enthusiasm to the *Othello* extract. Almost all were familiar with the soliloquy and could locate it accurately, showing understanding of its significance. Most were able to grasp Othello's mental conflict here, and many explored key images such as "pluck the rose" and "put out the light". Some answers considered the change in Othello and the stereotypical attitudes towards women, but those that tracked Othello's thoughts and feelings closely across the extract were more successful.

Better responses traced Othello's thoughts while exploring the nuances of language in detail and probing at the motivation for Othello's actions, often showing considerable sensitivity to his contrasting emotions. Fruitful areas for comment included "whiter skin…smooth as monumental alabaster", "cruel tears" and the drama of both the kiss and the final sentence.

Weaker responses were generally at least able to pick up on the use of repetition ("It is the cause…", "One more…") and evidence of Othello's enduring love for Desdemona, but struggled to go beyond this. Examiners felt that some responses were self-limiting due to the lack of AO2 analysis. Sentence structure, contrasts and dramatic irony were potentially straightforward opportunities to score marks that were not often taken.

Much Ado About Nothing

This extract from the end of Act 2 Scene 1 seemed familiar to the vast majority of candidates, with many engaging well with the humour and presentation of the main characters. Some were keen to explore how this scene was used to set up later events within the play, showing some overview. There was plenty of discussion of the changes in audience responses over time, particularly in relation to the roles and expectations of women, but while this can contribute to AO1 marks, all too often it seems to take up valuable time that would have been more profitably spent on closer selection and comment.

Stronger responses made inferences about Beatrice, finding her to be direct, independent, non-traditional, light-hearted, and entertaining for the audience. The most popular quotations were "Heigh ho for a husband", "Will you have me lady?" and "She were an excellent wife for Benedick". There was some excellent language analysis on Beatrice's gentle mocking of Don Pedro, the "sunburnt" metaphor and Don Pedro being too "costly" for Beatrice. Many candidates picked up on the beginnings of Don Pedro's plan here to join Beatrice and Benedick and the foreshadowing that is created.

Less successful candidates struggled to grasp the relationship between Don Pedro and Beatrice, or examine the reasons behind his proposal. Misreadings included that Beatrice is desperate for a husband, that Don Pedro is devastated and "offend[ed]" when she turns him down and that she is a sad "melancholy" character. Some limited themselves either by only considering Beatrice or merely commenting on the first half of the text.

Henry V

This extract from the battle of Harfleur gave candidates an opportunity to write about the comic low-life characters, partly through their own actions but mainly through the soliloquy of the Boy. Most candidates were able to locate the extract within the context of the play and some at least were able to see that this is a comic counterpoint to Henry's Harfleur speech in the previous scene. There was a clear focus on audience response, with interesting and varied views on whether an audience would vilify them, find them humorous or relate to them.

Stronger responses tracked through the extract, commenting on Llewellyn's imperatives and insults, along with Pistol's attempts to deflect them with flattery. Many selected "swashers" and "antics" to show a broad view of the Boy's disillusionment with his role-models, although few were able to pin down what these words actually mean. Many did better with memorable descriptions such as "white-livered and red-faced" and "a killing tongue and a quiet sword". Understandably, there was much admiration and sympathy for the Boy and his decision to "seek better service".

Weaker responses tended to be unbalanced, concentrating on the opening action or the Boy's speech only. Some seemed unaware of Llewellyn's role, and a few seemed to believe that the Boy is in fact a young King Henry. Some could track the content of the extract but offered little in the way of engagement with the language. Just as last year, hardly any candidates noted that the extract is written in prose, let alone offered an explanation for this.

The Merchant of Venice

This extract from the beginning of the play was universally recognised and generally approached successfully, allowing, as it did, for responses on a narrative level as well as requiring (for higher band marks) some quite subtle understanding of character. Responses took a broad approach to the question of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. Most could say that they were "good friends", some identified both the manipulative element in Bassanio's character and Antonio's devotion; some even detected an arrogance in Antonio for his reputation in Venice. Bassanio's description of Portia garnered good AO2 marks, with his first words on her as "a lady richly left" being deemed particularly significant.

Higher achieving responses probed the characters and the dynamic of their relationship in detail, with Bassanio's motivation and attitude in particular drawing thoughtful comments. "Wilful youth", "shoot another arrow" and Portia's "sunny locks…like a golden fleece" were apt selections for focused analysis.

Weaker responses tended merely to follow the conversation, describing its content without making many inferences beyond the friendship between the two speakers. A lack of AO2 analysis was a limiting factor in some otherwise solid discussions. A few candidates were eager to go beyond the extract and further into Act 1 and wrote about Shylock and the bond, thereby losing focus.

Summary of key points

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

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- More detailed coverage of the extract, managing comment on the beginning, middle and end, not straying beyond it
- More selection of supporting references rather than general impressions
- More practice on probing subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract
- Less reference to contextual factors when AO3 is not addressed in this question
- Practice in responding to both soliloquies and extracts with characters interacting and responding to each other

Comments on individual questions – Essay questions

Essay questions were focussed on key characters and themes in the plays, and enabled students of all abilities to access them and demonstrate their knowledge. Weaker candidates manged to track the narrative and find some points of focus; encouragingly, most were also able to offer some relevant, direct references from key moments. For higher ability candidates, the challenge was to plan and execute a focused, analytical response, selecting the most pertinent references in support. Examiners saw a wide variety of successful approaches, but saw little evidence of planning, which certainly might have helped some answers maintain a more sustained focus.

Examiners felt that it was with the essay question where many candidates seemed most secure. Better responses were characterised by tracking across the whole text chronologically and the ability to select and comment on key quotations from these scenes. Weaker responses often didn't cover the whole play, for example essays on Lady Macbeth that missed out the middle part. Other less successful answers didn't manage to incorporate AO2 elements into discussion. Encouragingly, however, many examiners commented on the frequency of apt quotations utilised by candidates: teachers are to be congratulated on how well students were prepared for this aspect of the exam. Probing effects of language choice and use of imagery were extremely productive sources of AO2 reward; another was the highlighting of turning points or key moments in the development of a character or theme.

Contextual discussion in the Shakespeare essay was highly relevant in many responses (e.g. the expectations and roles of women in *Macbeth*, and *The Merchant of Venice*; ideas of honour and shame in *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing*). However, some candidates allowed contextual themes to dominate their responses. It is worth reinforcing the message to candidates that AO3 is not explicitly rewarded in this question, although it can add to credit for AO1 when it is focused and proportionate. In many cases, however, more attention to AO2 would enable higher marks.

The total marks for this question are strongly influenced by AO4 and once again examiners saw the full range of performance. There was clear evidence of proof-reading and correction in some scripts, which is encouraging. The lack of capital letters certainly lost some candidates marks, as did the absence of apostrophes, repeated misspelling of characters and, indeed, Shakespeare himself. This year's most surprising error was the repeated use of "eachother" as a compound word – one to look out for and eradicate wherever possible.

Romeo and Juliet

This was a straightforward question which offered plenty of scope for a wide range of responses, and candidates engaged enthusiastically with the theme of love. As well as the romantic love between the eponymous characters, there was successful discussion of Romeo's unrequited "love" for Rosaline, love as a social contract, familial love (or the lack of it) in the Capulet clan, the surrogate parental love of the Nurse and Friar Lawrence and the love shown at the end of the play, both amongst and between the families. Candidates were also keen to discuss male friendship through Romeo and his relationships with Benvolio, and more importantly for the plot, Mercutio.

Many candidates were able to quote effectively, which gave them potential for analysis, and therefore performance at a higher level. Some concise quotations worked well for candidates, including "star crossed lovers", "What lamb! What ladybird!", "be rough with love", "Good pilgrim", "My fingers itch" and "happy dagger". There were some perceptive and sophisticated answers at the top end, whilst at the lower end candidates were able to score a respectable mark with secure knowledge of the narrative. Examiners were generally impressed with the variety of approaches taken in constructing answers

Stronger responses discussed a range of types of love presented in the play, often seeing how the links and contrasts between them contributed to the overall presentation of the theme. Some identified key moments where love has a direct impact on the play, for example how Romeo's love for Mercutio creates a turning point in Act 3 Scene 1. Examiners were impressed with the sheer range of references employed by candidates to good effect, particularly when explored for AO2 coverage.

Weaker responses tended to be those that limited the discussion to Romeo and Juliet's relationship, often in quite simple terms. Some seemed to want to answer on another theme, and responses that tried to contrive focus by discussing Tybalt's love for violence and conflict were generally less successful. Some difficulty in distinguishing between characters remains, with Benvolio and Mercutio most often confused.

Macbeth

This question presented students with the opportunity of discussing a fascinating character, whose presentation changes through the play. Candidates tended to take a sensible approach by working chronologically through the text, giving their discussions a clear supporting structure. Most showed a good understanding of how Lady Macbeth is presented, offering focused, thoughtful discussion. A number of candidates contrasted her with the positive and maternal portrayal of Lady Macduff; some considered the notion that Lady Macbeth was also a mother, grieving for the loss of an infant child.

Students highlighted the breakdown of the character, moving from her dominance in the relationship with her husband (making good use of the latter part of Act 1 and the start of Act 2) to the weak and fragile character who is isolated by Macbeth in Act 5 (through discussion of the sleepwalking scene). However, a large number of candidates missed some of the key moments in this change by omitting coverage of Acts 3 and 4 altogether.

Higher achieving responses were often distinguishable by their discussion of the Macbeths' relationship breakdown in Act 3. Some impressive responses discussed Lady Macbeth asking the servant for a chance to see Macbeth in Act 3 Scene 2, covering when Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost and the change in Macbeth's language to Lady Macbeth (from "partner of greatness" to "dearest chuck") was well noted – as was the change in her own language in the sleepwalking scene.

Weaker responses tended to leap from Act 2 to Act 5 without mentioning the intervening events or offering only passing reference to the changing dynamics within Lady Macbeth's relationship with her husband. A lack of AO2 was responsible for limiting some candidates, as was some unnecessary exploration of contextual details.

Othello

Candidates responded well to this clear, straightforward question. As a result, responses were engaged and often thorough, with candidates feeling sure of their ground. Knowledge of the character and the play were generally secure, and candidates saw Desdemona in various ways: independent, strong, fatalistic, a tragic victim and weak. Her defence of Othello and "divided duty" at the start of the play was widely covered, along with the striking scene and, of course, her death. Popular quotations included "whore", "strumpet" and "white ewe". Some used the question to talk about Iago and Othello, usually maintaining the focus on Desdemona, although a number strayed somewhat, seeing Desdemona as merely a tool in Iago's plotting.

Better responses had a clear focus and tracked Desdemona's presentation across the play with detailed textual reference; examiners felt that candidates were well-prepared for this task. Many approached the task by considering how she is perceived by others at various points, while others focused on how Shakespeare presents her to the audience. Both methods worked well, particularly when supported with a series of brief quotations to illustrate points and analyse language choice.

Weaker responses tended to be limited in the selection of scenes and relatively brief. There was very little misunderstanding, although a few seemed to want to focus more on Othello and his relationship with Desdemona.

Some responses were limited by a paucity of AO2 comment after the "white ewe" image had been dealt with. Perhaps understandably, some candidates struggled to understand Desdemona's acceptance of her fate, but were dismissive rather than exploring the reasons behind this.

Much Ado About Nothing

Discussion of Claudio elicited some strong feelings in candidates – mostly negative – and these were generally well-supported by reference to his actions in the play. He was found to be materialistic, idiotic, gullible, naive, shy, shallow, immature, fickle, jealous and vacillatory. Some candidates credited him with changing for the better at the end of the play, whilst others felt Hero should not have taken him back and was inevitably setting herself up for future problems. The majority of candidates at all ability levels had sound knowledge of the character and his key moments in the narrative, suggesting candidates were well-prepared for the task.

Stronger responses showed engagement with the purpose of the character within the play and what he represented for Shakespeare. Those who could see the subtleties in his presentation were able to access the higher bands. Many offered focused discussion of language and structure, exploring images such as "rotten orange" and "Can the world buy such a jewel?" Other quotations used included "in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion", "there will I shame her" and "Another Hero".

Weaker responses tended to deal with Claudio as quite a two-dimensional character and there was plenty of criticism of his actions without looking at what Shakespeare might be saying about male expectations and behaviour. There were some narrative-based approaches that were limited by a lack of attention to AO2. Common misreadings included the idea that Claudio has never met Hero before and that he asks Don Pedro to woo her for him. Some examiners noticed what appeared to be memorised opening paragraphs, which didn't necessarily benefit the respondents.

Henry V

Candidates could not have been offered a more central and straightforward essay question on this play, and as a result answers were clearly focussed, and most ranged across the text. Candidates discussed how Henry is presented by Canterbury and Ely, his inspirational skill as an orator and motivator and as a brave soldier. Better responses were able to select a wider range of different points across the play and were more evaluative, for example examining his piety and his ruthlessness, and how he is seen by others, such as the French, the Chorus and his men.

Weaker responses tended to lack close reference to the text and didn't take advantage of opportunities to include specific references and address AO2, such as Henry's language in his speeches at Harfleur and Agincourt, or key images used to present him, such as Ely's metaphor of the strawberry plant.

The Merchant of Venice

Examiners felt that candidates did well with this question, which offered plenty of scope for wide-ranging responses on appearances and deception, whether relating to the casket scene, the use of disguise or indeed on how the presentation of characters changed throughout the play. Characters such as Portia, Shylock, Antonio and Jessica were discussed thoughtfully, and candidates who knew the play well had no shortage of material with which to work. Stronger responses were focused and detailed, selecting a range of characters and scenes to inform their discussion. There were some extremely perceptive pieces, and some argued quite successfully that deception is necessary for female characters to prosper in an otherwise male-dominated world.

Weaker responses tended to flounder initially, while candidates came to terms with the possibilities of the task, while some limited themselves by only choosing two or three examples of appearances being misleading, or, in some cases, re-framing a Shylock essay to fit the question. Despite the implication of the question, some candidates saw characters in relatively simple terms, for example viewing Portia in a purely positive light.

Summary of key points

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

Ways in which performance could be improved:
- Tracking a character / relationship / theme across the whole text, with effective coverage of later acts
- More focus on 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 careless technical errors, such as forgetting use of capital letters for character names or neglecting punctuation

Comments on individual questions – Poetry

Question 7.1

Anecdotal feedback from centres suggested that the choice of poem was seen by some as unexpected and, disappointingly, a small minority of the students clearly approached this as an unseen poem. However, *A Wife in London* enabled the vast majority of candidates to respond with understanding. The first two stanzas were more accurately discussed than the latter two, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the opening is relatively straightforward. Many candidates focused on the use of gloomy imagery at the start, for example "glimmers cold" and "tawny vapour". Hardy's language enabled candidates to explore a range of AO2 features, particularly pathetic fallacy, use of metaphors, caesura, euphemism, third person and the anonymous pronouns.

Unfortunately, some candidates did not seem to fully comprehend "The Irony", with some believing that the "new love" referenced in the letter suggested an optimistic ending, for some signalling the start of a new relationship. Many others, however, responded very sensitively to the pain of the Wife's loss, understanding how the letter "penned in highest feather" is a cruel twist, which highlights the potential love that is prematurely curtailed. Comments on structure were tackled with varying degrees of success: those that engaged with the progression and change within the poem and the timing of the two messages being received were more successful than those who commented on stanza lengths, rhyme scheme and numbers of lines.

Whilst many candidates did pick up on the late 19th century wartime context, there were some otherwise good responses with barely a hint of this, beyond the knowledge that the husband had died in war. Quite a few were unclear about which war Hardy was writing about, with World Wars 1 and 2 frequently offered as suggestions. On a more positive note, examiners did feel that contextual comments were integrated more effectively into responses this year, and these included links to Hardy's life, work and anti-war stance, London in the late-Victorian period and the methods of communication used in the poem, as well as the Boer war itself.

Stronger responses tracked through the whole poem, selecting and commenting on the use of language and structural devices and linking to context at several points. Many paid attention to the title and linked this to the use of the indefinite article, implying that many women could be in the same position. Most students were also able to identify the pathetic fallacy and write about its effects and discuss the punctuation of "He – has fallen – in the far South Land…" Those who could analyse the use of the more positive imagery in the husband's letter and show how this sharpened the irony and sense of loss secured marks in the top bands.

The weakest responses were those where the candidate seemed unfamiliar with the text and were therefore reduced to tackling the poem "unseen", often with only limited success. It is crucial that centres prepare candidates for all of the poems in the anthology rather than question-spotting and taking risks on what might come up. A lack of contextual discussion was a frustration for some examiners marking otherwise decent responses. Similarly, where there was confusion about which war the poem was referring to there was wasted detail on the wrong war. A significant inhibitor was an either an unwillingness to get to grips with the latter half of the poem or misunderstanding of it, with number of candidates giving positive interpretations about the wife finding new love with someone else – in an alarming amount of cases with the postman.

Question 7.2

The theme of 'loss' seemed to be liberating for candidates, eliciting a far wider choice of poems for comparison than in the previous two years of the specification. The most popular choices were *The Manhunt*, *Death of a Naturalist*, *Afternoons*, *As Imperceptibly as Grief*, *London*, *Ozymandias*, *Dulce et Decorum Est* and *The Soldier*. The candidates looked at loss of life, love, innocence, hope and power – to name but a few. Some choices were obvious and worked very well; others were less successful and therefore self-limiting – a clear reminder of how important that initial selection can be. Examiners felt in many cases there was a freshness in the responses, showing that candidates were able to think on their feet and select from a range of choices. Encouragingly, examiners held the view that students are becoming more adept at integrating comments on context into their discussions; furthermore there was less technique spotting, with more comments related to meaning and effect.

Stronger responses benefitted from candidates making appropriate choices for comparing the theme of loss, in particular where they knew their chosen poem well. This allowed them to develop their points while incorporating close language analysis. The best answers sustained a focus on loss in both poems and selected suitable quotations to help them discuss meaning and language. Some, at the top end, did so with sensitivity and flair.

Weaker responses sometimes stemmed from ill-advised choices – *Hawk Roosting*, for example, is difficult to bend to the theme of loss. In some cases, sound responses were limited by lack of quotations. A number of examiners felt that the candidates' ability to successfully explore AO2 elements seemed to be less evident this year, so it is worth re-emphasising the importance of encouraging students to spend time exploring the language of the poems as much as their narratives, viewpoints and key messages.

A number of otherwise good responses were affected by not linking to context effectively, ideally in both poems being discussed. There was again a lot of confusion between titles and contexts of war poems; perhaps greater time could be devoted to revising these. Finally, some candidates still seem reluctant to repeat themselves by including points made in 7.1 in 7.2, thus making comparison less effective and losing marks. It is worth reminding students that they can score marks in both 7.1 and 7.2 for a supported point or piece of language analysis on the given poem.

Summary of key points

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

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

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 2

Section A – Post 1914 Prose/Drama

General Comments

The most popular Section A texts studied were *Lord of the Flies*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Blood Brothers.* A large number of candidates studied *The Woman in Black* and sizeable minorities opted for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* or *The History Boys.* Smaller numbers tackled the other texts, but all the texts were studied across this year's cohort.

Rubric Infringements

On an untiered paper, it is to be expected that some candidates will attempt all of the questions. This is still more evident at the start of the paper, where there were far more rubric infringement responses on questions 01-04. While examiners can award marks for sensible comments made from tracking the extract, the responses are obviously only limited to that section of the text and cannot demonstrate any wider textual knowledge, leaving them within Band 1 or low in Band 2 at best. It is vital that candidates are familiar with the layout of the paper and are reminded of the rubric before entering the exam hall. Understandably, even the most well-prepared candidates can make this error under the pressure of GCSE exams.

The Paper

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

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

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

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

AO4 – Spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structure accuracy

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

Timing Issues

It is still clear that many candidates spend significantly longer on the Section A text than their 19th Century Prose – which has a knock-on effect for their poetry responses too. CPD training and more familiarity with the paper has made this slightly less of an issue than in previous years, but it remains something to reinforce with candidates. Candidates should be advised and given opportunities to rehearse answering on their set texts within 45 minutes and be reminded of the of the 45/45/60 timings when familiarising themselves with the overall paper structure.

Comments on individual questions

Lord of the Flies

The extract proved to be very accessible and a good opportunity to discuss the start of Ralph and Jack's relationship. Many candidates used it as a springboard into a discussion of the deterioration in their relationship over the course of the novel, often tracking Jack's challenge to Ralph's leadership and his greed for power. Stronger candidates linked these to broader ideas of the breakdown of civilisation in the text. A minority of candidates simply compared Ralph and Jack and contrasted their personalities, appearance and leadership without specifically exploring the question of their relationship. This passage evoked some perceptive close reading, with most candidates exploring the sense of unity between the boys, commenting on the "sharing" of the task, the repeated use of "together" and the way they "grinned at each other". There were some good explorations of "the strange invisible light of friendship", with suggestions that this demonstrated an intangible potential of friendship that was sadly never to reach fruition. A discriminator between candidates tended to be an understanding of the boys' shared sense of shame and embarrassment at not knowing how to light the fire. The very best accurately placed the extract in terms of Ralph and Jack's relationship and went on to write analyses which were both forensic in terms of attention to detail and sensitive in their interpretation. Plenty commented on the boys' leadership skills, contrasted their priorities and noted their roles as representatives of

civilisation and savagery, with the majority of responses pinpointing key moments to chart turning points in the breakdown of the relationship. Most led up successfully to the arrival of the naval officer (or policeman, according to some) where the best were able to comment on how Golding shifts the perspective to give a fresh view of Jack and Ralph's relationship and their response to the rescue.

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

Anita and Me

As previously mentioned, a small minority of candidates studied this text. Most responses were tackled 'unseen' with very little knowledge or understanding of Syal's presentation of mama's character, or Meena's relationship with her. Those candidates that did study this enjoyable text obviously engaged well with its characters, events and themes.
The extract provided a rich opportunity for AO2 analysis, with many candidates exploring the imagery the opening simile, comparing mama to the goddess Kali. Others focused on the conflicting emotions presented in the parent/child relationship with many commenting on how mama "both terrified and fascinated" Meena and how she "enjoyed her anger". The extract provided many candidates with an opportunity to explore the nature of Meena's lies and behaviour when young and how mama views and reacts to this.

The best candidates then selected well from the text to show an understanding of how Meena and mama's relationship changes, often exploring mama's breakdown following Sunil's birth; how Nanima's arrival changes mama's character and her relationship with Meena; and mama's hard work and determination. Some contrasted Meena's relationship with papa compared to mama, and this too was a valid and fruitful approach.

Never Let Me Go

This complex novel clearly continues to engage and is often used with the most able candidates. The question elicited some very thoughtful and sensitive discussions of Kathy and Ruth's relationship.

The extract proved to be very accessible and a good opportunity to discuss the start of Kathy and Ruth's relationship. Many candidates sensibly dealt with it first and then used it as a springboard into a discussion of the wider text. The extract was an opportunity to show Ruth's controlling nature in the relationship and the balance of power, including her slightly dismissive opinion of Kathy. This was often illustrated by reference to Ruth instigating the meeting and looking Kathy "up and down". Much was made of the symbolism behind Ruth's naming of the horses and Kathy's acceptance of her role in accepting Ruth's demands and "instructions". Additionally, there was often also interesting use made of the extract to explore the effect of Kathy as narrator, and how the reader may be misled by this.
Many candidates made clear links between the three stages of the novel and their developing relationship, commenting in depth on their time at Hailsham (including the truth about the pencil case); the finding of a replacement of the Judy Bridgewater tape; the time in the cottages; and the lead up to Ruth's death. The influence of Tommy on their relationship

was mostly well explored, with many responses dealing effectively with Ruth's desire to keep him apart from Kathy. Sensitive handling of the relationship in its final stages was also evident, with some effective links and evaluations made across the text from their early friendship at Hailsham and consideration of the tragic nature of their friendship. Weaker responses tended to make sweeping statements about the nature of Ruth and Kathy's relationship and/or had little discussion about the latter stages of the novel. These responses tended to contain little commentary on events at the cottages or beyond this point.

The Woman in Black

It is clear that this novel is enjoyed by those who study it. The question on places and locations was an ideal opportunity for candidates to show off their knowledge of the events and characters of the novel. However, candidates operating in the mid-grade area, did not always take advantage of this, not knowing how to show off their knowledge of the story via the question. This was one occasion where candidates would have really benefitted from close reading of the bullet points in the question that guide them to "show your understanding of characters and events in the novel".

Better responses started at the beginning by discussing the setting of Monks Piece, and tracked through the events of the novel, with discussion of the smog-filled streets of London and the subsequent train journey north, the events of Eel Marsh House and the nursery, the places the woman in black appears and the town of Crythin Gifford itself. The very best answers dealt with the shock at the end when the woman in black exacts her final revenge. These answers discussed Kipps' growing sense of unease and recognised the rather complex structure of the novel.

There was some valid discussion of the significance of place names (e.g. Monk Piece and Eel Marsh House, Nine Lives Causeway) though this was sometimes strained and fixated upon to a detrimental extent (e.g. monks are solitary, and piece sounds like peace or nine lives being to do with cats, which are associated with witches).

The extract was usually well used and candidates exploited the number of good opportunities it provided for the addressing of AO2. Most candidates focussed on the sense of geographical isolation exemplified in the extract and picked up on the sound and colour imagery (typically, the "harsh, weird cries from birds" and the "clumps of reeds, bleached bone-pale"). The best were able to link these to make valid points on the significance of this journey for Kipps, the Gothic nature of the novel, the author's use of pathetic fallacy and linked to the descriptions and appearance of the woman in black, herself.

Weaker responses were too dependent on the extract, were muddled on the text's minor characters or were dependent on knowledge of the film version. It was easy to spot these because of the fact the film version diverges considerably from the novel. At least one candidate referred to "Daniel Radcliffe" as the main character, which was a bit of a giveaway!

Oranges are not the Only Fruit

Religion is central to the novel and the vast majority of candidates engaged well with the question.

Sensibly, many candidates used the question as an opportunity to discuss Mrs Winterson's character and beliefs, with many references to her forthright views and apparent hypocrisy. Perhaps following last year's question, many candidates focussed partly on the character of Elsie and her support for Jeanette and Melanie, contrary to the rest of the congregation.

Most candidates had a good sense of Jeanette's changing relationship with religion as she grows up, with the best candidates providing very detailed and nuanced examinations of this, with some also extending the sense of change to Mrs Winterson.

The extract was surprisingly used less than expected, providing as it did, a rich opportunity to show the way religion was presented to oppose Jeanette and Melanie's relationship. Those that used the extract well noted its building sense of tension, the innocence of the girls at the start in what was to follow and the fury of the pastor. Much was made of the reference to everyone in the congregation looking like "a waxwork" and the meaning behind this. The effect of the dialogue in the second half of the extract was often picked up as a device to build the sense of relentless interrogation and pressure on the girls.

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

Weaker candidates struggled to include a range of detail from across the whole text to demonstrate the presentation of religion. Others spent much of their response focussed on the 'parenting' of Mrs Winterson, and whilst certainly relevant, these answers did not always remain clearly focused or provide sufficient discussion of religion as an important theme in its own right.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

The question on the central character of Christopher provided plentiful opportunities for candidates to discuss his traits, actions, feelings and relationships with others. There were some very thoughtful discussions of these, with the best reaching sensitive evaluation. The extract, came from the end of the play and proved helpful as it provided a reminder of some of the key points in the play, including Christopher's difficult relationship with his father, his visit to London, investigation into who killed Wellington and finding his mother. Christopher's muted reaction to his exam result was well discussed by candidates, who often went on to discuss his reactions to other events in the play. Most, sensibly, discussed Christopher's relationship with Ed and Judy in some detail and provided solid discussion of the presentation of Christopher at key points in the play, such as his reaction to finding the dog and his difficulty in coping when confronted by the policeman. The best candidates acknowledged the change Christopher goes through from the beginning to the end of the play, with many candidates at the top acknowledging that Christopher matures during the course of the play.

Many candidates addressed stylistic features, such as the breaking of the fourth wall, Christopher's manner of speaking, and the use of stage directions and sound effects to help the audience get inside Christopher's head. These all proved useful in gaining AO2 marks. Weaker candidates focussed a little too simplistically on Christopher's condition (and there was much discussion about what this might be). These answers tended to say that Christopher lacked emotion, which evidently isn't the case, although he sometimes has difficulty expressing it. Amongst these weaker candidates there were many who relied far too much on the extract, and made very few comments on the wider text, or briefly referenced one or two other events in the play. Some candidates made more than was necessary of Christopher's plans for the future in the extract, suggesting that this made him big headed or unrealistic.

A Taste of Honey

The extract provided a good basis for some very confident and sensitive responses about Jo and Helen's difficult and complex relationship. There were thoughtful comments relating to Helen showing a rare moment of affection and support for Jo when she complimented her

daughter on her "artistic" ability. Many saw this as a glimpse into the life Helen would have liked to provide for her daughter and linked it to the title. Strong responses went on to mention that it is Jo who turns the conversation back into a more usual exchange between the two characters, with her accusations against her mother. These answers suggested that this was self-preservation on Jo's behalf, with some combining this idea with a suggestion that she doesn't want to see Helen's better nature in order to make it easier to escape her. Most candidates commented on the end of the extract, commenting on how the language exemplified Jo's difficult relationship with Helen throughout the play. The best were able to extrapolate a discussion of the dark humour imbued in this section and other sections of the text.

Outside the text, candidates often provided wider references to Jo's relationship with others and how her dysfunctional relationship with her mother has left her isolated and unable to make secure friendships and relationships. These were mainly well supported by reference to Geof and Boy. The best answers linked Jo's treatment of others as a cyclical result of her treatment by her own mother. Most candidates demonstrated their sympathy for Jo and Helen's situation and recognised the thematic links to parenting and motherhood with stronger answers dealing with Helen's return at the end of the play.

Weaker candidates lacked broader reference to the wider events in the play and stayed within the focus of the extract. Less successful answers considered the aggression in the relationship without any of the context and nuances of why this is present. These candidates simply labelled both characters as mean to each other. There were still instances of a sizable number 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, in that Jo's situation as a young, unmarried mother within the 1960s setting is relevant to her character, but often 'bolted on' context or extended discussion about the characteristics of a kitchen sink drama, for example, are less helpful.

An Inspector Calls

The question's focus on the theme of responsibility allowed the vast majority of students to readily engage with the extract and demonstrate secure knowledge of the text. Candidates often started with a focus on the extract before broadening out to take a systematic and structured, character-by-character approach to the question. This gave candidates ample opportunity to bring in wider textual references and reflect on the theme. As the extract in question came from near the end of the play many candidates used it at the end of their response, using the Inspector's "fire and blood and anguish" speech at the end of the extract to summarise their answer. A minority integrated their discussion of the extract and the whole text. All approaches were valid and had their merits. The extract generally provoked strong opinions against both Mr and Mrs Birling, while sympathising with Sheila and Eric as representatives of the more enlightened younger generation who could see the error of their ways. Sheila and Eric's growth and development throughout the play were discussed well.

Stronger responses focused clearly on the distinction between the younger and older generations and commented on how the characters, within the drama, conveyed wider societal implications. Candidates working at a high level often had a clear understanding of Priestley's motives in writing the play in terms of his intent to persuade his audience to accept personal and social responsibility. Crucially, these candidates used the characters and events to integrate ideas relating to capitalism, socialism, class structure and moral teachings. They confidently linked their discussion to specific instances of characters accepting or dismissing responsibility. They often noted the Inspector as the mouthpiece of

Priestley and a force for good in society, arguing that his role was one of a teacher, warning of what is to come for society. Very astute candidates noted the Inspector's use of "we" and how he included himself in the sense of responsibility and blame. These responses demonstrated the ability to move from the specific to the general, which is a feature of top band responses.

The weaker candidates relied heavily or solely on the extract, often providing a focused analysis of details from the extract without addressing the wider text. Those that moved beyond the extract focused on a limited number of characters or events, or simply tended to list the characters and what they had done to Eva/Daisy without much development or explicit reference to the theme in the question. Weaker candidates were also sometimes a little confused by the order of events and many mixed up Gerald and Eric and their interactions with Eva/Daisy. Lower band answers also tended to bolt on discussion of Priestley's intentions in writing the play without linking to characters and events. Sometimes, weaker candidates wrote more widely about Priestley's background without a focus on the question or provided some unnecessary and poorly understood discussion of Marxism or Socialism.

In terms of AO2, the extract gave students the opportunity to provide a close analysis of the language and the importance of stage directions (e.g. "bitterly", "savagely", and Sheila "crying quietly"). Many went on to make references to stage directions in other parts of the play, including Priestley's suggestions about the lighting of the set. Many were aware of the dramatic ironies which make both Mr and Mrs Birling look foolish and invalidate their materialistic, political views as a result. The structure of the play was well referenced, with a frequent analysis of significant moments and turning points. There was inevitably some feature spotting by weaker candidates, which led to less successful responses.

As with all Section A responses, there were up to five marks awarded for candidates' use of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and grammar. In terms of spelling, "Priestley", "Birling", "responsibility" and "Sheila" were often prone to errors. Missing capital letters for character names (including the Inspector) was a fairly common feature. Additionally, many candidates struggle to use the possessive apostrophe correctly.

The History Boys

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

There was some excellent analysis of the extract which provided a useful way into the theme of education. Candidates noted the differences between the views of the Headmaster and Mrs Lintott, and this often provided an excellent springboard into a wider discussion of the Headmaster's view of league tables and public perceptions compared to Mrs Lintott's belief in the truth and presentation of facts and good teaching. The majority combined this with a wide-ranging discussion of the other characters' views on teaching and education.

Candidates were well prepared for this, judging by the mainly assured selection of pertinent quotations selected from across the text. Most responses moved beyond the Headmaster and Mrs Lintott to evaluate the views of Hector, Irwin, and the boys themselves, often in a detailed, mature and confident way.

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

Blood Brothers

The question worked extremely well across the full range of abilities. The extract gave candidates a useful reminder of key moments in the text (e.g. the locket) which weaker candidates used to support their responses. More able candidates were able to link these to the various themes in the play (e.g. superstition and religion) or wrote about Mrs Lyons in terms of society's expectations of a middle-class housewife at the time the play was set. Most discussed her manipulation of Mrs Johnstone at the start of the play and tracked her increasingly poor mental health, sense of paranoia and descent into 'madness'. The best of these were able to focus on the power shift from Mrs Lyons to Mrs Johnstone over the course of the play and explored how Mrs Lyons comes to believe in her invented superstition. Mrs Lyons' relationship with Edward was well considered, with candidates often exploring how Eddie's interactions with Mickey affected his relationship with his adoptive mother and the subsequent impact this had on her belief and security that he was really hers. Some effective responses discussed comparisons between Mrs Lyons and Mrs Johnstone, therefore allowing them to make evaluations and push their responses into the top band, but this approach led to some candidates losing sight of the focus of the question.

Pleasingly, many candidates had a more balanced, nuanced response to the character of Mrs Lyons without simply labelling her as the villain of the piece. The majority had some sympathy for her, if not for the manner she goes about things. Some used the inclusion of the locket in order to expand their discussion to the bond between Eddie and Mrs Johnstone, and how Mrs Lyons felt pushed out and scared. These understood the different perspectives of the characters, showing a sensitive awareness of the loneliness of Mrs Lyons, with her empty house and absent husband, as well as the desperation, longing and subsequent love for her child, which motivate the darker aspects of the character.

Blood Brothers seems to be a text that is particularly prone to some candidates taking a narrative approach, and these were self-penalising. Candidates should be given opportunities to practise a selective approach in order to avoid a simple, but often very long, retelling of the story.

Coverage was a slight issue this year. Many candidates focussed only on the start of the play and the extract. A notable absence was lack of reference to the songs. There was occasional reference to 'My Child' but little else. Reference to the songs is an obvious way to access AO2 marks and they are an important aspect of the text. Many candidates also ignored the ending in which Mrs Lyons plays a key role.

Context is obviously not explicitly rewarded here, but it is essential to be able to use some in order to develop effective responses. Stronger candidates dealt with this efficiently, mentioning class, arguments about nature and nurture and poverty to support points they were making about Mrs Lyons. Weaker candidates often wrote paragraphs about Liverpool's perceived poverty and housing crisis, or Margaret Thatcher's policies without showing directly how this linked to Mrs Lyons. Very often, this contextual information was confused, with references that the play was "set in the time of the industrial revolution" and statements such as, "Poverty was quite popular in Liverpool in the 1980s" or, "Most of society was religious." Sweeping generalisations regarding the rich and poor were also evident (e.g. "The upper class weren't natural mothers"). Such simplistic and erroneous discussion wastes valuable time for the candidates.

There were many, many spelling mistakes of keywords (e.g. "manipulative", "paranoid", "delusional", "superstitious"). Candidates would benefit from being tested by centres on key vocabulary.

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 <u>be selective</u> in their use of the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills. There is no requirement on Component 2 to analyse the extract in detail. Instead, use the extract as a springboard for a wider discussion, with a few key words or images explored that can then be broadened out to show knowledge and understanding of the whole text
- Avoid 'over analysis' of vocabulary. '*Mrs Lyons says Edward was a 'tiny baby'. The adjective 'tiny' suggests her problems and life with her husband were 'tiny'*
- Avoid repeatedly labelling or naming every word class. Be selective. Also, avoid forcing techniques and subject terminology into their responses to the extract – either incorrectly or very tenuously: *'The use of a descending tricolon causes Ralph and Jack to seem much closer to each other'.*
  Similarly, avoid focus on analysis of sentence length, punctuation features or more non-fiction rhetorical devices, which again, can be an unproductive use of the extract. It also would be better to avoid unnecessary terms such as semantic fields or lexical sets and replace with simple reference to 'words' or 'phrases'
- <u>Contextual details</u> 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* were central to this year's task but still needed to be closely tied to discussion of the play. Too often, context is confused and very general (e.g. *'During the 1960s, or the Industrial Revolution, women were seen as failures if they didn't stay home and have babies').* These are not particularly helpful, relevant or accurate
- Encourage pupils to <u>learn key spellings</u> such as character names and authors, as well as key words associated with each text and so likely to be employed. Proof-read responses to Section A to eradicate simple errors such as capital letters or missing apostrophes and avoid combined words such as "alot" and the increasingly prevalent "eachother"

Section B – 19th Century Prose

General Comments

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

The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. At the lower end, there was a tendency towards unfocused narrative but most attempted to deal with the characters or themes reflected in the questions set and the majority of candidates produced well-supported, well-constructed essays. There was clear engagement with the texts, the questions and more able candidates were able to demonstrate higher level evaluation skills. As with Section A, the source-based response (or "exploding extract") continues to be successful in offering apt support for a closed book, untiered exam.

All the extracts worked well as a starting point for candidates and they were, quite rightly, used in different ways. Some candidates included the extract at the start of their response; many used the extract as part of a chronological approach; and others used it throughout their response, cross referenced with the wider text. All approaches were valid and all were able to work satisfactorily for the individual candidates concerned. Very few didn't use the extract at all, though some treated it with a light touch, preferring to focus on the wider text. This too was acceptable, although potentially a wasted opportunity. Relatively few candidates made no reference at all to the wider text. Overall, it should be noted that the vast majority used the extract sensibly. A surprisingly large number of candidates are still referring to the 19th Century Prose text as a play. This was true of all the texts and it was occasionally clear that some candidates were basing their answers on theatrical productions. While overall there was a decline compared to last year, there again were numerous film references, particularly in *A Christmas Carol, War of the Worlds* and (to a lesser extent) *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Whilst film and play versions are undoubtedly of valid use in teaching a text, it is important that candidates study the full novels.

Context (assessed as AO3), on the whole, was handled well. Inevitably, there were examples where it was barely touched upon, poorly understood or included as a standalone 'bolt-on', but far more prevalent was relevant, integrated reference used to enhance discussion of the text. There seemed to be less of a focus on biographical information – particularly around Stevenson and Dickens, but across all the texts.

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

Comments on individual questions

A Christmas Carol

The question focused on the importance of the Cratchit family in the novel. This gave candidates of all abilities something to discuss and allowed candidates to adopt a slightly different perspective on the novel. There were relatively few that merely retold the story and most had some focus on the question. Lots of candidates tracked confidently through the extract, identifying the characters in the extract as a starting point to their essay. Most were able to comment on Bob Cratchit's role as clerk and as a contrast to Scrooge, with candidates also often commenting on the warmth of the Cratchit family in contrast to Scrooge's views, attitudes or relationship with his own family. Many candidates tracked Scrooge's character and the way in which the Cratchit family were instrumental in supporting his transformation. Many candidates discussed with engagement and evaluation the ways in

which the Cratchit family (and Tiny Tim in particular) acted as a catalyst for Scrooge's changing attitude to the poor.

Many candidates discussed the divide between the rich and the poor in Victorian England with discussion of the Cratchit family as an example of this. The key ideas of the Cratchit family representing love, kindness, and the celebration of humanity were all well discussed. Lower band responses often focused mainly, or entirely, on the extract and there was sometimes confusion over who the members of the Cratchit family were (Martha, Peter).

The extract and the text provided lots of opportunities to meet the contextual requirements of AO3. Most candidates commented on the significance of family and even in the lower bands, candidates were often able to engage empathetically with viewpoints on family and most grasped, in a simple way, the intention of the author in raising awareness of the poor in Victorian England. The best responses included detailed knowledge of context, integrated with detailed knowledge of the text including links to Dickens' construction of the characters to reflect his views on social reform. Top band answers used contextual information to illuminate meaning in the text, blending the AOs seamlessly, and it was pleasing to see how context was used in such a meaningful way. Less successful, of course, were candidates who included contextual information in isolation, often in long context-driven introductions however there seemed to be less biographical information on Dickens which was rarely linked closely to the text and as such, often had little positive impact on the mark awarded.

Silas Marner

Silas Marner works well for every level of ability, with its strong storyline, clearly delineated characters and accessible themes, as well as clear contextual features. The vast majority of responses were sensitive, perceptive and insightful. Most candidates were clearly engaged with the importance of money in the novel and commented on the theme in a well prepared and highly evaluative manner. There was often a detailed and forensic analysis of the extract and there was much discussion of how it introduced the reader to Marner's backstory, betrayal, isolation and obsession with money. Many candidates took the opportunity to explore AO2 points through the extract, with many discussing the monotonous repetition of weaving and the imagery used to portray Marner's obsession with gold. There was plenty here for candidates to explore and most took full advantage. Often, discussion of money led on to discussion of the important themes of parenting and responsibility and almost all candidates commented on the link made between gold and Eppie (in particular her "golden curls") and the value of the bond between Eppie and Silas outweighing monetary wealth. Many candidates discussed the Cass family, their status and wealth in relation to their happiness and in comparison to Marner. There was often thoughtful discussion about Dunstan and Nancy's childlessness and attempt to reclaim Eppie leading to conclusions about the relative importance (or insignificance) of money. Many candidates traced Silas' growth through the novel, with interesting evaluations of his character at the end of the novel.

AO3 was well discussed and mostly perceptive and assured. The vast majority provided excellent examples of integrated discussion on historical context (e.g. poverty, the value of family in contrast to monetary wealth) while some candidates commented on the novel's links to religious beliefs, families and Victorian expectations.

War of the Worlds

The question asked candidates to consider the ways people react to the Martian invasion in the novel. The extract focused on the Narrator's experiences in hiding in the abandoned dwelling. Lower band responses were quite generalised and commented on ways in which "people panicked" and "people became violent" but were not always linked to specific

characters or incidents. Top band responses discussed a range of key events with a secure understanding of the extract and its significance in terms of presenting the Narrator and the curate.

There was good discussion of the curate's behaviour and fear where many candidates took the opportunity to explore AO2 in some detail, although there were various interpretations of the curate's behaviour ranging from: "hungry" or "tired" to "insane". Most candidates successfully commented on the curate's breakdown and often contrasted his behaviour with the mental strength and resilience of the Narrator. Candidates often went on to discuss the events of the wider novel by refocusing on the initial curiosity of many at the start of the text with many then tracking the fear that followed. Some candidates tracked events methodically to include detailed reference to the "Exodus" and panic that spread as it became apparent the Martians could "slay guys so rapidly and so silently." In addition to the curate many candidates also mentioned the Narrator's various encounters with the Artilleryman and compared and contrasted his behaviour with that of the curate.

The presentation of the curate in the extract often also acted as a springboard for candidates to discuss a range of contextual details and explore AO3. There were some astute references to divided Victorian attitudes to science and religion ("What good is religion if it collapses under calamity?"), as well as valid references to the survival of the fittest; Tasmania; the British Empire; and Imperialism which were all validly and skillfully used. Biographical details on H.G. Wells' life and background were less often integrated into essays, but lower band essays tended to focus in isolation and for too long on these and other aspects of context, to the detriment of showing detailed knowledge of the text's events.

Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice proved to be relatively popular once again, and was studied right across the ability range. There were some very able candidates studying this text and they responded well to the opportunities offered by the novel and the set question, which called on candidates to consider the presentation of Elizabeth and Jane Bennet in the novel. However, many candidates relied on the extract with only very brief reference to the rest of the text with only a minority of candidates tracking fully to the end of the novel. Responses were discursive but many were without specific support from the text (either paraphrased reference to events or direct supporting reference). There was much discussion of the theory of Neoclassicism vs Romanticism with limited success as this was often misplaced, confused or bolted on. Some candidates were able to place the extract precisely in the timeline of Bingley's departure from Netherfield, however this was rare.

The extract allowed many candidates to discuss both characters and their attitudes to marriage, prejudice, and social status however overall there was limited exploration of AO2. Lower band responses did not comment on the extract other than to overly focus on Jane's "angelic" nature. Many candidates discussed the two sisters in a very superficial and general way this year. Few candidates explored Jane's uncharacteristic irritation caused by her mother. Some candidates discussed the sisters' contrasting attitudes in the extract to the marriage between Mr Collins and Charlotte Lucas (Jane being more sympathetic). More successful responses used Charlotte's marriage as a springboard to discuss marriage within the wider text linking it to Jane and Elizabeth's expectations or prospects of marriage, rejection of marriage proposals or (in very few responses) their eventual marriage.   The top band answers framed discussion of the characters in an appreciation of Austen's presentation of women contrasting Jane and Elizabeth with their sisters. Some candidates developed a discussion of Elizabeth by including reference to Darcy's early opinions and prejudice towards Elizabeth, Jane and the Bennets (and vice-versa) and often tracked skillfully through the relevant events of the novel including Darcy's influence on Mr Bingley which allowed candidates to focus further on the question with reference to the presentation

of Jane. The best answers linked discussion with AO3 context points seamlessly woven in, through comments on the social and economic standing of Jane and Elizabeth, their respective behaviour, demeanour and attitudes to marriage in the novel.

Jane Eyre

The question focused on the way female characters in *Jane Eyre* struggle to be treated fairly and the majority of candidates were able to discuss the theme in assured, confident and evaluative ways. The extract, and Jane's treatment while at Lowood, provided candidates with a springboard into the rest of their essay. Most, quite sensibly, dealt with it first, often as part of Jane's first experiences of unfair treatment as a child and at school. AO2 was addressed with some success. Mid band responses commented on Jane's reaction: concealing her face, her paralysis, and the presentation of her embarrassment as "eyes directed like burning-glasses". There were a range of responses to Miss Temple's comments and some candidates, quite rightly, included her as an example of a woman mistreated and lacking power.

Following discussion of the extract many candidates refocused on Jane's earlier experiences of unfairness citing John Reed and in particular the "red room". Many candidates discussed the red room using unhelpful symbolic interpretations (e.g. the room representing the 'menstrual cycle'). Most candidates commented sensibly on Jane's unfair treatment throughout the novel: as a child, as a student at school, as a governess and as a prospective wife, with higher band responses including treatment of Jane not only by Mr Rochester but also St. John Rivers. Higher band responses often commented on other characters such as Helen Burns and Bertha Mason as examples of women treated unfairly either in a standalone sense or in comparison to Jane. There were, however, a significant number of responses which did not feature any reference to Bertha Mason's treatment which was a missed opportunity and reflected a potentially significant gap in knowledge of the text.

AO3 was mainly well integrated predominantly through comment on the extract. References to gender, religion, economic status, social class and sensitive parallels between Jane and the real-life situation of Charlotte Brontë in her post as a governess were made. Indeed, Brontë's views on independence for women often led to engaged discussion. Overall, this was a successful question for the candidates who studied the novel.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

The question focused on the presentation of Dr Jekyll in the novel. This allowed candidates to respond in a variety of valid ways. Most candidates were aided by the extract which referred to both Jekyll's "smooth-faced" appearance and "slyish cast". The extract provided a clear focus and springboard to discuss the respectable and more sinister nature of the character and this proved useful to candidates. Film versions seemed to be much less prevalent this year, though were still occasionally present.

Candidates engaged fully with the extract, discussion of which often led into the rest of the text. The majority of responses referenced key events e.g. Jekyll's relationship with Utterson; scientific experimentation or "heresies" and in many cases his growing "pale" and the "blackness about his eyes" were invariably cited and used to target AO2. Candidates often widened the scope of their discussions to consider and contrast the descriptions of the Jekyll's home and the contrasting dwellings of Jekyll and Hyde. The top band responses widened their scope to bring in other characters in comparison to Jekyll notably Hyde and contrasted the "pleasant dinners" and gentleman-like behaviour of Jekyll with the "dwarfish", "troglodytic" and "ape-like fury" of Mr Hyde. Some candidates surprisingly did not mention Hyde which limited their responses significantly. Utterson and Lanyon also featured as figures representing a sort of goodness, compared to Jekyll as a divided figure reflecting

both good and evil. Many candidates did not make reference to the ending of the novel and should be reminded to cover the whole text in their answers.

On the whole, the use of context was secure, relevant and accurate and at its best, well developed and sensitively applied. Occasionally candidates used context to drive their essays, and whilst this can be a valid approach, it often limited reference to the whole text. There was less use of biographical information about Stevenson 'bolted-on'. There was less reliance on discussions of Freud and the id and ego theories however there was an increased link between Jekyll and homosexuality which often had limited value. Better approaches tended to be discussion of the text linked to the ideas of Victorian societal expectations, respectability, repression and hypocrisy; Darwin's Theory of Evolution; the conflict between science and religion; the Victorian fascination with physiognomy; and links to contemporary literary trends all of which could be directly linked to, and exemplified by, textual details.

Summary of Key Points

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

Characteristics of good Section B essay responses:
- Clear and sustained focus on the question asked
- Use of the extract at a relevant point of the essay
- Selection of short references to support points made
- Coverage and reference to a range of relevant points across the wider text
- Critical probing of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas
- Close analysis of how the language, writer's techniques in the extract and wider text help to present the focus of the question
- Clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and themes
- Suitable analytical style of writing

Ways in which performance could be improved:
- Plan where coverage of the extract will be best placed in the essay
- More detailed coverage of the extract and wider text, including the beginning, middle and end
- More selection of detailed supporting references rather than general impressions
- Avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story
- More practice on 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, *Yesterday* and *Those Winter Sundays* were well received and the pairing was successful. The familiarity of the subject matter allowed all candidates to engage on some level and proved to be accessible for all, with plenty of opportunities to stretch all abilities when discussing AO1 and AO2. There were many personal responses which demonstrated secure levels of engagement with the poems. Most candidates wrote thoughtfully about the theme of parenthood however it is doubtful whether many candidates had, as advised, devoted an hour to this question.

There were a significant number of candidates providing short or partial responses. A number of candidates dealt relatively briefly with *Yesterday* in 3.1 in order to fully discuss the comparison in 3.2. This potentially limited the marks of some candidates in the first part. A very small minority of responses focused only on one text in response to 3.2 whilst some mixed the two questions together and did not answer 3.1 and 3.2 discretely. These responses were self-penalising.

Across both poems, various similes and metaphors were well probed and whilst there was still some feature spotting and line-counting, candidates of all abilities commented on imagery, pathetic fallacy, similes, metaphors, tone, contrast, and so on in a sensible way with clear reference to their effects. There were a number of unhelpful references to enjambment and counting lines rather than engaging with the ideas and meaning of the poems in terms of content and imagery. It is important for candidates to engage with the broader ideas presented in the poems and the overall meaning. Also, it is advisable for candidates to spend time reading and attempting to fully understand the ideas behind the poems before commencing a response. The best responses contained a clear and brief overview of the poem as well as thoroughly tracking through details. Though they were in a minority, some candidates ignored the statement at the top of the section that these were two poems about relationships between a parent and child, and came up with a range of abstract interpretations which inevitably hindered candidates' understanding and responses to both questions.

Comments on individual questions

Question 3.1

Yesterday was explored in every way from the most basic understanding to perceptive, sensitive and original responses. There was widespread understanding of the key ideas and engagement with the very familiar subject matter. Many candidates wrote quite touchingly on the affection felt by the parent for the child and their own childhood. Candidates commented on the swift passage of time, sense of loss, ideas about bonding and connection in a range of ways. Shoe-polishing and its significance was thoughtfully handled by most. Time-shifts and change of tense were all spotted. Some candidates found the poem happy, some melancholy and they were able to show why. There were a number of mis-readings and whilst these were obviously less successful, there was still general engagement and often comments to reward.

Candidates enjoyed the poem and nearly all saw the poem as a positive portrayal of the parent and child dynamic and a reflection on the swift passing of time. Some candidates in higher band responses interpreted the poem sensitively as a love letter to a child expressing the wonder and joy of motherhood and the sadness of the child becoming more distant as he or she grew up. Most candidates showed an appreciation of the mother's feelings for her child and their growing up: sadness, nostalgia and enduring love. The poem provided

opportunities for rich and interesting discussions of imagery, such as the "tiny foot on my palm" and the child's "shoes". Many explored the parental affection and awe with which the mother "marvelled" at the child. Most candidates appreciated that the speaker was a mother however those who missed the pregnancy references sometimes made an acceptable case for it being a father who had had his rib-cage tested by a playful toddler.

Some responses discussed the development of the child from foetus to school-goer with some candidates perhaps over-estimating the passage of time and reference to "wave you off" as a child leaving for university. In higher band responses candidates also commented on the mother's ability to be able to focus on her "work unhindered" at her "own pace" during the child's absence. Many candidates were able to discuss the end of the poem with originality, sensitivity, and probe the nuances of the meaning behind the "imperfect love" of the parent. Overall, *Yesterday* worked very well, perhaps because the themes and content were familiar to candidates. Candidates found the poem accessible and were able to track through the poem with insight and sensitivity.

Question 3.2

The pairing of *Yesterday* and *Those Winter Sundays* gave the candidates plenty to discuss in terms of comparison and worked well across the entire ability range. *Those Winter Sundays* was well understood, with many candidates recognising the idea of the father's sacrifices for the son. However, the poem also raised some misreading, such as the father being a fireman. Better responses were those who picked up on the subtext of the tensions within the home (some, in fact, noted the distinction between "house" and "home") and the sense of regret at opportunities missed to thank the father. Many candidates commented on the physical presentation of the father and his "cracked hands" representing manual labour, poverty or wear and tear from chopping wood for the fire. The "blue-black cold" was linked by quite a few to the colour of bruising and the "chronic anger of the house" and at times to potential abusive treatment. Some responses then went on to connect the boy's slowness to rise and dress as a reluctance to meet his father because of the abuse. Top band responses engaged fully with the more quantifiable regret, either through comment on "No one ever thanked him" or as shown by the repeated rhetorical question at the end of the poem, "What did I know, what did I know of love's austere and lonely offices?". Some candidates offered some speculative responses which highlighted the possible death of the father and sensitively handled the ending of the poem. At the lower end, weaker responses took a more literal approach to the end of the poem and commented that the father worked in an office and "these are normally lonely places".

The comparisons were often thoughtful and perceptive with differences in perspective and gender roles competently discussed. The writers' effective tone, and presentation of the warmth and coldness of the relationships between parent and child were sensitively explored too. The shoe-polishing produced a range of interpretations but most commonly was identified as a mundane chore with (sometimes) some very great significance behind it. Candidates engaged on a personal level with the reflections of family life presented in both poems.

Some candidates made a valid claim about a sense of poignancy in Pogson's poem, and some thought, less validly, that the household Hayden described was poorer and therefore more abusive. Candidates who had a clear understanding of the stories of both poems were able to present sensible, justifiable interpretations and readings of both poems. Nevertheless, most candidates made thoughtful links and contrasts between the poems and were engaged by their content. Finally, many commented on the poem's apparent messages e.g. making the most of time with parents or children; learning to appreciate all that parents do for their children; how hard parenting is and valuing and appreciating all that parents do for children (including shoe-polishing). 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
- Clear comparison of ideas, mood and some reference to how the poets use language
- Detailed selection and coverage from each poem
- Comments exploring the meaning of these selections
- Spend about an hour on the poetry questions

Ways in which performance can be improved:
- Ensure that the first poem is adequately analysed in 3.1
- Ensure that the second poem is adequately analysed in depth in 3.2
- 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
- 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