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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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## **ENGLISH LITERATURE GCSE**

**AUTUMN 2020**

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCSE

Autumn 2020

### COMPONENT 1

#### General Comments

The paper was clear and accessible, with no questions causing misunderstanding or confusion for candidates. There were more rubric infringements than usual, with some candidates not attempting questions, or trying to answer on all of the Shakespeare extracts, but it appears that these were not due to problematic questions on the paper; rather they seemed to be a result of the atypical entry profile and unique circumstances surrounding this exam series.

I saw a full range of responses across Bands 1 to 5, but overall, the standard of performance was lower than usual; again, this was due to the unusual nature of this exam series and the disruption candidates' learning during 2020 caused by the pandemic. Overall, responses tended to suggest that the time lost this year and the lack of teaching immediately prior to the exam – both in terms of knowledge of the texts and of how to approach the individual questions – were factors in attainment.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

As usual, the most popular Shakespeare text was *Macbeth*, closely followed by *Romeo and Juliet*. I saw responses to all the other plays, although a relatively high proportion of these were rubric infringements, with some candidates trying their luck by attempting extracts from plays “unseen” and a few then endeavouring to use the extracts to answer the accompanying essay questions. Unfortunately, these responses were extremely limited.

#### *Romeo & Juliet*

For question 1.1 most candidates seemed familiar with the extract and grasped key aspects of Juliet and the Nurse's reactions to Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. Better responses tracked Juliet's developing thoughts and feelings through the extract, saw the emerging argument between the two characters and considered how an audience might respond. Not all candidates were able to take advantage of the opportunities for AO2 marks afforded by Juliet's use of oxymoron to express her conflicting feelings about Romeo at this point in the play.

Most candidates selected Romeo as the male character most deserving of sympathy in question 1.2, although cases were also made for Mercutio, Friar Lawrence, Benvolio and even Lord Capulet and Tybalt. Generally, discussion was focused and aptly supported by reference to the play's events, although candidates' recollection of key quotations was perhaps a little sketchier than usual, particularly from the latter part of the play, and attention to AO2 was sometimes lacking.

## **Macbeth**

The extract from the sleepwalking scene in question 2.1 was clearly familiar to candidates, and most showed a sound appreciation of how it illustrates Lady Macbeth's guilt and mental deterioration. Her jumbled thoughts and recollections, repetitive phrasing and use of rhetorical questions enabled the majority to garner AO2 marks, although only one candidate noted how Shakespeare's use of prose in this scene contributes to the presentation of Lady Macbeth's psychological trauma.

Question 2.2 afforded candidates the opportunity to track the presentation of Macbeth across the entire play, offering them an abundance of material to select from and work with. Most were able to pick at least three scenes to illustrate Macbeth's development, with the very best tracking the changes in his presentation in detail across all five acts while noting the influence of the Witches and Lady Macbeth. Quite a few, however, took a narrative approach which showed knowledge of the play but neglected AO2; there was also some confusion between key characters such as Duncan, Banquo and Macduff, both of these issues perhaps illustrating the length of time that had elapsed between being taught the play and sitting this exam. Quite a few responses neglected the final act of the play.

## **Poetry**

For question 7.1, Larkin's *Afternoons* and the theme of relationships should have been an accessible selection, and many candidates found this to be the case: the symbolism of "summer...fading" and the leaves falling in "ones and twos" was explored by many, and relationships between the mothers, children, husbands and "lovers... in school" were explored effectively in many cases. Disappointingly though, a significant number of responses felt "unseen", perhaps suggesting that not all poems were able to be covered by some centres prior to lockdown. However, the most serious impediment to candidates achieving their potential on this question was the lack of contextual knowledge shown in a large proportion of responses. Those that were able to integrate contextual comments into their analysis therefore stood out more than usual.

A wide selection of poems was chosen for 7.2, with *Valentine*, *Sonnet 43* and *The Manhunt* offering many candidates fruitful opportunities for comparison. Dove's *Cozy Apologia* was a welcome and pertinent choice, which enabled a number of candidates to construct Band 4 and 5 answers. However, there were also less helpful choices made, with *Death of a Naturalist* and *Ozymandias* selected by some who tended to want to discuss the theme of time rather than relationships, which inevitably limited focus on the question posed. More candidates than usual omitted question 7.2 entirely, therefore passing up a significant proportion of the marks for the paper – again, this was almost certainly a consequence of the unique circumstances surrounding this exam series.

## **Summary of key points**

- Rubric infringements are always costly: missing out a question on this component has a major impact on overall marks and, ultimately, grades. Attempting extract or essay questions on plays that have not been studied rarely achieves anything other than wasting valuable time that could have been used more productively on persisting with a single extract and essay response.

- For essay questions, AO2 needs to be addressed through selection and analysis of key textual references, or comments on the play's structure, for example looking at contrasts, cause and effect and how plot and character development relates to the play's overall shape.
- For the poetry questions, showing at least some knowledge of the poems' contexts is crucial, whether this is historical, literary, social or biographical. A lack of attention to AO3 always restricts the overall mark.
- The selection of the poem for comparison in question 7.2 needs to be appropriate and considered in the light of the question. Examiners are open to unusual or less obvious choices, but it is important to try to make this choice with the focus on the theme given in the question. Responses that try to compare poems with the focus on an alternative theme are inevitably self-limiting.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### GCSE

Autumn 2020

### COMPONENT 2

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

##### General Comments

In a unique series, given the exceptional context of 2020, the vast majority of candidates studied *An Inspector Calls*. A small minority studied *Lord of the Flies* and *Blood Brothers*.

##### Rubric Infringements

There were a number of rubric infringements where responses were only based on the extracts set and did not reflect study of those texts. This is to be expected on an untiered paper, and was more evident in Section A, where there were far more rubric infringement responses (especially on questions 01-05). While marks can be awarded 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. Understandably, even the most well-prepared candidates can make this error under the extreme pressure of GCSE exams, and perhaps the context of reduced teaching and preparation time before this series added further to these errors.

##### The Paper

The source-based essay format was again successful in offering support in the closed-book, untiered exam. The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. There were a range of character, relationship and theme questions on texts.

Candidates generally responded well to the questions set. On the whole, candidates were able to demonstrate good understanding of the main events, characters and themes of the texts. Some candidates did not always comment on the ending of texts. This may have been a consequence of interrupted or reduced teaching time. Responses, overall, tended to show knowledge and understanding of texts in a narrative, rather than selective or evaluative, way.

Candidates took different approaches in responding to questions: some used the extract as a starting point for their essay, some took a more integrated approach by making links to the extract across the whole text. All approaches were valid. Although some candidates sensibly used the extracts as a means to demonstrate analysis of AO2 skills, many did not. As a result, the overall analysis of AO2 was less successful.

##### Timing Issues

It is still clear that some 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. Again, the reduction in teaching and preparation time may have meant that many candidates lost out on opportunities to rehearse answering on their set texts within 45 minutes and consequently may have been less familiar with the overall paper structure than in previous series.

## **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, 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.

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

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

The extract proved to be accessible and a good opportunity to discuss the character of Ralph. Many candidates used it as a springboard into a discussion of how Ralph's position amongst the boys had deteriorated by this point, before showing how he had got to this situation through the previous events in the novel. Some took a more linear approach, tracking Ralph's character throughout the novel and then weaving in the extract towards the end of their response. A significant weaker minority, however, did not use the extract in great detail and this invariably limited these candidates' success in terms of AO2. These candidates tended not to reference the end of the book at all and were sometimes confused over the order and details of events.

Some candidates chose to focus on the relationship between Ralph and Jack in the course of their responses. Whilst there was often a lot to credit in this approach, a minority of candidates lost focus on the question and drifted into discussion of Jack. To a lesser extent, the same was true of those candidates who also approached the question through Ralph's relationship with Piggy, though these tended to have a stronger focus on Ralph. The most able candidates linked Ralph's fall from power to broader ideas of the breakdown of civilisation in the text.

This passage evoked some perceptive close reading, with most candidates exploring the physically broken Ralph through the repetition in the extract of the word "limped". The character's seeming lack of hope at this point was referenced, especially "No fire; no smoke; no rescue". and better candidates discussed his fear through the selection of "terror", "flesh crept" and "shivered".

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

The question's focus, on the character of the Inspector, worked well and led to many focused and engaged responses. The question enabled more able students to comment in detail on the breadth of the play while less able candidates demonstrated a straightforward knowledge of events and related these to the Inspector's investigation of Eva Smith's death.

Candidates often started with a focus on the Inspector's investigative methods in the extract and his immediate conflict with Mr Birling, before broadening out to take a systematic and structured, character-by-character approach to the question. In terms of AO2, the extract gave students the opportunity to provide a close analysis of the language. Discussion of stage directions was generally handled well and selection of "massiveness", "looking hard at the person he is addressing", and "cutting through" were all commonly selected and discussed well. Many candidates went on to make references to stage directions in other parts of the play, including Priestley's suggestions about the lighting of the set changing on the Inspector's arrival.

The structure of the play was well referenced, with a frequent analysis of significant moments and turning points, including the dramatic irony in the timing of the spotting by weaker candidates, which led to less successful responses.

The revelation at the end of the play, with the realisation that the Inspector was fake, was well referenced and discussed. At the lower end, this was handled in a very straightforward way, often with lengthy discussion on the supernatural nature of the Inspector, linked to the significance of Goole as his name. While valid, some of these would have benefited from further development.

More able candidates were able to discuss how the Inspector catalysed change in the younger generation and some stronger responses focussed on how the characters, within the drama, conveyed wider societal implications.

Priestley's characterisation of the Inspector was also discussed as a means to demonstrate the conflict between capitalism and socialism in the play. Often, this was linked to discussion on how the Inspector was the 'mouthpiece' for Priestley's own voice, including his clear views on class structure and the moral teachings he wished to impart to the audience.

As well as the extract, key speeches of the Inspector were often used to gain AO2 credit, most popularly and sensibly, his 'fire, blood and anguish' speech. Very astute candidates noted the Inspector's use of "we" in this speech, 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 how the Inspector exposed the characters in terms of what they had done to Eva/Daisy without much development or explicit reference to the character of the Inspector. Lower band answers also tended to bolt on discussion of Priestley's intentions in writing the play without linking to characters and events.

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.

### ***Blood Brothers***

A small number of candidates answered the question set on this text. The question worked well across a range of abilities in the responses seen.

The extract worked well as less able candidates were able to use it as a starting point to discuss Mickey and Linda. More able candidates commented on Linda's manipulation of the situation, her attempts to make Mickey jealous and Mickey's shyness and insecurities. Some candidates responded with limited discussion of Mickey and Linda's relationship focusing only on them as children.



More able candidates tracked the relationship between Linda and Mickey from childhood, through childhood, adolescence, into adulthood and to the end of the play. These responses tended to use a range of approaches, some focused on Linda and Mickey in turn before bringing ideas together e.g. their role in childhood games, their behaviour at school and the relationship that then developed between them post-extract. The majority of responses were able to discuss the relationship between the characters in some detail.

The most successful responses tracked through the play fully and thoroughly including details of the breakdown of Mickey and Linda's relationship and Mickey's death. At the highest level, candidates were able to evaluate the impact of the breakdown of Mickey and Linda's relationship and its contribution to the tragic ending of the play.

## Summary of key points

### Characteristics of a good Section A response:

- Extract is used purposefully, highlighting key details that help focus on the question and provide AO2 comments
- The extract is used as a springboard into a wider discussion of the text
- A focus on well-chosen key events, scenes, characters and relationships to link to the question
- Sustained focus
- Direct textual references with good coverage of the text (referencing events spanning the beginning, middle and ending of the story)
- Clear planning and progression in the response, with well-structured ideas

### Ways in which performance can be improved:

- 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 and select key events, scenes, characters and relationships that link to the question
- Avoid narrative retelling of plot
- Have good coverage of the text, referencing events spanning the full range, including the end of the story
- Have a clear plan and progression in the response, with separate and logical ideas and focus
- Include supporting references rather than just making general impressions and assertions
- Remind candidates of the bullet points built into the start of every question and use them to shape responses
- Avoid repeatedly labelling or naming every word class
- Avoid forcing techniques and subject terminology into their responses to the extract – either incorrectly or very tenuously
- Contextual details should only really be included in Section A if relevant to the question and then still need to be closely tied to discussion of the characters, events and details. For example, Priestley's intentions in writing *An Inspector Calls* were central to this year's task but still needed to be closely tied to discussion of the play.
- Learn key spellings such as character names and authors, as well as key words associated with each text and so likely to be employed

- Careful adherence to the rubric requirements of the paper to ensure that candidates are only answering questions on the texts that they have studied
- Leave time to proofread responses to Section A to eradicate simple errors such as capital letters or missing apostrophes and avoid combined words such as “alot” and “eachother”

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

### General Comments

In a unique series, given the exceptional context of 2020, the vast majority of candidates studied *A Christmas Carol*. A small minority studied *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

### The Paper

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. A majority of candidates produced well-supported, well thought out essays. There was clear engagement with the texts and sustained focus on the questions. 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.

As intended, the extracts provided a starting point for candidates and 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 a small minority used it throughout their response, cross referenced with the wider text. All approaches were valid, and all were able to work satisfactorily for the individual candidates concerned. Very few did not use the extract at all, though some treated it with a light touch, preferring to focus on the wider text. This too was acceptable, although potentially a wasted opportunity. Relatively few candidates made no reference at all to the wider text.

There continue to be numerous film references, particularly in *A Christmas Carol*. Although common to this paper, this was perhaps to be expected even more this year, when teaching time may have been reduced.

Discussion of context (assessed as AO3 in Section B) was also varied, with a general feeling that while many candidates had knowledge of a text’s contextual issues, they were often less secure in how to integrate this knowledge into their responses. Again, this could be a consequence of less preparation time and a lack of practise and feedback that would have allowed them to refine skills before the exam took place.

### Comments on individual questions

#### *A Christmas Carol*

The question focused on how and why Scrooge changes from someone who wishes “to be left alone” in Stave One to his transformation at the end of the novel. The question called on candidates to select key events that cause this change in Scrooge’s character and comment on how Dickens presents them in the story.

The open nature of the question gave candidates of all abilities something to discuss and allowed candidates free rein to select the events they considered key in changing Scrooge’s attitudes. Invariably, some weaker candidates merely retold the story, though most had some focus on the question. Lots of candidates tracked confidently through the novel, selecting key moments such as the visitation of Marley’s Ghost; Scrooge witnessing his earlier break up with Belle; his growing concern for Tiny Tim; and witnessing his own death.

The extract was commonly used as a starting point to candidates' essays, coming as it did from relatively early in the novel. Most were able to comment on how Scrooge "wept" to see his younger self. There was mixed understanding of the significance of Ali Baba in the extract, with many failing to grasp the imaginary nature of his presence. Nearly all, however, were able to comment on the range of emotion Scrooge demonstrated in witnessing him and link this to the question. A discriminator tended to be whether candidates got to the end of the extract and explained Scrooge's regret for his earlier treatment of the carol singer at his door in Stave One.

Many candidates discussed with engagement and evaluation the ways in which Scrooge's views were typical of some in Victorian society. Dickens' intention in writing the book as a catalyst for change was well discussed, as was how the Cratchit family (and Tiny Tim in particular) acted as a key reason for Scrooge's changing attitudes. It was pleasing to see a number of references to Ignorance and Want and, at the top, engaged discussion of the symbolism of these characters. Selection such as this allowed many candidates to discuss AO3 purposely and explore the divide between the rich and the poor in Victorian Britain.

The best responses integrated context with detailed knowledge of the text and were fully aware of Dickens' construction of the characters and events to reflect his views on social reform.

### **The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**

The question focused on the conflict between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and the way it is presented in the novel. The question called on candidates to select key events to demonstrate understanding of the conflict between the two characters and comment on how Stevenson presented this in the story.

The extract was commonly used as a starting point to candidates' essays, as it deals directly with the conflict caused by Dr Jekyll's dilemma in choosing between his two "natures". There was plenty of detail in the extract which reflected the conflict between the two characters, including discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of both natures. Most candidates were able to comment on Dr Jekyll's dilemma and the temptation of becoming Mr Hyde. Nearly all were able to comment on the range of emotion Dr Jekyll demonstrated in response to some of Mr Hyde's actions. A discriminator tended to be whether candidates were also able to explore ideas of conflict linked to moral weakness, sin and temptation as referenced towards the end of the extract.

The open nature of the question gave candidates of all abilities something to discuss and allowed candidates free reign to select the events they considered important in showing this conflict between the characters. Invariably, some weaker candidates responded narratively and simply retold the story, though most had some focus on the question. Other candidates tracked confidently through the novel, selecting key events such as the violent acts committed by Mr Hyde, the involuntary transformation between "natures" and the struggle between good and evil.

Some candidates discussed with engagement and evaluation the ways in which some of the views expressed were typical of those in Victorian society. There was less reference to context in a "bolted on" sense and it was pleasing to see at the top, engaging discussion of the symbolism of the conflict between the two characters. Discussion such as this allowed many candidates to discuss AO3 purposely and explore the struggle between good and evil and the morality of Victorian Britain.

The best responses integrated context with detailed knowledge of the text and were fully aware of different accounts and perspectives within the novel. At the highest level, responses discussed the construction of the characters and events and the way the text reflects views on the role of science and drugs in Victorian society.

### 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, particularly including details from the end of the text
- More selection of detailed supporting references rather than general impressions
- Avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story by selecting key events and characters
- Keep sustained focus on the question
- More focused and integrated discussion of how contextual factors influence writers' characters, themes and ideas. Avoid contextual 'bolt-ons'
- 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

Despite the reduced teaching time and relative lack of preparation that candidates may well have experienced, the pairing of the two linked poems on this untiered paper, *Watching a Dancer* and *The Busker*, were successful. The familiarity of the subject matter of the first poem allowed all candidates to engage on some level and proved to be accessible for all, with plenty of opportunities to stretch all abilities when discussing AO1 and AO2.

Understanding of *The Busker* was more mixed, with a minority appearing confused over whether the subject was a dancer or not. There were many personal responses which demonstrated secure levels of engagement with the poems. Most candidates wrote thoughtfully about the theme of performance.

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 *The Busker* in 3.2 but did develop discussion of *Watching a Dancer* in the same question.

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, 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 people performing and came up with their own abstract interpretations instead. This approach inevitably hindered candidates' understanding and responses to both questions.

There was more evidence this year of candidates dealing with the second poem in isolation before moving onto points of comparison. This benefitted some candidates, but a very small minority of responses focused only on one text in response to 3.2, omitting any comments on comparison or linking. This was obviously self-penalising.

### **Comments on individual questions**

#### **Question 3.1**

*Watching a Dancer*, by James Berry, elicited a wide variety of responses. There was widespread understanding of the key ideas and this led to engagement with the very familiar subject matter of performance.

Only a minority of candidates linked the poem to their own experiences, though some made a link to performing in their own lives or watching others on stage. Some also discussed the importance of music in their own lives as a way to escape and relax.

Candidates clearly enjoyed the poem and nearly all saw the poem as a positive portrayal of the dancer, from the point of view of both the performer and the audience. Often, the dance was seen as a balletic performance and there was a keen sense of the athleticism of the performer through selection of "shapely and strong". There was often productive and valid discussion by candidates of the possible symbolism of the "red costume".

The best candidates commented on the structure of the poem in terms of the anticipation and progression of the dance, with particular attention paid to the stillness in the second stanza and the possible nerves and excitement evoked by Berry in this section. Many discussed the repeated use of the pronoun “she”, often linking this with a sense of self, or extreme scrutiny from the viewpoint of the audience. The majority of the candidates showed an appreciation of the skill of the dancer in performing and the imagery of her swimming and flying. Many explored the effect of the music on her body, with some thoughtful discussion of “pulses” evoking heartbeat and blood pumping and “haunts” linking to ideas of fear and possession.

Overall, *Watching a Dancer* worked very well, with candidates finding the poem accessible and giving them opportunities to show thoughtful insight and sensitivity.

### **Question 3.2**

The pairing of *Watching a Dancer* and *The Busker* gave the candidates plenty to discuss in terms of comparison and worked well across the entire ability range. *The Busker* was well understood, with many candidates recognising the central idea of the violinist playing on the street for money, with mixed success. However, the poem also raised some misreadings, such as the man being a dancer or a puppeteer (due to the “dancing spider”). There was also confusion over whether the musician was extremely skilled or very poor. Both interpretations were rewarded, depending on the level of engagement and support provided. Candidates who had a clear understanding of the central idea in both poems were able to present sensible, justifiable interpretations and readings of both poems.

Better responses were those who explored the metaphor of “old, mechanical toy” and probed the imagery of this in terms of the busker’s appearance and movements. The sounds of the violin were referenced through “scratches” and “grating”, with these usually explored sensibly as having negative effects on the listener. The skill of the violinist was often discussed, with his two hands working in isolation. Better answers explored the images of a “dancing spider” on its web and the delicate implications of “a lady taking tea”. At the very top, there was discussion of the violence of the movements, through appreciation of onomatopoeic language as well as phrases such as “dangerous little stabs” and “point blank”. There was some apt discussion on the success of the busker in terms of the word “sparingly”, as well as his main audience being the pigeons who largely ignore him. However, the end of the poem was generally not well discussed and often ignored.

Most candidates made thoughtful links and contrasts between the poems. This often centred around the environment of the performance and the skill of the performers. Many contrasted the fluidity of the first performer with the more jerky, staccato feel of the second. Many commented on the poems’ apparent messages of various levels of appreciation for performers.

Overall, candidates dealt well with the poems and levels of engagement were 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
- Spending 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





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