



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCSE**

SUMMER 2022

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

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COMPONENT 1A (SHAKESPEARE)

General Comments

Examiners felt that the paper worked very well and was accessible to the whole ability range. There was nothing to mislead or limit candidates, who generally engaged well with questions and were able to show their knowledge of the plays. Less able candidates were able to get to grips with extracts that were familiar and enabled them to discuss how an audience might respond, and the essay questions enabled them to gain marks with secure knowledge of narrative, character and theme. For those working at higher levels, there was plenty of opportunity for focused, sustained exploration and analysis of the texts. This year, perhaps as a consequence of the time constraints faced by English departments over the last three years, Macbeth was by far the most popular choice, followed by Romeo and Juliet. Othello, Much Ado About Nothing and The Merchant of Venice continued to have reasonable numbers.

The unique nature of this year's paper seemed to have a beneficial effect on candidates' time management, with examiners reporting fewer brief responses and perhaps more fully sustained ones. It certainly felt that there were fewer rubric infringements and questions not attempted. Given the difficulties of the last three years, English departments and teachers deserve great credit for preparing their students so effectively for the exam: examiners were impressed with both the levels of enthusiasm and depth of understanding shown in these responses to Shakespeare, with the vast majority of candidates able to comment on their text with focus and select detailed, appropriate references to support their views.

Despite the fact that AO3 is not explicitly assessed on this paper, context continues to be a significant factor. Contextual comments can often be very useful in both extract and essay questions and can be rewarded via AO1. Indeed, the question phrase "how an audience might respond" invites discussion of how a contemporary audience might have reacted to the plays. However, modern audience reactions are just as relevant, and examiners felt that excessive reference to historical detail sometimes added little in the way of focused discussion and instead wasted valuable time.

Comments on individual questions – Extract Questions

As always, the extracts chosen were key moments from the plays, and none of the six extract questions confused or surprised candidates. For both Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet, the fact that the extracts came from Act 1 might have helped, with an overwhelming majority able to discuss their content and significance within the play as a whole, but the extracts taken from later in their respective plays appeared equally familiar. Placing the extract within the play's events continues to be an effective way into an answer, as well as a means of avoiding misunderstanding. For example, those who began the Romeo and Juliet extract question noting that it was from Act 1 Scene 1 of the play and therefore our first view of Romeo were able to discuss an audience's possible reaction to his speech and behaviour and did not make the mistake of confusing his feelings for Rosaline with those for Juliet.

Weaker responses tended to only cover part of the extract, often the first half, although a surprising number of candidates all but ignored Benedick's soliloquy in the *Much Ado About Nothing* extract in favour of discussing his subsequent interaction with Beatrice. It remains a sensible policy 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 and their effects, therefore not achieving much coverage of AO2. Examiners noticed that this year more candidates than usual spent time referring to events outside the extract itself. It is useful to reference moments beyond the extract only if this helps to shed light on the significance of something within it; otherwise, the result is a lack of focus which has a negative impact on marks.

Better responses worked through the extracts carefully and logically, noting thoughts and feelings, or the reactions of characters to events, selecting and commenting on language choices and possible effects on an audience. Those who were able to note turning points or changes of mood and narrative direction profited, as did those who were able to see the effects of dramatic irony or moments of foreshadowing, all of which gain AO2 marks. As usual, some extract questions contained soliloquies, and those who were able to track the character's developing thoughts and feelings carefully did well. Typically, candidates who were able to focus on the connotations and effects of individual word choices were able to access the higher bands for AO2.

Romeo and Juliet

Most candidates answered the question with comments on both Romeo and Benvolio, but were able to do equally well if they focused on Romeo. Those that correctly placed the extract could usually comment effectively on the difference between Romeo and his feelings for Rosaline here and later in the play, when his feelings towards Juliet are arguably more genuine and certainly more requited. However, a significant minority of candidates incorrectly assumed that that "her favour" was a reference to Juliet rather than Rosaline. The majority of candidates wrote successfully on Benvolio, regarding him as a kindly, supportive confidante to his friend, although surprisingly few commented on his ulterior motive in finding out information about Romeo's sadness for the benefit of Lord and Lady Montague.

The extract provided ample opportunity for language analysis. Less able candidates were able to pick out features such as Romeo's torrent of oxymorons, the repetition of 'O' and use of the third person "This is not Romeo" to suggest his emotional confusion. The short lines and rapid interchange of comments at the opening of the extract gave candidates the opportunity to comment on structure, as did the rhyming couplets towards the end. Some confusion was caused by lines such as "love, whose view is muffled still, / Should without eyes see pathways to his will", and there was a divergence in opinion regarding the sincerity of Benvolio's "No, coz, I rather weep". Many misinterpreted Benvolio's cry of "Soft!" as an insult, adding to a view of Romeo's effeminacy which seemed to feed into rather sweeping and mostly unproductive discussion of Elizabethan gender roles.

More successful responses showed some appreciation of the fact that this is an audience's first sight of Romeo, and were able to discuss potentially differing views: that some might respond sympathetically to this sensitive, wounded romantic dealing with rejection, while others might feel less positively towards his self-obsession and propensity for melodrama. They tended to go beyond the spotting of oxymorons and unpick the language of phrases such as "feather of lead", "heavy lightness" and "bright smoke". Some found success in exploring the links between the recent "fray" and link to "Loving hate". Weaker responses tended to be less secure regarding the identity of Romeo's love and struggled to go beyond identifying some obvious language techniques such as the oxymorons. Some neglected the latter part of the extract, or struggled to select and comment on individual words and phrases and their effects, despite the rich array of images to choose from here.

Macbeth

Candidates were clearly very familiar with this extract and found it accessible. Examiners were impressed by the levels of engagement and enthusiasm shown in many responses. As a relatively brief extract, it seemed to help candidates achieve decent coverage in the time given, and Lady Macbeth's dominance in terms of the proportion of her lines in the conversation encouraged exploration of the dynamic of their relationship at this early point in the play. Many noted the strength of the relationship between the Macbeths, with "my dearest love" frequently cited, with better answers exploring Lady Macbeth's praise "Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, / Greater than both..." and seeing the emerging ambition and manipulation behind these epithets. Tracking of Lady Macbeth's manipulation of her husband often took in her envisioning the "future in the instant" and her use of imperatives. Inevitably, the key image "Look like the innocent flower / But be the serpent under't" was utilised by most candidates, who looked at its implications and connotations to varying degrees. However, some went into excessive contextual detail about the Gunpowder Plot, which merely served as a distraction. The line, "We shall speak further" caused some healthy debate, with some seeing it as evidence of Macbeth's desire to make further plans and others interpreting it as evidence of Macbeth's hesitancy and desire to put off Lady Macbeth's plan to kill Duncan.

Many candidates discussed the presentation of the non-typical gender roles displayed in the extract and the potential reaction from a Shakespearean audience, which is absolutely valid. However, there was a tendency for these comments to be sweeping and lacking subtlety. A number of candidates insisted on seeing this first interaction between the protagonists on stage entirely through the lens of Jacobean gender roles, which proved a rather reductive approach and, ultimately, self-limiting.

Stronger responses tracked the extract closely and noted how Lady Macbeth was able to use a range of tactics to drive her plan forward, convincing and manipulating Macbeth along the way. Some candidates recognised the echoes of the witches in Lady Macbeth's greeting and linked this effectively to her presentation here. Some noticed the increased assertiveness of Lady Macbeth once Duncan's plans were established, and traced the means of her manipulation closely, along with thoughtful discussion of Macbeth's ambiguous final line.

Weaker responses tended to deal only with surface meaning or only selected a small number of references to discuss. Some candidates mis-placed the extract as occurring before the murder of Banquo, while others seemed to think that the plan to murder Duncan had already been established before this point. There was a tendency for some weaker responses to move outside the extract, either to reference Lady Macbeth's soliloquy earlier in the scene or to discuss her emasculation of Macbeth in Act 1 Scene 7.

Othello

Examiners saw a wider a range in quality for this question than at any point since 2017. Candidates tended to respond with enthusiasm to an extract featuring the arch-manipulator Iago and there was a strong sense of recognition of the character and his traits here, although some struggled to track his thoughts through the soliloquy. Quite a few responses incorrectly placed the extract as Iago's first soliloquy at the end of in Act 1, and therefore started off on the wrong foot. However, there were also sensitive responses that showed perceptive understanding of Iago's intentions and were able to make evaluative comments on the motives he offers to the audience. Key phrases for analysis included the apparently contradictory phrases "The Moor... / Is of a constant, loving, noble nature", and "The lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat", along with "like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards" and "wife for wife". Much was made of Iago's jealousy and misogyny in this speech.

Stronger responses were able to make points about Iago's manipulation of Roderigo before the start of the soliloquy by commenting on his use of imperatives and prose; they then tended to track Iago's thoughts concerning the three characters to be enmeshed in his plot, along with the possible motives he gives us. They made a range of well-chosen selections for analysis, wisely avoiding taking much of what Iago says at face value. The use of the rhyming couplet and stage direction at the end were apt references to end with.

Weaker responses were generally able to pick up on Iago's jealousy and desire for revenge and could show an awareness of how he plans to manipulate Cassio, Desdemona and Othello. However, for some there was confusion at times, particularly over whom he calls "this poor trash of Venice". Some understood the idea of a soliloquy but were unable to link this with Iago's character and purpose. Most were at least able to see the racist language and stereotyping in phrases such as "the lusty Moor" and comment on the extreme language used to foreshadow Othello's fall, such as "a jealousy so strong / That judgement cannot cure" and "even to madness".

Much Ado About Nothing

This question offered candidates one of the most comic moments from the play to write about and most candidates engaged fully with its events and subtext. Most were able to place the extract correctly, although a small minority thought that Beatrice had already been tricked by this point. Benedick's damascene moment begins with dramatic irony ("This can be no trick") that many picked up on, and the soliloquy offered a series of rhetorical questions and striking phrases to analyse for AO2 such as "I will be horribly in love with her" and "the world must be peopled". The entrance of Beatrice provided candidates with fresh dramatic irony and humour and examiners were impressed with effective discussion from some candidates that contrasted the characters' attitudes towards each other.

More successful responses made use of the stage direction at the start, which helped place the extract and show understanding of the events that lead up to this moment. Humour is never easy to analyse, but many candidates clearly understood how the scene works and selected some apt reference for analysis. A number of strong responses correctly identified that Benedick is mirroring his earlier speech when he labels Beatrice "fair... virtuous... wise" here, providing plausible evidence that he has loved her all along. Another feature of better responses was a good balance between comment on the soliloquy and the dialogue, seeing the effect this shift might have on an audience.

Less successful responses seem to ignore Benedick's soliloquy and instead concentrated on the exchange with Beatrice, which limited the opportunities to show understanding and analyse textual detail. A few thought that Benedick was speaking in verse, while a significant minority wanted to move outside the extract to discuss Beatrice and Benedick's behaviour elsewhere in the play. A small number of responses could grasp the situation, but passed up the opportunity to analyse language choice, thus missing out on AO2 marks.

Henry V

This extract from the siege of Harfleur gave candidates an opportunity to engage with one of the most famous speeches in the play, and the vast majority of candidates were clearly familiar with it. Henry's rallying speech provided a range of images and devices for them to get to grips with, and most understood the tone and purpose. The use of repetition ("Once more", "On, on", "English", "England"), imperative verbs and personal pronouns offered plenty of potential for accessible analysis, as did the zoomorphic images to suggest fierceness and hunting prowess.

Stronger responses fully appreciated the significance of the speech, his first inspirational address to his army in the play, and its rhetorical power. They were able to track methodically through the extract, making thoughtful comments and analysing linguistic choices and structural devices as they went. They tended to make the most of the climactic ending to the speech, highlighting Henry's motivational skill. Weaker responses tended to include some misunderstanding, confusing this with the speech before Agincourt or struggling to interpret lines such as "And sheathed their swords for lack of argument". They also tended to work through the speech, offering a "translation" of some key lines but without commenting on the language choices and their effects. In a few cases there seemed to be some confusion between the words "patriarchal" and "patriotic", although the nature of the speech meant that examiners generally understood which they meant.

The Merchant of Venice

This extract was from a key area of the text and seemed to be almost universally recognised, although the quality of responses varied quite widely, with some tracking the narrative on a fairly basic level, while others explored the dynamic between the new couple and probed the levels of meaning and motives on display. There was plenty of discussion of the position of women in this society and the submissive role that Portia was expected to play here, with some candidates making the point that Portia dominates the exchange to a surprising degree given her claim to be an "unlessoned... unschooled, unpractised" girl! Higher achieving responses were able to cover both speeches in the extract, evaluating the sincerity or otherwise of each character's pronouncements. Most of these could see what the hyperbole of this set piece is masking and understood the significance of Portia's "gift" of the ring. Weaker responses tended to track the speeches on a surface level, identifying techniques such as tricolon or hyperbole but without really making inferences, thus presenting the view that Portia is genuinely deeply in love with Bassanio, who would willingly die for her – despite evidence of Portia's duplicity and Bassanio's untrustworthiness elsewhere in the play.

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

As usual, essay questions focused on key themes and characters in the plays, and each one enabled students of all abilities to demonstrate their knowledge. Weaker candidates tended to track the narrative and find some points of focus, and it was encouraging that most were also able to offer some relevant, direct references from important moments in the play they had studied. For a closed-book exam, this was impressive, and highlights how most candidates were well-prepared. For some, though, the process of selecting some key words from these references for comment on their connotations and effects would have significantly increased their marks for AO2.

The challenge for higher ability students was to plan and execute a focused, analytical response, selecting the most pertinent references in support. Examiners saw a wide variety of successful approaches, and this year many noted an increase in evidence of planning, which is to be encouraged. Over the forty minutes recommended for the essay question, a five-minute plan can prove to be a time saver and it certainly enables candidates to maintain a clear focus and respond to the question in a logical, coherent manner. Better responses were characterised by tracking across the whole text chronologically and the ability to select and comment on key moments and quotations from relevant scenes. Weaker responses tended to be brief or often did not cover the whole play. Other less successful answers did not manage to incorporate AO2 elements into discussion. 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 often extremely relevant, for example how ideas of honour and contemporary gender roles contribute to conflict in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, some candidates allowed contextual explanation 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 better marks, and this, overall, needs to be a higher priority when teaching students how to respond to essay questions.

For AO4, examiners saw the whole range of performance. The five marks available for this in the essay question make up a significant proportion of the total. Encouragingly, there was clear evidence of proof-reading and correction in some scripts. As in previous years, a lack of capital letters for names lost marks, as did the absence of punctuation and the misspelling of character names. This year, examiners cited over-long sentences and a tendency for candidates to use an informal register to be factors too – perhaps consequences of a relative lack of exam practice when compared to previous summer series. An increasing tendency to abbreviate character names to initials, presumably to save time, is an unwelcome development that reduces formality and risks losing marks.

Romeo and Juliet

This was an extremely accessible question which offered candidates a wide range of material to work with, and examiners felt that most responded with enthusiasm. A wide range of approaches were taken: some tracked conflict throughout the play in chronological order, mostly relying on the physical acts of conflict, while others identified different types of conflict presented in the play, including inner conflict and conflict within the family. As a result, examiners felt that responses were generally effective in tackling the question. Popular scenes included the opening brawl, with its involvement of the feuding families at all levels, from servants to patriarchs and the introduction of Tybalt and Benvolio, and Act 3 Scene 1, including the violent deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. Lord Capulet's row with Tybalt in Act 1 Scene 5 was also fertile ground for discussion, as was his conflict with Juliet in Act 3 Scene 5, with better responses here taking in Juliet's inner conflict as an obviously religious and until now obedient daughter potentially being forced to commit bigamy. Other moments of internal conflict were Juliet's reaction to Romeo killing Tybalt, her soliloquy in Act 4 Scene 3 prior to taking the potion and the lovers' suicides in Act 5 Scene 3. It was good to see how many candidates discussed the death of Paris earlier in that scene, given its omission from the most popular film version of the play. Overall, examiners were impressed with the sheer range of valid examples of conflict from across the text.

Candidates were usually able to quote effectively from the play, with well-used quotations including "ancient grudge", "Peace? I hate the word...", "a plague a'both your houses", "fire-eyed fury" and "My fingers itch". Stronger responses were able to utilise such references for analysis, thus ensuring coverage of AO2 with word and sentence level comments added to the identification of turning points and comments on how conflict drives the narrative of the play. Better responses also often featured consideration of the ending and the resolution of the conflict, with its heavy cost. Higher ability candidates were also able to explore how family honour and toxic masculinity feed into the play's conflicts. Weaker responses tended to concentrate on only one or two scenes, or attempted to utilise the extract to write about Romeo's inner conflict relating to Rosaline without offering much more. Overwhelmingly, though, it was a narrative approach without attention to AO2 that was the mark of weaker answers to the question, and this remains the main area for development in essay responses on the play.

Macbeth

This question allowed candidates of all abilities to respond, with examiners commenting on the high level of engagement with the theme of guilt in the play. Key areas explored by candidates included Macbeth's immediate response to Duncan's murder and his inability to wash his hands; "sleep no more" and "amen" as further indicators of remorse; Banquo's ghost; Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene and Macbeth's initial refusal to fight Macduff at the close of the play. Many candidates, quite reasonably, considered situations showing a lack of guilt, for example Lady Macbeth's initial ease after Duncan's murder.

A variety of approaches proved successful, with some focusing only on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, whilst others included other relevant characters such as Macduff and Banquo. Candidates were, for the most part, confident in discussing the development of the theme across the whole play and were able to support their points with valid textual references. Popular quotations for discussion included "Neptune's ocean" contrasted with "a little water" in the aftermath of Duncan's murder, "never shake thy gory locks at me" in the banquet scene and "all the perfumes of Arabia" and "Out damned spot!" from Act 5 Scene 1. The inclusion of a contemporary view of regicide in many responses showed that context, although not required here, can be used to illuminate discussion without diluting focus. Overall, examiners were impressed by candidates' thorough knowledge of the play and the amount of thought that had gone into many responses.

More successful responses had good coverage of the play, were focused on the theme throughout and selected relevant supporting scenes or quotations to highlight their ideas. Often, they were able to see signs that Macbeth feels guilt before the murder of Duncan and explore the linguistic clues that led them to this view. Many showed an overview by comparing the guilt shown by Lady Macbeth to that of Macbeth across the text. Those that considered motifs such as sleep and blood to be symbols of guilt, and explored how they were used throughout the play, did well. Some sensitive candidates were able to see Macbeth's journey from guilt to nihilism in the latter stages, while others showed their perceptive understanding by exploring Macduff's sense of guilt in contrast with Macbeth's. Typically, higher level answers were those that were able to incorporate word and sentence level analysis of language and structure into sustained, secure discussion.

Weaker responses tended to either only manage partial coverage of the play or struggled to offer specific moments in support of generalised discussion. Some became unnecessarily embroiled in historical context, particularly concerning the Gunpowder Plot. There were issues with recognising the order of events (the "dagger" speech frequently occurring after Duncan's murder) and correctly attributing key lines, with "Neptune's ocean" frequently getting mixed up with "all the perfumes of Arabia". As with other essay responses on the paper, the most common factor in candidates not making the most of this question was a lack of AO2 coverage in narrative-led approaches.

Othello

This was an open-ended question, giving candidates a free choice. As a result, a wide range of approaches was taken, with some discussing one character only, whilst others looked at several and (usually) decided who they felt deserved the most sympathy. Desdemona elicited the most sympathy from candidates, with many detailed and perceptive essays focused entirely on her. Emilia was proposed by some, and there were some excellent essays arguing her case. Many candidates drew on discussions around feminism, misogyny and male violence against women, showing the play has a clear current relevance to students. Emilia was proposed as a feminist character who gives Desdemona a voice when she can no longer defend herself, with Act 3 Scene 4 and Act 4 Scene 3 featuring in support. Othello was also a popular choice, although elsewhere candidates argued he deserved little sympathy. Those candidates who were sympathetic towards Othello discussed racist slurs and his mistreatment by other male characters, again highlighting the current relevance of the play. Cassio and, perhaps worryingly, Iago were also nominated for sympathy, although here candidates tended to struggle to offer the level of support necessary for a satisfying response.

Popular moments and quotations included "green eyed monster", Othello striking Desdemona, the characters' deaths, the willow song, "ocular proof" and the handkerchief. Iago featured almost universally, as it is difficult to write about sympathy in the play without drawing on the villain. Dramatic irony was covered by many candidates in reference to various parts of the play.

Better responses tended to track the chosen character(s) across the whole play, regularly selecting textual references for analysis and identifying key moments that create sympathy. As in previous years, there were plenty of Band 4 and 5 responses that were confidently constructed and written, and many candidates were able to make well-supported evaluative comments to support their viewpoint. Weaker responses tended to be limited in the selection of scenes and relatively brief. Some otherwise sound discussions were held back somewhat by a limited range of quotations, while others selected a wide range of characters to discuss but, as a result, diluted the focus and reduced the opportunities for showing deeper levels of understanding and AO2 analysis.

Much Ado About Nothing

This was an accessible question which elicited a wide range of responses. The numerous references to friendship and relevant events in the play enabled candidates at all levels to find something to write about. Some candidates took “friendship” to mean “relationship”, and so some discussion was perhaps tenuous, particularly when discussing Claudio and Hero or Hero and Leonato. Some discussions of Beatrice and Benedick worked well though, with candidates seeing an unconventional friendship that turns into love. Better selections included Claudio and Don Pedro, Claudio and Benedick and Beatrice and Hero. Don John, Borachio and Conrade made quite a few appearances, sometimes contrasted with the more genuine friendships in the play. Male friendships were discussed in relation to the male code of honour and the ways in which loyalty drives the plot (Claudio and Don Pedro) or love overcomes loyalty (Benedick). “Kill Claudio” was a key quotation utilised to discuss more than one friendship in the play.

Stronger responses tended to focus closely on “friendship” rather than romantic or familial relationships. There were some well-constructed discussions of the friendships between the women in the play and the ways in which they protect and trust each other, particularly in the face of misogyny, toxic masculinity, and women’s lack of agency within patriarchal Messina. Although there are no explicit marks for context, the reference to these issues often strengthened the response. Some responses contrasted female friendships with male relationships which appear to be hollower and more superficial. Weaker responses tended to not focus clearly on “friendship”, preferring to discuss romantic relationships, or struggled to select a range of relevant events and quotations. Some candidates showed understanding, but neglected AO2, therefore limiting their overall mark.

Henry V

This question offered candidates the opportunity to write about a range of characters in a play dominated by one man – even if, as ever, it was impossible for them not to write about Henry while doing so. They responded with some enthusiasm, with Canterbury and Ely’s mostly successful attempts at influencing Henry at the start of the play a popular starting point. The Dauphin’s provocation of Henry with the tennis balls was seen as a key influence, with candidates contrasting the two characters effectively. The Eastcheap characters featured in many responses, as did the treacherous lords, Bates and Williams and Katherine. Several candidates argued that Henry’s army were a key influence. Two unexpected individuals – though not “characters” – were also discussed as having affected and influenced Henry: his father and God.

Better responses were able to select key characters from different points across the text and argue why they had influenced or affected Henry, supported with well-chosen quotations. They tended to identify key moments of influence as turning points in the play as well as select key images and phrases to analyse to address AO2. Less successful responses tended to be brief or not select more than a couple of characters (or groups of characters) to discuss. Some approached the question through narrative which highlighted some influences on Henry along the way but struggled to discuss key moments in detail or select quotations for specific comment.

The Merchant of Venice

Responses to this question showed engagement from across the ability range, and examiners felt that candidates offered focused discussion of a range of characters in their responses, suggesting perhaps that most of the characters were seeking revenge in some way or other. Popular subjects included Shylock wanting revenge on Antonio and the Christian characters for their racism, Antonio taking revenge on Shylock by making him convert to Christianity, Portia punishing Shylock and wanting revenge on Bassanio for giving away the ring, and Jessica stealing from Shylock when she disowns him and runs away to marry Lorenzo.

Examiners felt that there was some unnecessary and often sweeping contextual comment on the subject of Shylock's treatment that did not contribute to much focused discussion on the presentation of revenge. However, they were generally impressed with candidates' use of the whole text, which contributed to plenty of thorough responses to this task. Stronger responses were focused and detailed, often offering some thoughtful discussion of the behaviour of the Jewish and Christian characters, with many, quite reasonably, concluding that no character emerges well from the play. Weaker responses tended to take a narrative approach and although they selected some relevant examples of revenge for discussion, they often neglected to pinpoint key moments or analyse language choices sufficiently to address AO2 to the extent that they did AO1, thus missing out on some marks.

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.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 1B (POST-1914 PROSE/DRAMA)

General Comments

Considering the global issues leading up to the exam, standards on the whole were as expected in a typical year, with the full range of responses seen. Candidates seemed well prepared and eager to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the studied text.

The most popular Post 1914 Prose/Drama texts studied were *Lord of the Flies*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Blood Brothers*. 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 and theme questions. As intended, the resource-based essay format was again successful in offering support and challenge 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 specific events and characters of the text in any given question: there is a tendency to discuss wider, contextual aspects of the text and/or perceived authorial motives sometimes 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. 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 a 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 exclusively 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 previously, 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. Informal expression and illegibility also caused problems for even the most able candidates and is self-penalising.

Timing Issues

Previously many candidates would spend significantly longer on the Post 1914 text (Section A) than the 19th Century Prose (Section B) – which has a knock-on effect for their poetry responses too. However, this year, due to the COVID adaptations in place, Post 1914 Prose/Drama, 19th Century Prose and Unseen Poetry were presented as separate papers. With this being an exceptional year, familiarity with the timing of the paper 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 45/45/60 timings when familiarising themselves with the overall paper structure.

Comments on individual questions

Lord of the Flies

The question about violent events allowed students of all abilities to access the paper.

The extract was a powerful one and engaged candidates: most explored the symbolism of the breaking of the conch and Piggy's death as presented in the extract. This provided many opportunities for AO2 exploration and many candidates focused on the violent language and the description of Piggy's death.

Outside the extract, most candidates wisely chose to focus on the key events demonstrating violence: the first pig killing, Simon's death and the raid to snatch Piggy's glasses were popular areas for discussion. Others tended to explore the theme through key characters (Ralph, Jack, Roger, Simon and Piggy) or through the changing relationship between Ralph and Jack. Jack was a popular topic of discussion, with candidates examining his personality and how it changes, and how he acts as a catalyst for violence in the others.

Wider areas for discussion often included the significance of the fire; the idea that the beast is actually inside the children; animal imagery; and how the violent events mark the descent into savagery. More able candidates considered the theme of good versus evil; the setting and the damage done to the island by the plane crash; and the spectre of war taking place in the world beyond the island. As always, those who selected from across the novel fared the best.

Sometimes, contextual details were included. While these were not explicitly assessed in this question, they were often used meaningfully to discuss the question. Occasionally, the context was bolted on and was included unnecessarily.

Anita and Me

A very small minority of candidates studied this text. Most responses were tackled 'unseen', with very little knowledge or understanding of Syal's presentation of Meena's experiences of growing up in Tollington. Many confused Anita with Meena and obviously had very limited understanding of the question.

Those few candidates that did study this enjoyable text engaged well with its characters, events and themes. The best candidates selected well from the text to show and understanding of how Meena 'grows up' in the novel. The extract provided a good opportunity to contrast Meena's relationship with papa compared to mama, and explore their views and contribution to her development. This was a sensible starting point for candidates to explore how Meena's relationship with her parents changes as she grows up.

Other rich areas for discussion included Meena's changing relationship with Anita; how Nanima's arrival and subsequent stay changes Meena's viewpoint; and her stay in hospital with Robert.

Never Let Me Go

A small minority of candidates studied this text. The question provided an ideal opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the events and characters of the novel. Responses offered a range of approaches and some very thoughtful and sensitive discussions on the theme of discovering truths.

The extract proved to be very accessible and a good opportunity to discuss the truth of the clones' lives and the way this is gradually revealed in the extract and the rest of the novel. Many candidates sensibly dealt with it first and then used it as an opportunity to discuss the clones' lives and purpose. Many candidates used the extract as a springboard into a discussion of the wider text and the discovery of Hailsham's true purpose. Much was made of Miss Lucy's revelation that "None of you will go to America ... be film stars" and that the clones' lives are "set out". Additionally, there was often also interesting discussion of the way Ruth often obscures the discovery of truths and the way the discovery of truths affected the characters and their relationships.

Many candidates made clear links between the discovery of truths and the three stages of the novel. Some responses included sensitive handling of Part Three of the novel, as the characters discover the truth and reality of donating and becoming carers. There were also some effective links and evaluations made across the text including consideration of the tragic nature of the text.

Weaker responses tended to be heavily reliant on the extract with very little or no reference to the central theme and discovery about “cloning”. Weaker responses also tended to make sweeping statements and/or had little discussion about the wider text and/or latter stages of the novel. These responses tended to contain little commentary on events at the cottages or beyond this point.

The Woman in Black

The question, on ghostly experiences in the novel, gave candidates a completely open opportunity to show off their knowledge of the events and characters of the novel.

There was a tendency to explore the extract first. This was perhaps sensible, as it provided a rich seam of exploration in terms of AO1 and AO2. The situation Arthur Kipps finds himself in; Hill’s use of Spider as a proxy for Kipps’ emotions; sound imagery; the feeling of the woman in black’s control, manipulation and temptation; the use of first person; and pathetic fallacy were all often explored well through a tracking and discussion of the extract. Occasionally, the extract was treated in an unseen way and, judging by the cautious references to “the narrator” and guesses about the identity of Spider, this was clearly the case in some instances. The powerful nature of Hill’s writing allowed the vast majority of the candidates to engage with the question, even those that did not address the whole novel.

In general, however, candidates seemed to have a really thorough knowledge of the text and were able to explore Kipps’ journey from London to Eel Marsh House and back again. Candidates wrote well about the early scenes at Mrs Drablow’s funeral, the pony and trap, and the woman in black’s appearance at the nursery window. A minority of candidates got to the very end of the book and these candidates also tended to reference the complex structure of the novel in terms of a ‘framed narrative’, impressively tying this in to the focus of the question.

Overall, it was very clear that those who wrote on this book really had enjoyed the experience of engaging with this genre. Inevitably, there were candidates who relied heavily on film adaptations of the novel and these were obvious because of discrepancies between the book and the film.

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

Oranges are not the Only Fruit

Jeanette is central to the novel and the vast majority of candidates engaged well with the question identifying and discussing a wide range of valid “turning points” for the character.

Sensibly, many candidates used the question as an opportunity to discuss turning points framed by Jeanette’s relationship with her mother e.g., her initial adoption; being forced to attend school and her experiences there; her experiences of religion and church; the exploration of her sexuality and her relationships with women and her return home.

The extract was used to introduce Jeanette's first meeting with Melanie and to then discuss their relationship at other points in the novel. Those that used the extract well noted the innocence of the girls at the start and what was to follow e.g., the fury of the pastor. Much was made of the reference to the shared experience of "no father" and the connection the girls felt as a result of this. Weaker candidates unhelpfully over-analysed the significance of "staring at the wheelks". The effect of the dialogue in the extract was often picked up as a device to reflect the nervous attraction / embarrassment of the girls.

Most candidates had a good sense of the key turning points which reflect Jeanette's changing relationship with religion as she grows up, with the best candidates providing very detailed and nuanced examinations of events including the sermon on the nature of perfection and the pastor's confrontation of Jeanette and Melanie's relationship.

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. Others spent much of their response focused on the relationship between Jeanette and Melanie, and whilst certainly relevant, these answers did not always remain clearly focused or provide sufficient discussion of turning points as an important theme in its own right.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

The question on conflict provided plentiful opportunities for candidates to discuss the theme. There were some very thoughtful discussions of the theme within the different relationships central to the text with the best reaching sensitive evaluation.

The extract proved helpful as it provided a springboard into some of the key points in the play, including Christopher's difficult relationship with his father and his investigation into who killed Wellington.

Christopher's reaction to his father's touch was well discussed by candidates, who often went on to discuss his reactions to other similar events in the play. Most, sensibly, discussed Christopher's reaction to finding the dog and his difficulty in coping when confronted by the policeman. Some candidates also included valid discussion of conflict resolution in the text such as the touching of fingers and thumbs in the extract. The best candidates also discussed the conflict that arises in Ed and Judy's relationship in some detail and provided solid discussion of the conflict caused as a result of difficulties in raising and coping with Christopher. Many candidates at the top end also discussed the conflict that arises due to Christopher's logic and interaction with other people in 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. These all proved useful in gaining AO2 marks. Weaker candidates focused a little too simplistically on the physical fight between Christopher and Ed. Amongst weaker candidates there were many who made very few comments on the wider text, or briefly made reference to one or two other events in the play. Some candidates over relied on discussion of Christopher's reaction to touch.

A Taste of Honey

Responses to this text were, on the whole, of a very high standard. The question provided plentiful challenge for candidates to discuss the character of Geof. The extract provided a good basis for some very confident and sensitive responses about Geof, many of which thoroughly explored the underlying tension between he and Helen.

There were some excellent sensitive and thoughtful discussions of the character which included the way Geof supports Jo at different points in the play. Candidates sensitively explored the breaking of gender stereotyping reflected in the extract and Geof's plans to support Jo as her chosen birth partner.

Sensitive responses were able to extrapolate a discussion of the subtext of inverse sexism imbued in this section and other sections of the text. Some also commented on the way the extract exemplified Geof's capitulation as a result of Helen's manipulative nature throughout the play. Good responses commented on the end of the extract, also commenting on the way Geof (like other males) leaves Jo.

Outside the text, candidates often provided wider references to Geof's relationship with Jo and how their relationship was mutually supportive. The best answers also linked the way Geof was treated by Jo as a cyclical result of her treatment by her own mother.

Weaker candidates lacked broader reference to the wider events in the play and stayed within the focus of the extract. Less successful answers misread the "frightening" presence of Geof and/or Helen without any of the context and nuance of Jo's pregnancy. There were less instances 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. There was also less reliance on context which has previously been problematic, such as the 1960's setting and/or the characteristics of a kitchen sink drama.

An Inspector Calls

This was the most popular question on the paper in terms of candidate numbers. The question's focus on the character of Eric Birling allowed the vast majority of students to readily engage with the extract and demonstrate secure knowledge of the text through detailed, focused and engaged responses. Even candidates at the lower end were able to achieve some success by engaging with the extract to support more basic ideas about Eric's personality and interactions. Better candidates focused on the character at the beginning, end and various key points in between and explored his relationships with other characters. A minority of candidates muddled Eric with Gerald, sometimes attributing the actions of Gerald with that of Eric.

The character of Eric was often labelled as "alcoholic" and weaker candidates fixated on this aspect of Eric's presentation, with sweeping, non-tentative statements about his perceived drinking problem. For some candidates, this took up a significant portion of their discussion of the character and became a little repetitive and undeveloped. Better candidates discussed his consumption of alcohol in a wider context, as a way of masking his guilt and difficult situation. They also acknowledged the role alcohol played in his treatment of Eva Smith.

Candidates often discussed what we learn of Eric from the play's initial scene, including focused discussion of the stage direction, "half shy, half assertive" and how this might relate to his character's development in the rest of the play. Many candidates were able to discuss Eric's position in the Birling family: there was considerable exploration of Eric's difficult relationship with Mr. Birling and, to a lesser degree, of his relationships with Sheila and Mrs. Birling.

Most candidates were aware that, at some point, Eric changes. Socialism and Priestley's 'message' were discussed at some length, which was often tied to consideration of the differences between the two generations. At times, Priestley's message became the main focus of candidates' final sections, resulting in some lack of focus.

It is interesting to note how changes in society have led to a significant change in many candidates' interpretation of the character. Eric no longer commands the near universal sympathy for his apparent remorse and change of heart at the end of the play. Instead, there was a much greater focus on his treatment of Eva Smith. Rape, toxic masculinity, gaslighting, dehumanisation and objectification were all discussed in great depth and to varying degrees of success by candidates. More able candidates discussed this in terms of how contemporary and modern audiences may have reacted to his words and actions.

Overall, this was a very successful question that elicited the full range of responses.

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 to discuss the character of Dakin. Candidates commented sensitively on the confident, flirtatious subtext of Dakin's interactions with Irwin here. This often provided an excellent springboard into a wider discussion of Dakin's witty, sexually charged language at different points in the play and the changing nature of Dakin's loyalties to Irwin at the expense of Hector. The majority of responses combined this with a wide-ranging discussion of Dakin's confidence, manipulation of others and his scornful response to Posner's adoration.

Most responses moved beyond Dakin's relationship with Irwin to evaluate his relationships with Hector and the other boys often in a detailed, mature and confident way. Most responses discussed Dakin's views on the various teaching styles presented in the play; his role as the 'leader' of the boys and his views on women, including his use of warfare metaphor for his relationship with Fiona which was viewed by some in a modern context as a horrific objectification of women. Some responses commented on Dakin's success in receiving an Oxford scholarship and his later career as a tax lawyer.

Weaker responses (and there were not that many) tended to over-simplify and be a little formulaic in their assessment, making assertions that Dakin is discussing history with Irwin; is a clown; is sexist. 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 Mickey and Edward's meeting aged 'seven'. Weaker candidates used simple differences between the characters to support their responses. More able candidates were able to link ideas presented in the extract to the wider text and the way Edward and Mickey's lives are different.

Most discussed the difference between the way Mickey and Edward speak. The best of these were able to focus on Edward's confident, polite, educated and generous nature in contrast to Mickey's boredom, petulance and suspicion. Weaker responses focused on Mickey's swearing and Edward's use of a dictionary.

Pleasingly, many candidates took a balanced, nuanced approach to the different lives of the twins. The majority had sympathy for Mickey, making references to the differences arising from the social class of the two characters. There was some discussion of how, despite their differences, Mickey and Edward are drawn together and share some similarities, e.g., the Blood Brothers pact and their relationship with Linda. Some responses included thoughtful discussion of the way the social differences between Mickey and Edward widen as they move into the later stages of their teenage years and into adulthood. There was some sensitive discussion of the breakdown in communication between Mickey and Edward in certain parts of the play as their lives diverge e.g., following Edward's return from university; when Mickey goes to prison.

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 take a more selective approach in order to avoid a simple, but often very long, retelling of the story.

Coverage of the text overall improved, however, full coverage was a slight issue this year. There were some improved references to songs such as 'My Child' and occasionally 'That Guy' 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 did not comment on the ending in which Mickey bitterly and tragically recognises the difference between his life and Edward's.

Context is not explicitly rewarded here but stronger candidates dealt with this efficiently, mentioning class, arguments about nature and nurture and poverty to support points they were making about the twins. Weaker candidates often wrote paragraphs about Liverpool's perceived poverty or Margaret Thatcher's policies. 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 and over simplified comments regarding rich and poor were also evident.

Summary of key points

Characteristics of a good 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
- coverage will include discussion of events/key details at the end 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:

- candidates need to be clear whether the text studied is a play or novel and should discuss the text accordingly.
- Remind candidates of the bullet points built into the start of every question and use them to shape responses.
- Encourage candidates to be selective in their use of the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills. There is no requirement on Component 2 to analyse the extract in detail. Instead, use the extract as a springboard for a wider discussion, with a few key words or images explored that can then be broadened 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 them with simple reference to 'words' or 'phrases'.

- Contextual details should only really be included in Section A if relevant to the question and then still need to be closely tied to discussion of the characters, events and details. For example, Priestley's intentions in writing *An Inspector Calls* 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 learn key spellings such as character names and authors, as well as key words associated with each text and so likely to be employed. Proof-read responses to eradicate simple errors such as capital letters or missing apostrophes and avoid combined words such as "alot" and the increasingly prevalent "eachother".
- Handwriting must be legible.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 2A (POETRY ANTHOLOGY)

General Comments

Perhaps understandably, given the pressures of preparing students for two GCSEs in English lessons when there has been so much lost learning over the last few years, the content-heavy Anthology question was dropped by many centres when the reduced content was announced for this year's exams. Happily, though, those centres who selected it seemed to have been able to prepare students well, and examiners were generally impressed with responses to both 7.1 and 7.2. "Dulce et Decorum Est" was well-received as the given poem and provided plenty of material for discussion and comparison. A benefit of breaking the components into shorter papers this year seems to have been that responses to 7.2 in particular have seemed less rushed and more sustained.

Comments on individual questions

Question 7.1

"Dulce et Decorum Est" seemed to be a popular choice with candidates, and examiners commented on the high levels of engagement and empathy the poem elicited in responses. There was plenty of material to work with to address all three assessment objectives, and the poem's content was often explored in detail and with enthusiasm. Popular quotations for comment and analysis included the similes in the first stanza "like old beggars under sacks" and "coughing like hags". From the second stanza "Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!" was well-used, and from the third much was made of "guttering, choking, drowning", while the verb "flung" in the final stanza proved an effective selection. It was heartening to see a genuine enthusiasm for the poem and commitment to its message in many responses.

Examiners felt that there was less "technique-spotting" than in previous series, and it was good to see that most candidates could discuss the effects of language choices, although some noted that the tricolon or rule of three was often referenced without comment on its impact.

This is a poem that lends itself to understanding contexts, so, on the whole, candidates found they could address AO3 reasonably well. Nonetheless there was a minority of responses that offered little contextual information – even to the extent of not acknowledging that this is a poem about war, and some of those that did were not able to identify it correctly as World War One. However, most could, and many were able to reference Owen's career as a serving officer, his experience of shell shock, his death close to the Armistice, the trenches, chemical warfare, his views on the tragedy of war and Jesse Pope. A few candidates referenced Craiglockhart and being influenced by Sassoon. Encouragingly, many were able to incorporate their discussion of context into their broader discussion of the poem.

Stronger responses tracked through the whole poem, managing coverage of elements of all four stanzas. They managed to integrate close analysis of key words, phrases and images into their discussion along with relevant contextual details. Weaker responses tended to be brief and were often confined to the first two stanzas, thus missing out on the opportunity to discuss the lasting effects of death on those left behind and Owen's direct address towards those who perpetuated the "old Lie" through propaganda.

Question 7.2

The most popular selections for comparison were, understandably, poems about war, with “The Soldier”, “Mametz Wood”, “A Wife in London” and “The Manhunt” all frequent choices. “The Soldier” provided a useful counterpoint to the ideas in “Dulce”, as well as offering some contrasting biographical context on two writers who both ultimately lost their lives as a result of World War One. “Mametz Wood”, meanwhile, offered some obvious similarities, whilst also giving candidates the opportunity to explore the lasting effects of war, thereby creating a strong contrast with the more personal and immediate effects presented in “Dulce”. Examiners also saw effective comparisons with poems that feature “death” in differing, sometimes non-literal ways, such as “To Autumn”, “Hawk Roosting”, “Death of a Naturalist” and “Imperceptible as Grief”. The levels of success tended to vary with these poems, with direct textual support perhaps harder to produce, but examiners were pleased to encounter many thoughtful and individual responses.

As usual, stronger answers to 72 benefitted from candidates making appropriate choices for comparing the presentation of death, in particular where they knew their chosen poem well. This allowed them to develop their points with focus while incorporating close language analysis. The best answers sustained their focus on death in both poems and selected apt quotations to help them discuss meaning and language. At the top end of the mark scheme, some candidates explored ideas about death confidently and sensitively, with context interwoven into the comparison.

Weaker responses were often a result of an injudicious choice of the second poem, where comparison was forced or unfocused, or lacked the direct references required to construct a meaningful response. A number of otherwise decent responses were affected by not linking to context effectively in both poems being discussed. Sometimes when context was included it was via a bolted-on paragraph at the end of an answer, rather than being integrated and linked to the poems’ content.

Once again there was quite a lot of confusion between titles and contexts of war poems; it’s certainly worth revising the differences between these poems, as they cause both candidates and examiners problems when mixed up. Examiners also once again noted the fact that in 72 comments were often made on “Dulce” that had not been made in 71, with some candidates still seemingly reluctant to repeat themselves by including the same points on the first poem in both 71 and 72. It is again worth reminding students that they can score marks in both 71 and 72 for making the same 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 2022
COMPONENT 2B (19TH CENTURY PROSE)

General Comments

The most popular text continues to be *A Christmas Carol*, along with a significant number opting for *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 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 and 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 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. 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 for *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 attitudes to poverty in the novel. This gave candidates of all abilities something to discuss and allowed even the weakest candidates to address contextual issues examined in AO3. 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' respective attitudes to Christmas as a starting point to their essay. Most candidates had an understanding of the role of the charity collectors and were able to contrast their attitudes and views with those of Scrooge. Better candidates were able to link the events of the extract with later events in the novella, such as Scrooge's childhood and his attitudes to Tiny Tim. Weaker responses sometimes did not move much beyond the extract, though the vast majority made at least partial reference to wider characters and events.

The most successful candidates tracked Scrooge's view of poverty through the novel, gave reasons for how and why it changed, and were able to accurately contrast his initial cold comments with the warmth and love he shows through his redemptive acts at the end, signalling his intention to eliminate the poverty he had caused. Although a minority of candidates only focused on the Cratchits and their Christmas dinner in terms of wider text, it was pleasing to see a significant number of references to Fred and his contrasting views of being poor at Christmas; the painful regret of Marley's ghost; a real understanding of why Belle breaks off the engagement to Scrooge; and the purpose and significance of Ignorance and Want. Better candidates explored attitudes to poverty by the poor themselves: the Cratchits of course, but also how the actions of Mrs Dilber and the others at Old Joe's shop are excused in their eyes by their circumstances.

Slightly weaker answers sometimes focused on the presentation of the poor in the novel rather than addressing the specific question of attitudes to them, but even this approach was not without some merit. Occasionally too, the answers drifted into attitudes to Christmas, and this was particularly true when bringing in Fezziwig and minor details such as the lighthouse keepers, the sailors and the miners and their attitudes to the season.

Contextual discussion was built into the question, meaning that very few candidates did not include some AO3 references. A majority selected the "surplus population", "workhouses" and "prisons" in the extract to gain credit in this area. Many went on to link Scrooge's views in the extract to Thomas Malthus, though spelling of his name and what he believed in varied greatly. Biographical information on Dickens was also well referenced, though inevitably the quality of this varied. Dickens' own attitudes and view of poverty and the poor provided a rich seam of discussion for many candidates.

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 excellent. Most candidates were clearly well prepared and engaged with the relationship between Silas and Eppie in a highly evaluative way.

The extract was often well used as an exploration of Silas and Eppie's early relationship, with candidates often using it as a starting point to discuss the closeness between the characters. There was much discussion of how the relationship reintroduced Silas to society and how he rediscovers his faith. Many candidates took the opportunity to explore AO2 points through the extract, with many picking up on phrases such as "convulsive joy" and "half sobbing". It was particularly gratifying to see so many candidates picking up on the humour in the extract and exploring how this leads to a softening in Silas's presentation.

Naturally, the imagery of Eppie's first appearance to Silas and the symbolism of the timing, her golden hair, and placement on the hearth were all explored to great effect. Often, discussion of Silas and Eppie's relationship led on to discussion of the important themes of parenting and responsibility. Most discussed Godfrey and Nancy's inability to have children and thoughtfully explored his attempt to reclaim Eppie and the reasons of his failure to do so because of Eppie's loyalty and love for Silas.

Most candidates used AO3 sensibly and at the top end this was perceptive and assured. Comments on biographical details about Mary Ann Evans and her own loss of faith, views on parenting and adoption were often integrated well into responses. Contemporary attitudes to adoption, gender roles and country and urban contrasts were also discussed in an illuminating manner.

War of the Worlds

The question asked candidates to consider the presentation of the destruction and panic caused by the Martians in the novel. This gave candidates a completely open opportunity to show off their knowledge of the events and characters of the novel.

The extract focused on the Narrator's observations of the mass migration triggered by the invasion and the destructive nature of the invading aliens. Whilst a minority of weaker candidates ignored or barely touched on the extract, most seized the rich opportunity to explore AO2. The best responses picked up on Wells' contrast of the situation with historical events; the sheer scale of the exodus; use of alarming language such as "stampede", "massacre of mankind" and "monstrous"; listing of affected areas of society; and the casual descriptions of death. The final paragraph provided candidates with a dense portrayal of panic and confusion and many candidates sensibly explored this in depth.

In terms of the wider text, the question allowed candidates the freedom to explore the ideas in any way they saw as appropriate. Many took the opportunity to discuss the panic as experienced by various characters, such as the curate, the artilleryman and the Narrator. Understandably, the incident of the curate's breakdown was well explored by a number of candidates with great success. Other candidates took more of an event-based approach, focusing on the initial calmness and mild curiosity at the start of the novel and then tracking and contrasting the fear that followed. Lower band responses were inevitably quite generalised and commented on ways in which people panicked, but were not always linked to specific characters or incidents.

Discussion of the destruction and panic in the novel often also acted as a springboard for candidates to discuss a range of contextual details and explore AO3. There were some astute and valid references to war and the breakdown of society; survival of the fittest; Tasmania; the British Empire; and Imperialism which were often validly and skilfully used.

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 the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in the novel.

Fewer candidates relied solely on the extract with only brief reference to the rest of the text. Responses were discursive although a minority of responses were without specific support from the text (either paraphrased reference to events or direct supporting reference). There was much discussion of the character's "pride" and "prejudice", often misplaced or bolted on, rather than the relationship between the characters. Some candidates were able to place the extract precisely, however this was rare as many candidates misread the extract as being taken from earlier in the novel rather than from the end.

The extract allowed many candidates to discuss both characters and their relationship. However, overall, there was limited exploration of AO2. Lower band responses did not comment on the extract other than to overly focus on Elizabeth's "playfulness" and "liveliness of mind". Many candidates took a "light touch" approach to the extract and/or discussed the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in a very superficial and general way. Many candidates successfully explored the relationship between the characters in contrast to the relationships between Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas; Jane and Bingley and Lydia and Wickham. More successful responses also explored Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's relationship within a frame of expectations or prospects of marriage, rejection of marriage proposals or (in very few responses) their eventual marriage. Some candidates developed a discussion of Elizabeth by including reference to Darcy's early opinions and prejudice towards Elizabeth and often tracked skillfully through the relevant events of the novel. The top band answers framed discussion of the characters' relationship within an appreciation of Austen's presentation of love, relationships and marriage.

Jane Eyre

The question focused on marriage worked well for every level of ability and the majority of candidates were able to discuss the theme in a range of sustained, assured, confident and evaluative ways. The extract, and Jane's reflection on her marriage, provided candidates with a springboard into the rest of their essay. Most, quite sensibly, dealt with it first, often then referring back to the beginning of the novel in order to track the development of Jane's relationship with Rochester. AO2 was addressed with some success. Mid band responses commented on the happiness of Jane and Rochester's marriage: their happiness; their being equals. Some responses focused on the religious tone of the extract and the "blest" nature of their marriage. There were a few responses which overly focused on Jane's character rather than the theme of marriage.

Following discussion of the extract many candidates refocused on Jane's earlier experiences and the build up to her marriage to Rochester. Many candidates somewhat unnecessarily discussed Jane's childhood and the red room again using unhelpful symbolic interpretations (e.g., the room representing the 'menstrual cycle'). Most candidates commented sensibly on Jane's relationship with Rochester: as a governess and as a prospective wife, with higher band responses including marriage in light of not only Jane and Mr. Rochester but also St. John Rivers. Higher band responses often commented on other characters experience of marriage such as Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason as examples of the way women were treated 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 Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason or potential marriage to Blanche Ingram which was a missed opportunity.

AO3 was mainly well integrated predominantly through comment on the extract. References to marriage, gender, religion, economic status, social class and sensitive parallels between Jane and the real-life situation of Charlotte Brontë were made. Indeed, Brontë's views on women's independence, and marriage for love and of equals 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 shock and horror in the novel. This allowed candidates to respond in a variety of valid ways. Most candidates were aided by the extract which referred to Hyde's violent actions, lack of remorse, effect on others and appearance: "It wasn't like a man". The extract provided a clear focus and springboard to discuss the shock and horror of Hyde's character and actions and this proved useful to candidates. Film versions seemed to be much less prevalent this year, though they 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., the murder of Danvers Carew, Jekyll's scientific experimentation and Dr Lanyon's death. Hyde's "black sneering coolness", "dwarfish", "troglodytic" appearance and violent actions: "trampling calmly" and his later "ape-like fury" were invariably cited and used to target AO2. Candidates often widened the scope of their discussions to include the reactions of others in order to discuss the shock and horror elicited by Hyde. The top band responses widened their scope to bring in features of Gothic horror which also contributed to the theme. Many candidates, surprisingly, did not mention the ending of the text and the shock and horror of Jekyll as a "self-destroyer" which was a missed opportunity.

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 was sometimes limited unless framed within discussion of reputation and Victorian societal expectations. Better approaches tended to be discussion of the text linked to the ideas of Victorian respectability, desire, 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
- practice and develop an analytical style of essay writing
- handwriting must be legible.

ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCSE
Summer 2022
COMPONENT 2C (UNSEEN POETRY)

General Comments

The two linked poems on this untiered paper, *Home* and *Coming Home* 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 home.

There were a significant number of candidates providing short or partial responses. A number of candidates dealt relatively briefly with *Home* 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 home, 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

Home by Fran Landesman proved accessible to all candidates and there were a range of responses, right across the ability range. These included many original, thoughtful and personal responses to the poem. This was helped by the fact that the poem's subject matter was highly relatable to candidates.

There were several different interpretations of the poem: all were valid readings and marked on their individual merits. Most candidates had the good sense to read and consider the poem before starting to write, but there were a number of responses that betrayed the fact that the candidate had not read, or had misread, the poem. These interpreted from the title and first line that the content would be wholly positive, then hastily realigned their answer once they worked out that the "Home" of the title was not the stereotypical haven of comfort and security they were led to expect. There were also many perceptive comments on the idea of *Home* meaning more than a physical building, and this set up a comparison to the second poem.

The majority of candidates selected and commented thoughtfully on a range of details in the poem. Many of Landesman's phrases were explored: "hang your hat", "can't get a break", "a test you always fail" and "where the heartache / Really started" were all often explored well. Many candidates identified with the criticism implied in 'Too fat or too thin' and the 'endless argument[s]'. Indeed, the poem's connections to contemporary issues, like body image, toxic relationships, and the lasting "triggering" effects of experiences made it a text with which they were able to understand and connect to, either on a highly personal level or as part of the current themes and concerns of society.

It was clear that many candidates had been well prepared for this task and there were forensic and sensitive discussions: for example, on the repetition of "but" and "always", as well as explorations of the words "ought", "endless" and "haunt". Better candidates also noted the subversion of the clichéd expressions in the poem and this proved to be a bit of a discriminator. These candidates often noted this as "sarcasm" or "mockery" and alluded to the bitterness in their use. The reference to "home sweet home" was another discriminator: many candidates struggled to understand this reference, though a number managed to discuss it by linking it to "No place like home" in *The Wizard of Oz*!

Unfortunately, a sizeable minority of responses demonstrated the "weighing and measuring" approach, by simply counting lines and syllables and spotting language features. These were rarely successful, but some did manage to relate these to the perceived message and mood of the poem.

Overall, there was an overwhelming sense that candidates had enjoyed writing about the poem and it was very successful in terms of determining ability across the ability range.

Question 3.2

The pairing of *Home* and *Coming Home* gave the candidates plenty to discuss in terms of comparison and worked well across the entire ability range. *Coming Home* was well understood, with many candidates recognising the idea of returning home. However, the poem also raised some misreading, such as rekindling a previous relationship. Better responses were those who picked up on the subtext of the impact of absence on the home and the sense of bringing the house back to life and feeling "the house becoming home". Many candidates commented on the presentation of the house as "drear" or "extinct". Many candidates focused on the first half of *Coming Home* without venturing into the "garden" of the text presented in the latter parts of the poem. Top band responses engaged fully with the presentation of the garden in the poem, either through comment on the returnee as "rain-god" or the way the soil "hisses and yields". The best responses showed a subtle appreciation of the initial gloomy presentation of the house in *Coming Home*: 'darkness' / 'unlit' even deathly; 'drear' / 'shrouded' and how this changed and became a place at first of contentment as the home 'revives' / 'relaxes' and then came alive 'pulse' / 'breathes'. At the lower end, weaker responses took a more literal approach to the end of the poem and commented that there were snakes in the garden.

The comparisons were often thoughtful and perceptive with differences in perspective and mood competently discussed. The writers' effective tone, and presentation of the warmth and coldness of the homes were sensitively explored. Candidates engaged on a personal level with the reflections of home presented in both poems. Many candidates made simple, descriptive often unhelpful comments about the structure or rhyme schemes of the poems which should be discouraged e.g., "both poems have an ABAB rhyme scheme".

Candidates who had a clear understanding 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., the difference between a house and a "home"; the positive and negative impact of home environment on people; the lasting impact that different experiences of "home" can have. The most sensitive responses made the link between the comforting nature of the resurrected version of home in *Coming Home* and the idiomatic nature of what a home "ought" to be in *Home*. Sensitive candidates also discussed the difference in power between the two poems: honing in on the "godlike" reference in *Coming Home* and the ability to make changes to the home, compared to the lack of power and "fake" negativity in *Home*. 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
- discuss a range of quotations to ensure coverage of the texts
- practice 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
- handwriting must be legible.



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