

GCSE Examiners' Report

English Literature
GCSE
Summer 2025

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Introduction

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

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

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

Further support

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

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

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
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Executive Summary

Component 1:

The report evaluates candidate performance across Component 1 which assesses Shakespeare and poetry. In Section A, extract and essay questions assess AO1, AO2, and AO4, while Section B assesses AO1, AO2, and AO3.

Examiners praised the accessibility of the Shakespeare questions, especially in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*, with candidates showing strong textual knowledge and enthusiasm. Strong responses effectively placed extracts, tracked language and structure, and engaged with key themes. However, weaker responses often neglected AO2 analysis, focused excessively on irrelevant contextual detail, or misidentified characters.

Essay questions on themes such as fate in *Romeo and Juliet* and character development in *Macbeth* allowed most candidates to demonstrate understanding. High-scoring essays showcased selective use of quotations, analytical commentary, and structured argument. Underperformance was linked to narrative responses, overuse of contextual commentary, or misuse of technical terminology.

In the poetry section, Duffy's *Valentine* was widely accessible, with most candidates understanding its critique of romantic clichés. Effective responses explored tone, structure, and imagery. Question 72 comparisons varied, with *Sonnet 43* and *Cozy Apologia* proving most successful due to their thematic relevance and contextual richness. Poorer responses often failed to compare poems effectively or lacked quotation recall.

Examiners recommended more focused AO2 analysis, fewer contextual digressions, improved textual coverage, and strategic poem selection. They emphasized the importance of quotation accuracy, cohesive comparisons, and careful proofreading. Overall, the exam was seen as fair and well-aligned with candidate abilities, with clear strategies outlined for further improvement.

Component 2:

This report evaluates candidate performance across Component 2. Section A assessed candidates on post-1914 prose and drama texts, with *An Inspector Calls*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Blood Brothers* remaining the most popular. New additions, *Boys Don't Cry* and *Leave Taking*, were also well received. Candidates demonstrated good textual knowledge and increasingly effective AO2 analysis, avoiding overuse of terminology and feature-spotting. AO4 was assessed here, with varied accuracy in spelling and grammar.

Section B focused on 19th-century prose, with *A Christmas Carol* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* proving most popular. Most candidates structured responses well, often tracking character development. Contextual understanding (AO3) was generally integrated appropriately. Stronger responses explored subtext and language use, while weaker ones relied on narrative summary or superficial context.

Section C involved comparison of two unseen poems, *Autumn* and *Frost on the Shortest Day*, allowing access for all abilities. Most candidates engaged well with tone, imagery, and theme, though some struggled with the more abstract ideas in the second poem. Comparative skills in 3.2 showed improvement over previous series.

Across the paper, the source-based essay format continued to support a wide range of learners. Performance trends indicate better integration of extract and wider text, improved planning, and more analytical depth. Areas for improvement include reducing generalised contextual comments, securing key spellings, and discouraging excessive reliance on film interpretations. Overall, candidates showed strong engagement with texts and growing confidence in responding analytically across all ability levels.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Knowledge across the beginning, middle and end of the set texts.	Blended Learning Resources on all the major texts.	Interactive self-study content covering the set texts.
Knowledge of the poems in the anthology.	Poetry Anthology Resources.	A set of resources to support the teaching and learning of a selection of the poems from the current anthology. Please note – there are new resources for the new anthology for first assessment in 2027.
An overview of the key themes, characters and contextual information (where relevant) of the chosen set texts.	Knowledge Organisers.	A bank of Knowledge Organisers to support the learning of GCSE English Literature.

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Component 1

Overview of the Component

- In Section A extract questions assess AO1 and AO2 and essay questions assess AO1, AO2 and AO4. Section B assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 in the first question and AO1, AO2 and AO3 in the comparison question.
- Shakespeare and the poetry anthology are assessed. Candidates are assessed on their ability to show their knowledge of dramatic techniques and demonstrate their understanding of plot, characterisation, events and key themes, they are assessed on their ability to analyse language, structure and form. In Section B they are assessed on their understanding of the poem and the relationships between them and the contexts in which they were written. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are also assessed in the Shakespeare essay questions.
- The assessment compared well with other series. Candidates of all abilities were able to access the questions, approach them in diverse ways and achieve their potential. Examiners were impressed with the enthusiasm and knowledge shown across all the texts, highlighting the rarity of brief or unattempted responses to the Shakespeare questions in particular. However, as in previous series, a small but significant minority of candidates infringed the rubric of the exam by attempting multiple extract questions, underlining the necessity of ensuring that all candidates are familiar with the paper's layout and requirements prior to sitting the exam.
For the poetry questions, engagement with Duffy's "Valentine" was extremely high, with examiners noting improvements in how candidates addressed AO2. They saw a wide range of poems used successfully for question 72, and while there were still some candidates who didn't manage a meaningful response to this final question, there was a general sense that the improvement in engagement for this question reported in last summer's series was at least maintained.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Extract Questions

Romeo and Juliet

The vast majority of candidates recognized the extract as coming from the opening scene of the play, with just a few believing it was from either Act 3 scene 1 or Act 5 Scene 3. Examiners felt that the question was extremely accessible, enabling responses to explore the anger and aggression of the heads of the feuding families, the contrasting responses of their wives, and the effect of the "ancient grudge" on the long-suffering citizens of Verona. The Prince's speech, especially his final two lines, led many candidates to show their appreciation of the extract's structural significance in setting up and foreshadowing later events.

Stronger responses often began by placing the extract, then considering the key ideas and viewpoints within it. They commented effectively on the urgency and violence shown in the first half, along with the Prince's subsequent intervention and threat. Many tracked the extract successfully, with some seeing the humour created by the stage direction describing "old Capulet in his gown" demanding a longsword and Lady Capulet's line "A crutch! A crutch! Why call you for a sword?" Others appreciated Shakespeare's mirroring of characters in order to present the similarities between both sides of the feud. Weaker responses tended to neglect the Prince's speech, or get sidetracked by the wives' attempts to restrain their husbands' violent urges into offering extended discussion of Elizabethan gender roles, usually at the expense of a sharper focus on the language and structure of the extract itself. While the Prince's description of the families as "enemies to peace" and "beasts" often drew effective comments from candidates, examiners felt that equally useful phrases such as "quench the fire", "purple fountains" and "bloody hands" were mostly overlooked. Overall, the main message from examiners was that a lack of focus on specific language choices inhibited marks more than any other factor.

Macbeth

Despite not directly featuring the play's central characters, the dialogue between Lady Macduff and Ross in the extract presents the effects of Macbeth's tyranny on a domestic level, and precedes a pivotal moment in the play that leads directly to his downfall. The majority of candidates recognized this, and most could track the conversation between the characters, with the accessibility of the language enabling them to probe linguistic and structural choices such as Lady Macduff's use of questions, Ross's triple-adjective defence of Macduff's character ("noble, wise, judicious") and key words such as "fly", "fear" and "madness". The contrast between Lady Macduff's confusion and frustration at her husband's sudden departure and Ross's attempt at calm reassurance enabled candidates to make relevant points, and examiners were also able to reward comments on the second-hand presentation of Macduff (and indeed Macbeth) in the extract.

Better responses were usually informed by the scene's dramatic irony, with the audience having recently been informed of Macbeth's intentions to "give to th'edge of the sword (Macduff's) wife, his babes", and candidates that understood what happens shortly after Ross's departure tended to empathise more fully with Lady Macduff's distress. Examiners pointed to engagement with the image of the "poor wren" defending "her young ones in her nest, against the owl" as a key discriminator for higher bands; those that could go on to discuss the "wild and violent sea" of Macbeth's reign often went on to reach the very top bands. Candidates that could see the breadth of Lady Macduff's emotions were able to offer more detailed, thoughtful responses, while the few that questioned Ross's early departure and his possible reasons for it impressed examiners. Less successful responses tended to lack an understanding of where the extract fits into the play, or neglected AO2 by passing up the opportunities to probe language choices. Some candidates seemed to answer as if they had simply misread "Lady Macduff" as "Lady Macbeth", often tying themselves in knots trying to place this moment in her character arc. Overall, though, examiners felt that the biggest source of underachievement was the time wasted in offering sweeping and entirely unnecessary contextual comments on gender in Jacobean society, despite contextual understanding not being assessed in the Shakespeare questions.

Unfortunately, many examiners noted how Lady Macduff was the recipient of the kind of casual misogyny that has been directed at Lady Macbeth in recent series – apparently because she has the temerity to question why she and her family have been deserted by her husband just before they are brutally murdered. Examiners saw her described as "disrespectful", "annoying", "stupid" and "playing the victim", while Ross was offered sympathy. While such views were difficult to support and therefore not easy to reward, the concerns here go far beyond the narrow confines of an extract question.

Othello

Examiners felt that this was an extremely accessible extract, with almost all candidates able to place it within the play's narrative and discuss the joy of Othello and Desdemona being reunited in Cyprus and how it is undercut by Iago's ominous aside. Most candidates drew on the mirrored expressions of love in the shared line "O, my fair warrior!", "My dear Othello!", with some unpicking "fair warrior", inferring Othello's respect for Desdemona's strength and seeing this as an equal, loving relationship. The pair's hyperbolic exchange and public kiss provided material for discussion, although there were some misunderstandings prompted by Othello's description of the height of the waves and Desdemona's invocation of "the heavens".

Less effective responses failed to pick up on the shift in tone towards the end of the extract when we are brought into Iago's confidence with the aside. Some were distracted by Iago's reference to "the Moor" at the start and wanted to discuss Iago's racism, often linking this to unhelpful contextual comments. Some candidates managed Band 3 responses that would easily have reached Band 4 with a little more attention to AO2. Stronger answers sensed the foreboding references to death in Othello's speech, noting that this moment marks the peak of Othello and Desdemona's relationship, so the only way is down, signalled by Iago's malevolent promise to the audience. Those that unpicked this metaphor ("I'll set down the pegs that make this music") tended to do well, often also noting the irony of Othello's triumphant "our wars are done" just as a bigger battle is beginning.

Much Ado About Nothing

This extract worked extremely well for all levels of ability, with almost all candidates recognising that it was the gulling of Beatrice, and the majority being able to place it accurately within the play's events. Many commented on Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony and saw the humour in Beatrice being tricked so easily. It was particularly pleasing to see how many candidates appreciated how we are presented with another side to Hero in this scene, with many commenting on the playfulness and intelligence she shows while she is away from the male characters. Most candidates began by discussing Ursula and Hero's conversation, often exploring the hyperbole and complimentary language used to describe Benedick. This was usually followed by engagement with Beatrice's soliloquy, with many viewing this as a turning point for Beatrice, as she finally accepts her underlying feelings for Benedick.

Stronger responses dealt with both halves of the extract, exploring the exaggeratedly positive language and imagery of Ursula and Hero's discussion of Benedick's qualities before considering Beatrice's thoughts and feelings when alone at the end of the scene, often exploring the imagery of "taming" and the "fire" in her ears, and appreciating its structural importance to her relationship with Benedick. Less successful responses tended not to engage with Beatrice's soliloquy, or struggled to appreciate the covert trickery of the conversation between Ursula and Hero. There was some misunderstanding, with some believing that Ursula is in love with Benedick; there was also frequent confusion over who or what is "prized", with many believing that this word referred to Benedick rather than Beatrice's wit. The most common reason for underachievement was a reluctance to engage with the rich language and imagery in the extract, thereby limiting AO2 marks.

Twelfth Night

It appears that no centres had taught this text for this series, meaning that responses examiners saw were the result of rubric infringements and therefore answered as unseen. This inevitably limited marks to the lower end of Band 2 or below.

The Merchant of Venice

The extract enabled engagement from candidates of all abilities, given that it is from early in the play, has a strong narrative element and is key to setting up the play's plot. Candidates were generally empathetic towards Shylock's position, but disapproved of his racist attitude, with some feeling that the extract itself gave a skewed impression of his character, while many saw this as the moment he is established as the play's antagonist. His attitude towards Christians in general and Antonio in particular provided plenty of material for comment. Opinions on Bassanio's attitude varied, with many feeling that his invitation to dinner was sincerely meant and an expression of goodwill; others saw duplicity, and an attempt to ingratiate himself with Shylock to secure the loan.

Weaker responses often failed to grasp the significance of Shylock's aside or became too caught up in contextual explanation and comment, often at the expense of digging into the language and structure of the extract itself. A few candidates took their response beyond the extract, wasting valuable time that would have been more productively spent in analysing the dynamic between the three characters presented on the page. Quite a few candidates didn't get as far as Antonio's lines towards the end of the extract, so weren't able to comment on his high-handed words regarding the loan. Better answers tended to do well on Shylock in particular, seeing the sharp contrast between his superficially polite speech towards Antonio and the deep hatred shown within the aside. For AO2, there were successful explorations of phrases such as "I will feed fat the ancient grudge", "our sacred nation" and "cursed be our tribe", and close engagement with language choice was often the mark of a more successful response.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on the details in the extract.
- "Placing" of the extract within the play's events and giving some overview of its significance and key ideas.
- 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 specific supporting references rather than general impressions.
- Less reference to contextual factors when AO3 is not addressed in this question.
- More practice on probing figurative language and connotations of key words to accumulate AO2 marks.
- Practice in responding to both soliloquies and extracts with characters interacting and responding to each other.

Essay Questions

Romeo and Juliet

This question on one of the play's key themes proved accessible, with examiners reporting that it enabled a variety of approaches. While most started with the Prologue and the labelling of Romeo and Juliet as "star-crossed lovers", then tracked the idea of fate across the play, others selected key moments that seemed to involve luck, mainly good luck, to bring about the meeting of Romeo and Juliet in Act 1 Scene 5 and then bad luck in the subsequent events that lead to their suicides. Some candidates explored the idea of free will and the extent to which certain characters such as Friar Lawrence and Romeo are responsible for their own actions in the play, despite blaming fate or misfortune. Examiners noted the fact that contextual details intruded less for this question than in recent years, and were limited to brief and reasonable mentions of Elizabethan ideas of fate and astrology.

Weaker responses tended to be narrative in nature and struggled to find clear focus on the key words in the question, perhaps inserting the words "fate" or "luck" rather tenuously. These often tried to fit in learned quotations that lacked relevance to the question. Examiners felt that such answers would have benefitted from a more selective approach, focusing on key moments where fate or luck could be seen to play a tangible part. Typically, the main limiting factor in less successful responses was a lack of engagement with language choices for AO2 marks. In more effective answers, examiners noted how apt quotations such as "I am fortunes fool", "I defy you stars" and "a plague on both your houses" were used both to support points and enable effective word-level analysis. As ever, candidates who planned their responses often managed to produce more focused, coherent discussions. Those who looked at Romeo's struggles with the machinery of fate and his ultimately futile attempts to alter his destiny often did well, usually selecting key moments such as the Prologue, Act 1 Scene 5, Act 3 Scene 1 and Act 5 Scene 3 to explore the theme. Friar Lawrence's foreshadowing warnings to the doomed couple (for example "These violent delights have violent ends") and Shakespeare's use of celestial imagery also proved fruitful in addressing AO2 in the mark scheme.

Macbeth

Examiners felt that this question was extremely accessible, allowing even the least confident of candidates to respond and achieve their potential. The opportunity to write about how the play's title character changes was welcomed, and the question elicited a high number of sustained responses. Most candidates began with the Captain's report of "brave" Macbeth's exploits on the battlefield in Act 1 Scene 2 and tracked his changes across the play, with those that picked out key turning points gaining credit for the structural part of AO2 to add to their AO1 understanding. Many also noted Macbeth's propensity for violence in that early scene, and were able to see this as Shakespeare foreshadowing his later fall into murderous tyranny. Most candidates saw the influence of the witches and Lady Macbeth as drivers of his changes, along with his own "vaulting ambition". Examiners were impressed with the sheer range of quotations that had been learned by candidates to support their comments and enable language analysis across their answers.

Stronger responses tended to be selective in their choices of key moments where Macbeth changes, supporting their discussion with apt quotations that could then be probed for AO2 marks. They also managed to offer an overarching view of Macbeth, sometimes bringing in evidence from other characters' perspectives on him, such as "something wicked this way comes" and "those he commands move only in command, nothing in love". Candidates who saw Macbeth as a construct rather than just a man, and who offered a nuanced, evaluative view, inevitably reached the upper end of the mark scheme. In contrast, those that took a narrative approach with less of a focus on the specific changes Macbeth undergoes struggled to get out of Band 2, particularly if they neglected word-level language analysis. Examiners were frustrated when effective quotations had been learned and used as evidence, yet not mined for AO2 marks. Other key messages from examiners included how lengthy forays into contextual discussion, for example on James I's obsession with the supernatural, Jacobean gender roles or the Gunpowder Plot, rarely added much to answers; also, they are less impressed by the showy use of niche technical terminology (this year's favourite: chremamorphism) than revision websites might have you believe, especially when such terms are used incorrectly or lead to lengthy explanations of what they entail. As always, it is comment on the effects of devices and word choices that brings the best rewards for AO2.

Othello

Examiners were generally impressed with how well candidates responded to this relatively open question, and many enjoyed the freedom it afforded them: most wrote about racism or sexism in the play, with many discussing both; some candidates also discussed class prejudice. The majority of responses began with Iago and Roderigo's late-night alarmist rousing of Brabantio, with "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe" providing ample opportunity for AO2 analysis. Iago's racism was explored, along with Brabantio's accusation that Othello used enchantments to coerce Desdemona, the frequent use of "the Moor" and the Duke's backhanded compliment that Othello is "far more fair than black". Many candidates explored the misogyny that Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca suffer, with Iago's view of women and treatment of Emilia prominent, along with how Desdemona is seen as Brabantio's property at the start of the play and Cassio's treatment of Bianca and description of her as a "bauble".

Better responses were able to show strong focus on prejudice and explore its presentation and effects across the whole play. Examiners were particularly impressed with the good use of textual quotations as both effective support for discussion and material for close analysis of language and structure. Those that were able to explore Iago's manipulation of Othello's internalised racism and how this is used to change him did well, often offering well-chosen references in support. Similarly, candidates that tracked Emilia's progression from pleasing Iago's "fantasy" with the handkerchief, to trying to educate Desdemona about the realities for women in the world, to finally finding her voice to expose Iago – and dying for it – were usually very successful overall. Weaker responses tended to struggle with focus, mainly due to not fully understanding "prejudice" and getting it confused with jealousy, power or a general dislike. Other reasons for less successful responses were brevity, a lack of textual support or reluctance to address AO2.

Much Ado About Nothing

Examiners reported that this question was generally handled well by candidates, with the concept of reputation clearly understood. A wide range of characters was discussed, most commonly Hero, Claudio, Don Pedro, Don John and Leonato, but also Beatrice, Benedick, and, occasionally, Dogberry. Reputation was interpreted in a variety of ways, encompassing ideas of honour, status, respectability, shame, slander and respect. Many discussed the lack of consistency and fairness around reputation, particularly regarding the female characters in the play and gender inequality. Context tended to creep in here, although in most cases without too much detrimental digression. The question lent itself to a non-chronological approach, which meant there were fewer narrative approaches than usual, and examiners noted that there were some confident links made to the title, and often thoughtful discussion of the unnecessary problems caused by the characters' fixation with reputation. Unsurprisingly, Hero's rejection at the altar was the moment most frequently discussed, providing candidates with plenty of textual references to work on for AO2 marks.

Better responses really explored the focus of the question: "the importance of reputation", and were able to look evaluatively at its influence on characters and how it drives the plot. They tended to address AO2 both structurally, through discussion of dramatic irony, foreshadowing and turning points, and through language choices, with the contrasting imagery of the lamb and the lion used to describe Claudio and the connotations of Leonato's view of Hero having fallen into "a pit of ink" proving particularly useful. Weaker responses tended to be brief, often only writing about Claudio and Hero, or showed confusion over plot, characters or quotations. Some took the gender-based aspects of reputation into extended explanation of the inequalities in Elizabethan England, thus losing focus and wasting precious time. As usual, most detrimental to marks was a lack of attention to AO2, often keeping marks at the lower end of Bands.

Twelfth Night

As previously noted, it appears no centres had taught this text for this series. However, examiners saw a small number of responses from candidates who clearly knew the text, perhaps from studying it at Key Stage 3 or another school. They were able to focus on the question and show understanding of characters and events, though were perhaps inevitably light on specific textual references, and thus struggled to register much in the way of AO2 marks.

The Merchant of Venice

This was an accessible question, and almost all candidates were able to respond, often at length, although examiners noted that many took a narrative-driven approach and struggled to get beyond Band 3, due to prioritising the re-telling of plot over evaluation of the relationship itself. Most candidates started with Bassanio's description of Portia as "a lady richly left" and a "golden fleece" in Act 1 Scene 1, with some then picking up on Portia's brief, approving comments on Bassanio in Act 1 Scene 3. From there, most looked at the casket scene, the courtroom and Portia's trick with the ring. Many candidates explored the balance of power within the relationship – is Portia submissive, or is she subtly controlling? – or discussed whether Bassanio really loves Portia, or marries her for purely mercenary reasons.

Better responses were evaluative, selecting key events involving the characters and exploring the fluctuating dynamic between them. Crucially, they were able to address AO2 through a combination of structural awareness and analysis of key words and images in relevant textual references. Some candidates compared them with other romantic relationships in the play, Nerissa and Gratiano, and Jessica and Lorenzo, with some success. Weaker answers tended to be narrative-focused, offering generalised statements, often without much attention to AO2; sometimes there were confusions with character or plot. Examiners felt that many responses could have been improved with more incorporation of specific textual detail in order to develop ideas further and provide more material for language analysis.

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.
- Probing of linguistic and structural choices in quotations used to support points.
- Some analysis of the writer's intentions when creating characters and plots.
- Highlighting of important turning points and key contrasts and their effects.
- Careful spelling and punctuation, with vocabulary and sentence structure used to control meaning effectively.

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- Tracking a character / relationship / theme across the whole text, with effective coverage of the play.
- More focus on including short quotations that can be analysed for AO2; fewer contextual comments.
- Practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question posed.
- Practice in selecting detailed textual evidence for ideas.
- Practice in proof-reading responses to avoid technical errors, such as forgetting use of capital letters for character names, neglecting punctuation and abbreviating character names.

Anthology Poetry

71

This question on the presentation of love in Duffy's *Valentine* enabled almost all candidates to respond, and examiners felt that it was accessible for the whole ability range. Many understood that the speaker is rejecting stereotypical, commercialized Valentine's gifts, along with some of the traditional conventions of love poetry, while offering a more honest representation of love. Candidates were able to engage with the ideas and language of the poem through the extended metaphor of the onion, with the majority probing the connotations of phrases such as "a moon wrapped in brown paper", "fierce kiss" and "cling to your knife", and this meant that AO2 marks could be accumulated by many. Despite being pleased to see so much engagement with the poem, examiners felt that interpretations were sometimes rather skewed, noting that a significant minority of responses suggested that Duffy is rejecting love itself, or focused almost entirely on the darker second half of the poem without seeing the "light", or appreciating the poem's more playful moments. Similarly, some examiners were uncomfortable with biographical context that either seemed to make dubious assertions about Duffy's love life or simplistic links between her sexuality and the "weird gift" of the onion. Overall, a relative lack of meaningful context was the most limiting factor here, with social, cultural, historical and literary connections generally more effective than biographical ones.

Stronger responses were able to offer some overview of the key ideas about how love is presented in the poem, and took full advantage of the poem's accessible yet rich language to address AO2. Examiners noted that structural comments were more meaningful than usual, with Duffy's use of free verse, repetition and single line / word stanzas eliciting some thoughtful comments. Careful tracking through the poem, noting the shifts in tone, enabled some to achieve sustained, engaged commentaries, particularly when linked to appropriate contextual details.

Even the weakest candidates were able to say something about the presentation of love, such as how both an onion and a loving relationship have layers; however, less successful responses tended to be brief and thin, usually omitting context and struggling to probe language choices. Candidates who saw the poem as a portrayal of a "toxic relationship", rather than a presentation of the realities of love that any of us might experience, tended to limit themselves.

72

Examiners were pleased to report that a wide range of comparison poems worked well for this question. The most popular choices were poems that feature romantic love and relationships, primarily "Sonnet 43" and "Cozy Apologia", closely followed by "The Manhunt", "She Walks in Beauty", "A Wife in London" and "Afternoons". Love of nature was explored in "Death of a Naturalist" and "To Autumn", love of country in "The Soldier" and self-love in "Ozymandias". As always, the choice of poem mattered, with those who made their selection based on the theme of love invariably being more successful than those seemingly determined to write about the poem they felt they knew best, regardless of its relevance to the question. Examiners felt that context was often handled better here than in 71, with the autobiographical nature of both "Sonnet 43" and "Cozy Apologia" perhaps helping and compensating a little for a relative lack of context on "Valentine". As in previous years there was a small but stubborn minority of scripts where 72 was very brief or not attempted. There was also some confusion of the titles of poems, but this didn't necessarily lead to further problems in the comparison; on occasion, however, ideas and quotations were sometimes muddled between poems.

“Sonnet 43” proved to be a really successful choice, with candidates able to contrast a more traditional love poem with Duffy’s rejection of conventions and romantic stereotypes. The differences in form and tone also aided comparison, while Barrett Browning’s life and relationships provided contextual material. Examiners also noted that this poem also lent itself to effective AO2 analysis, with the sonnet form, use of repetition and religious imagery frequently utilized. Similarly, Dove’s “Cozy Apologia” provided some clear links in its use of everyday objects to represent love, while allowing candidates to contrast its calm contentment with the darker mood of the latter part of “Valentine”, while Hurricane Floyd and Dove’s marriage to Fred offered some obvious context.

“She Walks in Beauty” worked well for many candidates, who felt that the superficiality of the love – or attraction, at least – was a clear contrast to the complexities of love presented in “Valentine”, and were able to explore and compare the poems’ imagery. “The Manhunt” – last year’s 71 poem – was also a good choice, with candidates able to compare Laura’s patient, unselfish love for Eddie with the “careful undressing” of love in “Valentine”. It also provided a rich source of word-level analysis and clear contextual details. Meanwhile, “Afternoons” offered the chance to look at married love diminishing over time, set against what was often seen as the constraint of marriage (“shrink to a wedding ring”) presented in “Valentine”.

Examiners saw plenty of less-obvious selections which nonetheless worked, with discussion of “Death of a Naturalist” looking at a loss of love for nature, focusing on the imagery of danger and violence in the latter half of both poems. Similarly, Brooke’s love for his country and the use of the sonnet form to express it this in “The Soldier” made for some thoughtful comparisons with “Valentine”, with some candidates considering the dangers of an all-consuming love.

Better responses usually benefitted from a considered choice of poem, and were able to draw on a few learned quotations that enabled candidates to both support their points and explore and compare language choices. Candidates tended to integrate their points of comparison throughout their answers, interweaving contextual details throughout. Weaker responses were sometimes the result of unhelpful choices of poem. More frequently, they were from candidates who struggled to recall quotations, thus missing out on specific support for AO1 and material to analyse for AO2. Examiners saw responses where candidates wrote about one poem, then wrote about the other, with very little cross-comparison, which inevitably limited the overall mark, given the nature of the task.

Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- Careful tracking of the poem set for 71, with detailed coverage of the whole poem.
- Probing of subtext, with tentative interpretation rooted in the poems.
- Strong focus on imagery, language and the effects they create.
- Interweaving of relevant contextual detail into discussion.
- A sensible selection of poem to suit the theme for comparison in 72.
- Probing of linguistic and structural choices in quotations used to support points.
- Detailed, developed comparison of ideas, language and context in 72.

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- More detailed coverage of the whole poem set in 71.
- Practice in supporting ideas with detailed reference to the poems.
- Selection of an appropriate poem for comparison, with a strong focus on the theme of the question.
- Effective revision of anthology poems to ensure the ability to recall key quotations and make good use of textual detail.
- Practising a structured approach to comparison, ensuring effective coverage of both poems and detailed comparative comments in 72.
- Incorporation of relevant contextual detail to support overall discussion in both 71 and 72.

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 2

Overview of the Component

Assessment Objectives

- This Component assesses AO1, AO2 in all sections.
- AO3 is assessed in Section B only.
- AO4 is assessed in Section A only.

Content/Topics/Skills

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

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

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

In Section C, candidates were assessed on AO1 and AO2 and their consolidation of skills developed across the specification, in a comparison of two unseen poems: *Autumn* by Alan Bold and *The Frost on the Shortest Day* by Patricia Beer.

Overview of General Performance

The most popular Section A text continues to be *An Inspector Calls* with significant numbers electing to study *Lord of the Flies* and *Blood Brothers*. A sizeable minority of candidates also studied *The Woman in Black* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The two new texts, *Boys Don't Cry* and *Leave Taking* were also popular, especially considering their unfamiliarity with centres. Smaller numbers tackled all the other texts, but all were studied across this year's cohort, including *Anita and Me* which was successfully studied by candidates again this year.

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

The paper contained a range of character and theme questions across Sections A and B. As intended, the source-based essay format was again successful in offering support in the closed book, untiered exam. The questions worked across all texts for all abilities and the full range of responses were seen.

The two linked poems on this untiered paper, *Autumn* by Alan Bold and *Frost on the Shortest Day* by Patricia Beer, were well received and the pairing was extremely successful. The subject matter of the seasons was familiar to the candidates and allowed the vast majority to engage on some level, with plenty of opportunities to stretch all abilities when discussing AO1 and AO2.

Comparison to Previous Series

In the majority of questions, there seemed to be nothing in the performance of candidates to suggest that this component was more or less accessible than previous years. However, the question on *A Christmas Carol* proved to be very accessible and open to the vast majority of candidates, with outcomes suggesting that the question was slightly easier than in previous series.

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

General Trends and Patterns

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

In all sections, the majority of candidates were also able to demonstrate some good AO2 analysis and evaluation skills with relevant subject terminology. Ongoing Professional Learning advice has continued to have been followed as there was again less emphasis on feature spotting and forced subject terminology than previous years. This helped the fluency of responses. More able pupils demonstrated exceptional AO2 analysis across all texts, striking the right balance of exploring the closer impact of key words, techniques and images, where relevant to the question.

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

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

In Section C, understanding of the first poem was perhaps more assured than the second, given its slightly more broad imagery, but there were still many confident and assured responses to both poems.

In Question 3.2, most candidates took time to explore the second poem before comparing with the first, which has been a steadily improving trend since the early days of the specification.

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

Different Approaches to Questions

The vast majority of candidates used the extract within their essays. Many candidates dealt with the extract and then moved on to discuss the text as a whole, while others took a linear approach and discussed the extracts at appropriate points in their essays (e.g. many candidates dealt with *A Christmas Carol* towards the end of the essays as the extract was taken from towards the end of the text). A minority took a more integrated approach by dipping in and out of the extract to make links across the whole text. All approaches are valid and effective.

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

In Section C, most candidates used an integrated approach to question 3.2, with some discussing the second poem first then making comparative or linking points.

More candidates seem to have used the statement in the poetry question which gives an overview of what the poems are about at a surface level. This meant that there were fewer forced, often implausible interpretations of what the poems might have been about.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Post-1914 Prose/Drama

Lord of the Flies

The extract proved to be very accessible, with most candidates able to discuss how the scene fitted into the theme of conflict in the novel. Many candidates took the opportunity to comment on Golding's use of light imagery, the impending storm and its significance, and how the childish language emphasised the ages of the boys. Discussion of Simon and his tentative assertion that "maybe there is a beast" were given appropriate attention as were the contributions of Ralph and Piggy. The use of short bursts of dialogue were commented on by many to gain AO2 credit.

In the wider text, most candidates sensibly chose to focus on the growing conflict between Jack and Ralph in regard to their priorities and decision-making. This often widened and developed into discussion of conflicting attitudes and beliefs, settings and ideologies. The very best responses covered key events from the whole novel and included the ending, leading up to the final moments and what many perceived as conflict resolution.

Anita and Me

It was very pleasing to see an uptake of this text by centres, with candidates providing engaged, knowledgeable responses. Most of these made extremely good use of the extract to write about Mama's hard-working ethic and her total commitment to looking after her family, often taking the opportunity to explore techniques used by Syal in the extract, such as listing, personification, alliteration and onomatopoeia and then commenting on the effect of these in presenting Mama's character. The very best explored the "swapping saris for M&S separates" quote as a springboard into the way Mama reflected the conflict and integration of cultures in the novel.

In terms of the wider text, many candidates compared the parenting styles of Meena's mother with Anita's mother, Deirdre, and there was a lot of mature discussion on cultural expectations. The poignancy of Mama's sense of alienation was nicely juxtaposed with her willingness to see the best in British life and wry humour in the face of its shortcomings. The effect of Sunil's arrival on both mother and daughter was often sensitively handled as was Nanima's contribution.

Boys Don't Cry

This was the first year of examination for this text and it proved very successful, working well for the full range of candidates across the entire ability range. The question, on the theme of growing up in the novel, provided candidates with an open opportunity to discuss characters, events and their presentation in the novel.

Many candidates sensibly used the extract as a starting point for their exploration of the theme. There was widespread recognition of the turning point in Dante's attitudes towards Emma, with much discussion of the simile likening Emma to a "fence which needed to be knocked down". This often led on to Dante's use of pronouns when describing Emma, turning from 'it' to 'her' as an example of how he matures.

Whilst many candidates understandably focussed on Dante and his attitudes and relationship with Emma, many more widened out the focus to include other characters like Adam, Emma herself, Josh and even Tyler. There was much relevant discussion on toxic masculinity, and it seems like the text resonated with candidates in this respect.

The Woman in Black

The question provided candidates with an open opportunity to discuss shock and horror in the novel. Many candidates took advantage of this to analyse key moments, characters and settings. Most candidates used the extract effectively to analyse Hill's use of imagery in describing the way horror was built, with frequent references to pathetic fallacy (e.g. the way fog builds isolation), Hill's use of aural imagery to create a sense of disorientation, and the use of a child to convey horror at their distress and loss.

Many candidates went on to discuss the shock of the woman in black's appearance at Alice Drablow's funeral, often using last year's extract to good effect. Other well-chosen moments included discussion of Arthur Kipps' experiences and discoveries at Eel Marsh House and the deaths of Stella and Joseph at the end of the novel.

Film references continue to be a particular issue for a significant minority of candidates on this text, especially as they often deviate dramatically from the events of the novel. More selective use of the film version as a teaching aid is advisable.

Oranges are not the Only Fruit

Mrs Winterson, and her changing relationship with Jeanette, is central to the novel and the vast majority of candidates engaged well with the question. The extract provided a rich opportunity to discuss Mrs Winterson's uncompromising character. Those that used the extract well often noted Winterson's presentation of Mrs Winterson's hypocrisy, e.g. "She said he was a devil, but she still took the mince." Candidates also frequently mentioned the character's snobbery, e.g. "keeping her 'H' as best she could". Many responses also explored the difficult relationship with Jeanette, noting the final line of the extract, "I hated her." Often this was used as a springboard into the wider novel, including discussion of Jeanette's hospital stay and her 'exorcism'. Many were also able to comment on the partial reconciliation between Jeanette and Mrs Winterson at the end of the novel.

It was also pleasing to note the recognition of the humour that the character provides in the extract and the wider novel. Similarly, the frequent purposeful references to the text's mythic elements, with comments on the allegorical nature of these elements, were also signifiers of candidates achieving marks in the higher bands.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

The question on Christopher's father, Ed, was very successful in providing the opportunity for some thoughtful, perceptive and heartfelt responses from candidates. It enabled them to evaluate whether Ed can be forgiven for hitting Christopher. The best responses discussed Ed's role in Christopher's life, often in comparison to Judy, and the challenges involved in raising a child with autism.

Many candidates commented successfully on the extract, in particular the mocking tone of, "Come on, you're the memory man...", the repeated questioning of Christopher by Ed, e.g. "What am I going to do with you, Christopher?". There was often some interesting discussion about the use of stage directions in the extract and the shocking and impactful moment when, "Ed *hits the side of Christopher's head*."

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

Leave Taking

This was the first year that this text had been examined and it proved very successful, working well for the full range of candidates across the ability range. The question, on the character of Enid, provided candidates with an opportunity to discuss the character's background, family relationships and her connection to the play's themes and provided a good basis for some very confident and sensitive responses. Many candidates commented on key moments such as the subdued nature of the character as detailed in the opening stage directions, and the rare opening up to Viv about her previous life in the Caribbean.

In the wider text, many candidates discussed Enid's reaction to Del's pregnancy and the way she reacts to and treats Viv, particularly in respect to her education. Some candidates also discussed the presentation of Enid in terms of her determination to have a better life and how house-proud this has made her. Her often-difficult relationship with her children was a rich seam of discussion with many discussing the end of the text and the partial reconciliation between Enid and Del.

An Inspector Calls

An Inspector Calls continues to remain the most popular of the Section A texts by a considerable margin. The play proved once again to be engaging and accessible to the complete ability range of candidates who were able to discuss Gerald Croft and his importance to the play as a whole. The vast majority were able to engage with the extract and demonstrate secure knowledge of the wider text.

A range of valid approaches was used. Some candidates chose to track Gerald's role chronologically from the beginning, while others used the extract as a springboard into a discussion of his relationships with Sheila and Daisy. The extract worked well in enabling candidates to reflect on Gerald and Sheila's relationship and the revelation of his affair with Daisy Renton. Sheila's sarcastic use of the phrase "fairy prince" was thoughtfully explored by some candidates. In terms of his relationship with Daisy Renton, some candidates argued that he was kind to her, giving Daisy money to live on when he leaves her, and was then saddened by her death; others argued that he abused Daisy in much the same way as Alderman Meggarty, and had shown no regret about his actions, only giving her a small amount of money when he leaves. There were also responses that promoted a mix of these interpretations. All responses were taken openly and rewarded on merit.

Successful responses tended to focus on the description of Gerald in the opening stage directions which describe Gerald as an "easy well-bred young man-about-town". Many interpreted "bred" (often misspelled as "bread") having animalistic connotations and implying that he had been trained to act a particular way in his class. The phrase "man-about-town" was often interpreted as proof of his familiarity with the Palace Bar. Other frequent mentions were given to Gerald's interactions with Mr Birling over dinner, and his role and reaction to the final revelation that the Inspector is not real at the end of the play. The engagement ring attracted some attention, not only as a symbol of Gerald's control over Sheila, because he chose it for her, but as a symbol of the cyclical nature of the play. The best responses were able to evaluate Gerald's position between the younger and older generations and many candidates made the point that, as Gerald is not in the room for the Inspector's "fire and blood and anguish" speech, he doesn't fully appreciate the lesson he has to learn. Although context is not rewarded in Section A of this component, it understandably has an integral part to play in the teaching of this text. The majority of candidates were at least aware of the issues of class, Capitalism versus Socialism, and the patriarchal society at the time the play is set.

Weaker responses sometimes confused the characters of Eric and Gerald, mixing up events from both characters' involvement with Eva Smith, however these were relatively rare. Some candidates tried to crowbar in information on other characters, e.g. Mr Birling's attitudes to business and his erroneous opinions, sometimes linked to Gerald with just a short sentence. References to Gerald's 'toxic masculinity' were abundant and often not totally secure in the context of the character.

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

The History Boys

Responses to this text continue to be, on the whole, of a very high standard. This seems to be a text that is well chosen by centres who know their candidates' ability to respond sensitively to its humour, themes and messages about the human condition. These candidates were well prepared to discuss Irwin's character in the extract and wider play.

Candidates wrote of Irwin's meretricious nature; his significance in the boys' development, both educationally and in growing up; his significance as a representative of the new education system; and his sexual predilections. The extract was often thoroughly explored with perceptive understanding of Irwin's self-serving intentions beneath the guise he employs of improving the boys' educational prospects. As ever, not all answers got to talk about the end of the play, but a number did make pertinent comments on Bennett's structure through talking about the prolepsis and the boys' slow desertion of Hector. Comparison with Hector and educational methods was pertinent but occasionally some candidates focussed more on Hector and occasionally lost focus on Irwin.

Film references were sometimes an issue for a small minority of candidates on this text, who commented on things that don't happen in the play. Selective use of the film version as a teaching aid is advisable.

Blood Brothers

The question worked extremely well across the full range of abilities. The vast majority of candidates had a very good knowledge of Mrs Lyons' character and the play as a whole. A large number of candidates tracked through Mrs Lyons' chronological appearances in the play and this approach often led to well-structured essays. These candidates often included the extract early in their response, in keeping with its placing in the early part of the play. Weaker students often relied on the extract, making only generalised references to the wider play, or occasionally no wider detail at all.

Many thoughtful responses explored how Mrs Lyons manipulates Mrs Johnstone, preying on her superstitious beliefs when inventing the superstition about the twins. Many used the quotation, "You will kill them," to express Mrs Lyons' desperation. Again, stronger candidates analysed how the stage directions highlighted Mrs Lyons' anger, frustration and power over Mrs Johnstone, e.g. "*picks up the money and thrusts it...*". Many candidates discussed the theme of the inequality between social classes using details from the extract such as, "It's a lot of money..." to explore the power imbalance between the two characters.

Generally, wider references to Mrs Lyons were plentiful, with many candidates tracking her character's mental deterioration over the course of the play, culminating in her attack on Mrs Johnstone. Some made a case for Mrs Lyons being a lonely and desperate woman, with her slapping of Edward often seen as an instinctive action which proved her villainy. Pleasingly, many candidates dealt with the end of the play and Mrs Lyons' contribution to the plot and ending of the play.

Context is not explicitly rewarded in Section A but some stronger candidates dealt with this efficiently, mentioning class, poverty, and nature versus nurture to support points they were making about Mrs Lyons. There was another useful decline in less successful candidates' over-reliance on context and sweeping generalisations regarding the rich and poor. In terms of AO4, missing capitalisation of the play and the characters' names was also frequent. As always, there were many variations of the spellings of "Johnstone" and "Russell".

Summary of key points

Characteristics of a good Section A response:

- Using the extract purposefully, highlighting key details that help focus on the question and provide useful AO2 comments.
- Using the extract as a springboard into a wider discussion of the text.
- Focus on well-chosen key events or scenes, significant characters/relationships to link to the question and wider themes.
- 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.
- Close analysis of how the language, writer's techniques in the extract and wider text help to present the focus of the question.
- A suitably analytical style of writing.

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- Candidates should use the bullet points built into the start of every question and use them to shape responses.
- Candidates should be more selective in their use of the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills. There is no requirement on Component 2 to analyse the extract in detail. Instead, use the extract as a springboard for a wider discussion, with a few key words or images explored that can then be broadened out to show knowledge and understanding of the whole text.
- Avoid 'over analysis' of vocabulary, e.g. 'Gerald and Sheila have an engagement party. The adjective 'engagement' suggests they are getting married.'
- 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 conflict between the boys'.
- Avoid overly focussing on on analysis of sentence length, punctuation features or more nonfiction rhetorical devices, which again, can be an unproductive use of the extract. It also would be better to avoid unnecessary terms such as semantic fields or lexical sets and replace with simple reference to 'words' or 'phrases'.
- Plans containing points to cover and some key words are helpful and can be practised as part of examination preparation. However, full pages of quotes written down before the question often lead to shorter responses and should be discouraged.
- 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* but still needed to be closely tied to discussion of the play. Too often, context is confused and very general (e.g. 'The Industrial Revolution of the 1980s, or 'in the 1960s all women stayed at home having babies and were housewives'). 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".
- Avoid reference to plays and films when discussing prose texts.
- Responses must be legible.

Section B – 19th Century Prose

Comments on individual questions

A Christmas Carol

The question asked candidates to write about Scrooge and the way he is presented at different points in the novella using an extract where Scrooge visits the neglected grave shown to him by the final spirit. This proved to be a very accessible and engaging question that allowed candidates across the entire ability range to fully explore Dickens' presentation of Scrooge in detail. The straightforward nature of the question enabled candidates to fully demonstrate their knowledge of the text and central character confidently and structure their ideas with ease. Most responses demonstrated a clear awareness of how Scrooge is depicted at various stages of the novella, with the contrast between the extract and his earlier appearances used effectively to track Dickens' characterisation. Less successful answers often relied heavily on the extract or on a small set of overused quotations or offered generalised assertions about Scrooge's character. There was also occasional confusion about key events or characters—for example, misidentifying which ghost reveals which vision, or conflating Fred and Bob Cratchit.

Many candidates structured their answers chronologically, beginning with the opening description of Scrooge as "hard and sharp as flint" and "solitary as an oyster", and tracing how Dickens gradually reshapes his portrayal through key episodes such as the visits from the three spirits. Many candidates tracked the presentation of Scrooge chronologically, linking the extract's fear and desperation with his earlier selfishness and eventual redemption. The best responses provided a detailed exploration of the extract, particularly the language of pleading and fear ("clutching at its robe", "trembling", "I will honour Christmas in my heart"), and tied this into broader themes of redemption, social responsibility, and moral awakening. Other approaches began with the extract and then explored earlier depictions retrospectively. Both approaches worked well, although some weaker responses spent too long on narrative summary and struggled to develop analysis of character presentation.

The most successful responses examined how Dickens uses language, structure and symbolism to shape Scrooge's portrayal at different points. In many responses candidates considered how the similes used early on present Scrooge as emotionally closed and disconnected from society, while later scenes—such as his reaction to Tiny Tim's death or his pleas in the graveyard—highlight vulnerability and emotional growth. There was often perceptive comment on Dickens' technique, such as the use of pathetic fallacy to mirror Scrooge's emotional state, or the way the extract conveyed fear, desperation and transformation.

Contextual understanding was often well integrated. Many responses frequently referenced Dickens' message about social responsibility, Christian morality, and attitudes towards poverty, with many citing Malthusian economics and Dickens' own background. There was also reference to Dickens' broader purpose in writing the novella, with the character of Scrooge used to challenge societal neglect of the poor and promote compassion and generosity. The best responses embedded this context naturally, enhancing their interpretation of Dickens' presentation of Scrooge at different stages. Less successful answers often skipped over the middle of the novella or bolted on context in isolated paragraphs, rather than integrating it meaningfully.

This question enabled most candidates to demonstrate sound knowledge of the text. Less confident responses were able to comment on Dickens' presentation of Scrooge as cold and miserly at the start, and more emotional and generous later. Stronger responses went further, analysing the *how* and *why* of these shifts in presentation, and offering thoughtful interpretations of Dickens' methods and messages. Overall, this was a well-received and productive question that elicited engaged and often thoughtful responses.

Silas Marner

The question asked candidates to write about Silas and the way he is presented as important to the novel and produced some very confident, assured responses. Candidates engaged confidently with the presentation of Silas at different points in the novel, often demonstrating assured textual knowledge and perceptive interpretation.

Most responses were well-structured, typically beginning with Lantern Yard and moving through key developments in Raveloe. The extract was used effectively to link earlier and later depictions of Silas, allowing candidates to track Eliot's presentation of the character with clarity. Higher-level responses explored Eliot's language and imagery with precision, discussing recurring motifs of weaving, light, and fire, and showed sensitivity to shifts in narrative tone and perspective.

Context was generally well handled. Many candidates demonstrated a sound grasp of relevant social and historical ideas. The most successful responses integrated context meaningfully to illuminate Eliot's intentions.

Overall, responses were consistently strong, with a significant number achieving the highest bands. Candidates showed genuine engagement with the character and responded with insight and maturity.

War of the Worlds

Candidates were asked to explore the narrator's importance to the novel. The extract described his emotional and physical exhaustion following a Martian attack. Responses generally demonstrated good understanding of the narrator's psychological state, vulnerability, and role as an observer.

Most candidates linked this extract with key moments of terror and philosophical reflection in the wider novel, such as his encounters with the curate and artilleryman. Many discussed how the first-person narrative deepens reader engagement with the themes of chaos, survival, and imperial decline.

Contextual references to Darwinism, colonialism, and Wells' criticism of Victorian institutions were often included and well-developed. Less confident responses tended to focus on summarising events rather than analysing the narrator's role and significance.

Pride and Prejudice

The question required candidates to explore Mr Darcy and his importance to the novel. The extract presented Darcy's self-reflection and personal growth, and many candidates used this effectively to discuss how Darcy changes throughout the novel.

Strong responses focused on the language of remorse and growth ("selfish being," "taught me a lesson"), and linked it to his developing relationship with Elizabeth. There was also apt discussion of Darcy's role in upholding and challenging social norms.

Responses included discussion of gender, class, and marriage expectations in Regency England, with confident candidates integrating these points smoothly into their analysis. Weaker responses often defaulted to general plot retelling or overly relied on film versions.

Jane Eyre

This open question on Mr Rochester and his importance to the novel yielded a wide range of responses. The extract allowed candidates to analyse Rochester's possessiveness, desperation, and conflicted emotions, especially regarding his proposal to Jane after revelations regarding Bertha Mason.

The most successful responses engaged closely with Rochester's romantic and moral complexity, referencing key episodes like the fire rescue, the wedding interruption, and the reunion at Ferndean. These answers often explored Brontë's presentation of power dynamics and emotional intensity. Evaluative commentary on Rochester's relationship with Jane was often well-developed.

Contextual references to Victorian patriarchy, religious morality, and Brontë's own experiences were often strong. Less successful responses struggled to fully address Rochester's flaws or the moral implications of his actions.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

The question focused on Mr Hyde and his importance to the novel. The extract provided a rich basis for discussing the theme of duality, with Jekyll's reflections on Hyde's "full deformity" and the battle for dominance between them.

Most candidates responded well, with even less secure answers able to discuss key events. "Trampled calmly" and "ape-like fury" were frequently cited, though stronger responses moved beyond these to analyse a wider range of evidence and Hyde's symbolic role. Stronger candidates offered perceptive analysis of the language ("slime of the pit," "co-heir to death") and how Hyde represents repressed desires or the darker side of human nature. Many made links to key episodes such as the trampling of the girl and the murder of Carew. A number of responses showed confusion around the phrase 'temporary suicide' and the novel's conclusion, however, most candidates showed clear understanding of Hyde's significance and made strong use of the extract and wider text to support their views.

Context was generally well integrated. Candidates often included discussion of Victorian anxieties around scientific experimentation, morality, secrecy, and respectability. Many candidates provided thoughtful commentary on the dual nature of the gentleman and the role of setting. Some candidates continue to discuss the influence of Freudian theory which was often overapplied and unhelpful. Some candidates did not fully address Hyde, limiting the depth of their response.

Summary of Key Points

Points to remember:

- The first key question for the examiner is: 'Does the candidate know the text well?'
- The second key question for the examiner is: 'Has the candidate answered the question in a focused and sustained way?'
- AO2 and AO3 are worth a third of the marks but are not expected to take up a third of the essay.
- Responses must be legible. Candidates who struggle with their handwriting can use word processors.

Characteristics of good Section B essay responses:

- A clear and sustained focus on the question asked.
- Using the extract at a relevant point of the essay.
- An appropriate selection of short references to support points made.
- Coverage of, and reference to, a range of relevant points across the wider text.
- Critical probing of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas.
- Close analysis of how the language, 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.
- A suitably formal analytical style of writing.

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- Practise of, and development of, an analytical style of essay writing.
- 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 direct references.
- Avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story.
- More practice on exploring subtext and interpretations.
- 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.

Section C – Unseen Poetry

General Comments

The question focused on *Autumn* by Alan Bold and *Frost on the Shortest Day* by Patricia Beer. The seasonal theme allowed candidates across the ability range to engage meaningfully with both poems. Some candidates showed confusion about seasonal sequence and the concept of winter's shorter days and longer nights. A minority of candidates imposed alternate meanings on the poems that overlooked the guidance that 'both poems are about different times of the year'.

The contrast between Bold's personified presentation of autumn and Beer's reflective tone and presentation of winter supported effective comparative analysis. Most candidates responded well to the theme of different times of the year and the changing seasons. Many candidates compared Bold's repeated images of nature stealing life in *Autumn* with Beer's slow, steady description of winter taking over the shortest day often exploring nature's power and transience with sensitivity.

Stronger responses analysed tone, metaphor, and structure with precision, and made sustained comparative points. More candidates are now addressing both poems in more depth in responses to 3.2 and integrated comparisons were more common than in previous series.

There was a clear shift away from feature-spotting, with most candidates considering the purpose and effect of techniques. A small number of candidates still referenced line-counting or form superficially.

Overall, this was a successful and well-matched pairing that supported inclusive and thoughtful responses across the grade range.

Comments on individual questions

Question 3.1

This question was accessible to all candidates, with the poem's vivid imagery and extended metaphor of Autumn as a thief provoking engaged, thoughtful personal responses. Most candidates discussed the extended metaphor of theft, the role of the wind, and the changing mood of the poem.

Stronger responses analysed how Bold creates mood using personification, such as "the wind is his accomplice" and "glows red with a quiet rage". These answers addressed both structure and tone shifts, recognising how the poem's seemingly playful opening becomes more ominous.

Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the content or feature-spot, but engagement was generally high.

Question 3.2

The comparative question invited candidates to explore similarities and differences between the two seasonal poems. Most understood that both poems reflected on seasonal change, decay, and the passage of time, though Patricia Beer's poem was often seen as more sombre.

Stronger responses compared Bold's vivid image of autumn as a thief "grabbing the green stuff" with Beer's portrayal of winter's slow, creeping presence through the "rolling shadow". Many candidates also compared the sense of sudden loss and chaos in the poem *Autumn* in contrast to the slower, steady, inevitable change of seasons in *Frost on the Shortest Day*.

Most candidates engaged well with Autumn's depiction as an "experienced robber," appreciating the poem's humour and use of colour imagery. Many explored the sense of loss and nature's limited control over seasonal change, especially through the image of the sky "glowing red with a quiet rage."

'Frost on the Shortest Day' posed more challenges, though most candidates identified its key events. Stronger responses examined the imagery of "heavy frost" and the metaphorical suggestion of disease, as well as the resistance implied by the "sheep who hold their ground." The sun's inability to "lick" the frost and the inevitability of darkness were also thoughtfully discussed. A small number of candidates struggled with the more abstract elements of Beer's poem but were still able to comment on key aspects of its content, imagery, and tone.

Comparisons frequently focused on the different seasons and the contrasting use of colour, particularly the recurring green. Candidates noted nature's powerlessness and the disruptive effects of weather, as well as broader themes of time passing. While some responses interpreted the poems in terms of death or ageing, these alternative readings often overlooked the explicit instruction in the question that both poems are about different times of the year; candidates are advised to anchor their interpretations within the thematic focus provided.

Summary of Key Points

Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- A thorough examination of the first poem in 3.1.
- A thorough examination of the second poem in 3.2, either as a discrete element or as part of the comparison.
- Recognition of the stated overview of the poems (found underneath the question on the paper).
- Clear comparison of ideas, mood and some reference to how the poets use language.
- Detailed selection and coverage from each poem with supporting comments exploring the meaning and effects of these selections.

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- Use the statement at the start of the question as a focus as it gives an overview of what the poems are about.
- Ensure that the first poem is adequately analysed in 3.1.
- Ensure that the second poem is adequately analysed in depth in 3.2
- Practise commenting on a range of poems and the effects of 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.
- Rehearse timings across the exam to ensure sufficient time is given to the poetry.
- Make sure a range of comparative points are made in 3.2.
- Responses must be legible.

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WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk