



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE A LEVEL

AUTUMN 2020

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

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COMPONENT 1: POETRY AND PROSE

General Comments

Due to the unusual circumstances of this year, and the cancellation of the summer series of examinations, there were very few candidates sitting this paper. There was therefore a very limited range of scripts to draw from when reporting on the findings of the marking session, and this is reflected in the brevity of the comments below.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Poetry

Two candidates answered Question 1, the poem 'You and I' by Roger McGough and two chose Question 2, an extract from the novel *Acts and Omissions* by Catherine Fox. An important concern is that the poems chosen from the Anthology should focus directly on the topic for comparison: this year, close relationships (Q.1) or the presentation of women (Q.2). The majority managed this but the candidate who chose Byron's 'She Walks in Beauty' for Question 1 struggled with connections as Byron's poem focusses on the woman herself rather than any relationship.

The text descriptors for the unseen texts are meant to be helpful but need to be approached with common sense. Text A was by Roger McGough (b.1937). One candidate speculated that the speaker could have been a soldier in WW2, a mistake which did not help with understanding the poem.

Candidates also need to remember that four Assessment Objectives are rewarded in Section A. One response had very limited awareness of context or genre (AO3) and referred to a 'paragraph' in one poem. Clear organisation is another key to success. It was pleasing to see a model introduction to Question 2, showing the candidate's sure grasp of the presentation of women in all three texts. On the other hand, one response wasted time and space by repeating previous points in an empty conclusion.

Section B: Prose

The candidates answered on *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*. The most successful responses on the Part (i), the extract question, showed clear awareness of key literary techniques as well as lexis and syntax while the less successful concentrated mainly on word classes.

The most successful Part (ii) response on *The Color Purple* integrated a range of biographical, social and critical ideas, addressing the reception as well as the production of the novel to address the double-weighted AO3. Another promising response, however, dealt only with biographical influences, reducing its reward for AO3. The successful responses chose relevant episodes for close analysis and considered a range of stylistic techniques; again, the weaker responses prioritised word class labels which were not always helpful or accurate.

Summary of key points

- Emphasise the importance of choosing relevant poems for comparison in Section A.
- Make sure that candidates are aware of the Assessment Objectives, especially the double-weighted AO3 in Section B Part (ii).
- Advise candidates that word classes, although numerous, are only one of many ways of discussing language. Practice the use of a range of linguistic *and* literary approaches.

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COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

General Comments

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Shakespeare

All candidates answered on *Othello*, Question 4. In the extract question, the focus is entirely on AO1 and AO2, so close analysis of language and dramatic effects is called for. The dramatic irony of Othello's self-delusion and dilemma in this extract from Act 5 Scene 2 were discussed with some success, and some responses found evidence for these in the linguistic features, although elsewhere there was misunderstanding of the imagery of the two "lights".

Most candidates chose to answer on 4(c), the "morality play" essay question, and there were interestingly diverse responses to this, with some successful focus on the grey areas between good and evil in the play, although surprisingly little mention of Desdemona as virtuous. Contextual attention (important as it is double weighted here) was mainly on attitudes to women, although some made fruitful references to Niccolo Machiavelli.

Section B: Modern Drama

Responses were seen on *The History Boys* (Question 8), *Translations* (Question 11) and *Kindertransport* (Question 13). Successful approaches to this section need to demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the play and its linguistic and structural features, supported by awareness of the play's contexts. Textual knowledge of Section B plays was less strong than of the Shakespeare, reflected in the rather generalised responses to these questions, although some sound contextual grasp was seen.

Summary of key points

In the very limited range of scripts seen, there was some promising analysis of dramatic effects in the extract question in Section A, and candidates were aware of the need for contextual focus in the Shakespeare essay. Textual knowledge of the modern plays was rather patchy.

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COMPONENT 3: NON-LITERARY TEXTS

General Comments

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Comparative Analysis of Spoken Non-Literary Texts

In this section, candidates were required to engage in comparative analysis of three texts with the linking theme of the environment, analysing and evaluating similarities and differences in the speakers' attitudes to the subject matter and how these attitudes are conveyed. The more successful responses clearly focused on attitudes and went beyond simplistically describing them as 'positive' or 'negative'. Other features of successful responses included: making detailed and specific comparisons throughout the answer; exploring how the speaker used language and spoken features to convey meanings and attitudes; and addressing the impact of different genres. Some candidates made it clear, for example, that they understood the key conventions of the stand-up comedy genre in Text B, and this enabled them to make sharper comments about the speaker's attitudes to the environment. On the whole, Text C was analysed in less depth.

Section B: Non-literary text study

In Cold Blood was again the most popular choice in this section. Most candidates responded competently to the extract question, tracking through the extract carefully and selecting relevant quotations to make some valid points about how Capote violence and its impact. The essay question tended to be handled less effectively, with some candidates experiencing problems with timing and others referring to very generalised context (e.g. Capote's research and writing techniques) without addressing the specifics of the question.

Summary of key points

Key points of advice for Section A:

- Candidates should begin with a concise comparative overview of the three texts, avoiding simple repetition of the descriptor paragraphs.
- A wide range of terminology, including specific spoken language terms, should be used throughout (AO1).
- There needs to be a consistent focus on attitudes to the subject matter and HOW these attitudes are conveyed (AO2).
- More successful answers compare and contrast the texts throughout (AO4).

Key points of advice for Section B:

- Candidates should engage in close linguistic and literary analysis in the extract response, frequently referring back to the wording of the question.
- They should track through the extract, ensuring that the whole extract is covered in the answer.

- Contextual factors should be specifically linked to the essay question.
- Care is needed with timing to ensure that the essay question is answered in sufficient detail.



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