



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

General Certificate of Secondary Education

January 2016

UNIT 4201

Principal Examiner: Ms. M. Lewis

General comments

The structure of the report has been amended this year. After each section there is a summary of the Principal Examiner's findings under the headings: 'Characteristics of a good response' and 'Ways in which performance could be improved'.

On both Higher and Foundation Tiers, *Of Mice and Men* was clearly the most popular of the texts, as in previous years, with *To Kill a Mockingbird* also quite popular on both. All the other novels were studied by smaller numbers of candidates, however, including a welcome return for *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. Students of all abilities evidently found much to engage their interest in the texts and examiners also noted some detailed and focused understanding of how social factors at the time the novels were set affected characters' lives and formed their personalities. While some on both tiers used this knowledge thoughtfully to inform their response to the essay questions, there remains some confusion and misunderstanding about where on the paper, and how, contextual understanding needs to be demonstrated. Centres are reminded that AO4 'Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts' is not assessed in the extract question.

The poetry comparison question was also handled with sensitivity and assurance by some candidates and examiners gave very high marks on both tiers where candidates could show an analytical approach to language and imagery. A tolerance of ambiguity - and in the best responses a real relish for it - characterised more successful responses, although on both tiers even quite able candidates seemed to look for literal meanings or resorted to rhyme counting and device spotting. This lack of confidence in discussing and interpreting the language of poetry was frequently noted by examiners, often in scripts where the responses to the novel were quite thoughtful and secure.

Higher Tier: Extract questions

Of Mice and Men

The Steinbeck extract question asked candidates to focus on Candy's behaviour and speech in this scene and most managed to track the most important features here. Those who saw Candy's social awkwardness in entering a black man's room for the first time, despite their many years of working together, were able to find appropriate details in the text to show how Steinbeck conveyed this - his hesitation at the door, the repeated reference to his embarrassment, his weak attempt to make conversation to cover up his discomfort. There were many thoughtful commentaries which focused on these aspects of his behaviour without lapsing into a discussion of the plight of black people in the 1930s. Better responses also covered the extract more thoroughly, tracking Candy's angry reaction to Crooks and showing a clear appreciation of why he is 'overwhelmed with his picture' at the end. While some sensitive responses sought to tease out the language used to convey Candy's almost trance-like rapture at the thought of his idyllic future, others suggested, equally convincingly, that his euphoric state drew attention to the unlikelihood of it ever coming true.

Weaker responses lacked both coverage and focus. There were quite a few very long preambles about Candy's character and story in general, rather than in this extract and while some were aware of his social awkwardness at the beginning or his euphoria at the end, there was only patchy focus on the extract. Contextual information about the social position of black people, while relevant to some degree in explaining Candy's behaviour at the beginning, tended to overwhelm some responses which limited achievement. In some cases, candidates accepted a rather superficial interpretation of Candy's behaviour here and did not probe the subtext, missing Candy's discomfort or seeing only a friendly old man looking for companionship.

Anita and Me

The scene selected for the extract focused on the relationship between Meena and Sam at this stage in the novel, when Meena shows her more mature understanding of Sam's character towards the end. Examiners awarded high marks where candidates were able to comment on the way Meena is shown to be the more intelligent and insightful of the two, despite her initial apprehension. Careful selection of words and phrases which tracked this growing understanding was evident in better responses in which ideas were supported by detail from the extract. The malign influence of Anita and Meena's realisation that Sam is not at all the charismatic figure she once believed was discussed with real insight at this level.

Candidates whose knowledge of the wider text was perhaps a little sketchy struggled to see the changing balance of power between the characters and tended to focus on the first part of the extract where Meena's feelings towards him are more typical of the early chapters of the novel.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Candidates were asked to comment on the presentation of Atticus in this extract and most made sensible, focused comments about his wisdom as a parent, his easy going humour and friendly advice to his brother. Better responses gave detailed support for their comments and tracked what Atticus says and the way he behaves here. Atticus' thoughtful parenting of his children was often alluded to, sometimes with reference to the careful way in which he explains Scout's behaviour to Jack, with little rancour or personal criticism of her. The way he takes care not to reward her bad behaviour with too much attention was noticed by abler candidates, as was the depth of understanding of his children and their personalities shown here. One sensitive candidate noted that the scene was witnessed secretly by Scout so that these more subtle aspects of his character could be explored in a conversation between adults. There was some over-reading of 'chuckled' in weaker responses to suggest that Atticus found her behaviour funny or thought it wasn't at all important. Weaker responses also tended to see Atticus as calm, wise and urbane throughout the extract, missing the note of anxiety shown at the end of the extract about how Scout would fare in the difficult times ahead.

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

The few candidates who tackled this text did so with some thoughtful commentary here on how Maya reacted to her employer renaming her at will for her own convenience. Better responses were able to detect the horrifying impact on Maya in the detail of the text, such as in her telling remark, 'Mrs Cullinan, sagging a little, knew and I knew' and in Miss Glory's 'fleeting second of feeling sorry for me'. The pathos of Miss Glory's own story was also used in better responses to highlight Maya's completely different reaction. Her determination, implied in 'I had to quit the job', was cited by some as evidence of her self-control and a few were able to show how this quality was a necessary skill for black maids at the time to cultivate.

Weaker responses relied on fairly simple paraphrasing of the text with limited awareness of Maya's true feelings and how they are conveyed by the understatement and control of the style. Some candidates at this level were drawn to the list of insults towards black people included by Angelou here but missed the reference to the 'hellish horror' of it. There was often a patchy understanding of Maya's behaviour based only on what she said rather than what was implied by her behaviour and indeed by what she did not say.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the relevant character, the question asked and the extract**
- **Selection of short, apt references to support points made**
- **Discussion of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas**
- **Careful tracking through the extract**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Clear grasp of what is being assessed here and what is not**
- **More detailed coverage of the extract**
- **More selection of supporting references rather than general impressions**
- **More practice on probing subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract**

Essay Questions

Of Mice and Men

The character question on Curley was rather more commonly selected than the alternative on heroes in the novel but both elicited a very wide range of responses. Curley's main attributes were tackled in different ways by candidates, many of whom could show how Steinbeck's presentation of him reflected his own views about the brutality and mean spiritedness of life in Great Depression America. At the highest level, responses often focused on how Steinbeck used the character to highlight important themes in the novel as well as aspects of context. He was often perceived as a pathetic bully, shored up by the status bestowed on him only by birth and class, although some candidates sympathised to some degree and felt Curley was as trapped by his circumstances as were the other ranch hands. Examiners were, as always, open to convincing interpretations of many shades if there was enough discussion and selection to support them. One very thoughtful response began to analyse how the 'glove fulla vaseline' might have hinted at a naïve tenderness towards his wife but that the macho culture of the time drove him inexorably towards violence and sexism. At the top of the mark range, Steinbeck's contrasting portrayal of Slim as the real source of authority and respect on the ranch led to some probing and appreciative discussion of Steinbeck's technique as a writer as well as his criticism of the social values of the time.

Weaker responses sometimes drifted into discussion of other characters rather than Curley – often his wife or Slim – or did not really tackle what the character tells us about American society at the time. Broad, sweeping generalisations about what men in the 1930s thought about women or how they behaved towards each other sometimes predominated or there was very little commentary on context at all. Similarly, weaker candidates seemed to lack experience in selecting events from the novel to illustrate their impressions of character. Sometimes, where apt events were selected, such as the fight between Curley and Lennie, candidates retold the story but did not discuss its implications or its significance in Steinbeck's characterisation. A limited awareness of the author behind the characters and of his conscious crafting of the characters meant that for some candidates the higher bands were not really accessible.

The alternative question invited candidates to consider whether Steinbeck created any characters who could be considered heroes and although the majority were fairly straightforward accounts of characters' attributes and actions, there were some more analytical and thoughtful responses too. At this level, contextual factors were often discussed to show how otherwise potentially heroic characters were undermined and even brutalised by the competitive, exploitative society of the time. George and Slim were most often considered potential heroes but in better responses there was more probing of both characterisation and context which sometimes led to a more nuanced, evaluative stance. There were some reasonably focused responses which nevertheless made very limited mention of context and how such consideration might affect our judgement of characters. Some responses showed a decent knowledge of the text but almost capped their marks by showing limited awareness of context or by providing very little supporting evidence for their views. For example, many wrote with engagement about George's admirable qualities as Lennie's friend and protector and considered his suitability as a hero but did not refer to the novel's events or to the writer's characterisation of him or in quite a few cases made no reference to the social and economic pressures which affected him. Sometimes a sketchy awareness of context led to some dubious judgements such as those who heralded the Boss as a hero because he gave a black man a job or because he was willing to house migrant workers.

In responses to both questions there was a very high incidence of references to the film, sometimes as if the text and the film were one and the same. These sometimes amounted to a distortion of the novel Steinbeck wrote and affected the mark given by examiners. Curley was fairly often quoted as telling his wife to 'Get back in the house' or having broken her records and the Boss was often referred to as Tyler. Curley was often said to be on horseback for much of the time and scenes which were not depicted in the same way or at all in the novel were routinely referred to as if they were. The disappointing dominance of the visual image over candidates' own imaginations was particularly striking in this examination.

Anita and Me

Both questions, as in all the text essays, required candidates to link their knowledge of the text with an understanding of how the characters' behaviour, attitudes and actions are affected by the values of working class Britain in the 1960s. The first question elicited some thoughtful ideas about both class and racial differences between the two and how this played out as they grew up. Better responses compared Meena's stable, loving family life with Anita's more chaotic background, with examples such as Meena's relationship with Nanima and Anita's with her mother to support some perceptive discussion. Some found the seeds of Anita's racist ignorance in the neglect of her family as a young child while the values important to Meena's family, such as a love of education, were seen as important in the eventual rift between them.

Weaker responses made passing reference to the different racial backgrounds of the characters but did not examine how these differences shaped their behaviour. Another common weakness was in discussing the characters accurately but generally, with only one or two references to events in the novel which showed how their relationship developed. The second question required a direct focus on the ways in which the casual and sometimes more overt racism of Tollington's residents manifested itself in the lives of Meena and her parents. Able candidates were able to tease out the different ways in which Meena reacted compared with her parents. The events at the Fair were often central here, revealing how Meena's anger is fueled by the hurt which she sees in her father's reaction. Some also noted that Meena's reactions are direct and defiant whereas her parents often relied on retreating into the warmth of their wider Indian family and culture or by presenting outwardly with dignity and endurance.

Weaker responses were less rooted in a discussion of events which exemplified Meena's and her parents' reactions to prejudice. Contextual information was sometimes quite detailed but was 'bolted on' to the commentary on the novel rather than used to inform the discussion of characters and their reactions. Occasionally, there was some confusion about 1960s Britain; candidates thought that Margaret Thatcher was in power at the time, for example.

To Kill a Mockingbird

The question on Jem was more popular overall than the alternative on the influence of the trial on the people of Maycomb but again both questions elicited responses across the mark range. Better answers on the presentation of Jem showed that candidates were usually mindful of how Harper Lee positioned the character in relation to the racist attitudes of the time and some were also able to explore how the narrowness and prejudice of the southern states at the time helped to shape his character in opposition to it. Atticus' influence and the lessons he taught Jem about tolerance and racial hatred also helped to root candidates' responses in the time and place the novel was set. Many candidates adopted a broadly chronological approach, discussing how Jem's childhood 'persecution' of Boo Radley gave way to a more mature and thoughtful character after the trial.

Weaker responses here tended to remain general and impressionistic rather than detailed and evaluative. Comments about Jem's relationships with his father and others lacked focus and detailed selection and although often broadly credible and accurate, comments were rarely supported by illustration from the text.

The question on the influence of the trial on the people of Maycomb also drew a range of responses from candidates. Better responses focused both on the impact of the trial on specific individuals and on the wider society of the time. The 'baby steps' taken by Maycomb as a whole towards a less prejudiced culture were often mentioned, sometimes with more concrete evidence from the text for that view, such as the way the black people expressed their gratitude in gifts for Atticus or the violent, defensive reaction of Bob Ewell to his humiliation in court. The impact on specific characters, often listed with a brief commentary on each, characterised less developed and mature responses. The more subtle but perhaps more significant change in Alexandra was often missed in weaker responses, perhaps showing some over-reliance on the film version in which she does not appear.

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

The relatively few candidates who studied Angelou's autobiographical account addressed both questions with engagement and some focus. Maya's fluctuating relationship with her mother was discussed to show how Maya's attitude towards her changed from an unquestioning adoration to a real appreciation of her strength and courage in a world which could be dangerous and humiliating for a black girl growing up with ambition and spirit. There was clear knowledge of the story and its characters in evidence here, where better responses made specific reference to events and interactions to support their views. The speed with which the mother reacted to her daughter's rape, as well as her encouragement of Maya's defiance of racist treatment at the end of the book, were used to shed a sympathetic light on the character and the relationship, despite the mother's long absences as Maya grew up.

Some responses to the second question about how Maya learned to deal with prejudice were also firmly rooted in events and a clear appreciation of how racism affected black people at the time.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **Clear appreciation of how context shapes characters and storylines**
- **Selection of a range of apt events and quotations to develop and support thoughtful ideas**
- **Some analysis of the writer's techniques and appreciation of the writer's ideas**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Less reliance on film versions, more on developing personal engagement with the text**
- **Practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked**
- **More focused discussion of how contextual factors affect characters' personalities, choices, ambitions and stories**
- **Practice in selecting detailed textual evidence for ideas**

Poetry Comparison

Examiners looked for and rewarded comparison of the poems however candidates chose to address the task but in most cases there was some cross-referencing of details as well as some comparison of mood and imagery. Sophisticated and detailed comparison of ideas, language and effects was quite rare but there were some very polished and assured responses. Occasionally, time management was weak and the all-important comparative element was absent or very thin and this did affect the total marks available. Similarly, quite a number of responses showed a lack of development of ideas and a lack of confidence in tackling the subtext or considering the inherent ambiguity of the poems.

Most candidates were able to comment sensibly about 'The Closed School' and to select and discuss the impact of particular images and phrases. Able students went straight to the heart of the poem, uncovering some of its poignant images of war, death and loss and reaching for an interpretation which acknowledged the idea of memory contained in the crumbling walls of the school. 'After Lessons' was approached a little more literally on the whole but better responses explored the subtle difference in tone here compared with the Wilson poem, noting how there is tension and a lurking sense of the sinister here more than the haunting sense of pain and loss in 'The Closed School'. The evocative images in both poems were discussed and their effects compared – an area of exploration which proved productive for abler candidates to show some analytical focus.

Weaker responses tended to focus on peripheral detail but missed or misread the subtext. The 'shadowy' church was much commented on, for example, as was the blackboard and the polished floor, but many looked for literal explanations and missed the 'brittle laughter' of the children or the ambiguous nature of the voice (man or boy?) in the Knight poem. While some of these literal interpretations were feasible if lacking sensitivity and imagination, some interpretations were insecurely anchored in the detail of the text. Some saw references to warfare between teachers and pupils in 'The Closed School' and hands that were painful from writing and both poems were sometimes thought to be describing schools on a 'snow day'.

Perhaps more damaging than doubtful interpretations was the tendency to resort to counting rhymes or lines or instances of enjambement. Some insisted that the poems were sonnets and while the subtlety of half-rhymes in 'After Lessons' was missed, many pointed out the rhymes in 'The Closed School' with no further comment or a 'makes the poem flow' comment which examiners found too vague to credit. Some of these responses were quite long but gave very little evidence of understanding.

Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- Detailed coverage of both poems and developed comparison of ideas and language
- Probing of subtext, tentative interpretation rooted in the poems
- Strong focus on images, language and effects

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- More exposure to ways in which poets use language in different ways
- More focus on how ideas are conveyed through imagery
- Careful reading of poems to avoid misunderstanding
- Practice in supporting ideas about mood and meaning with detailed reference to the poems

Foundation Tier: Extract questions

Of Mice and Men

There were some detailed and focused answers to this extract question and many Foundation Tier candidates showed an instinctive understanding of Candy's social awkwardness here and how his behaviour gives it away. Some were able to pinpoint specific illustrations of Candy's nervousness and sense of confusion, moving beyond the identification of him as being 'shy' which was very common. Sometimes, candidates who had tracked these more subtle aspects of his behaviour at the beginning of the extract did not sustain their discussion but those who did could get very high marks for their perseverance. Candy's experience of being 'overwhelmed with his picture' drew some empathetic and engaged comments from quite a number of candidates.

Weaker responses were patchy in their coverage of the extract or lacked a sustained focus on Candy, sometimes drifting towards Crooks and Lennie in their commentary. Also common amongst weaker candidates was a tendency to include Candy's back story rather than what he experiences here in the extract. There were also a range of scripts where sometimes quite lengthy responses relied on simple retelling or paraphrase with very little comment on what happens in the extract and what it shows us about the character.

To Kill a Mockingbird

The main character traits shown by Atticus in the extract were often identified simply and in better responses there was clear and apt support given for points made. Atticus' calmness, particularly when faced with his daughter's bad behaviour, was commented on as was his wisdom and understanding in bringing up his children in a way which took account of their young age when judging their behaviour. Some noticed his mounting anxiety and nervousness, suggested at the end of the extract.

Weaker responses sometimes misread the reference to Atticus' habit of not beating his children as if his threats to do so were very wrong or that in fact he did beat them. Some candidates seemed to have only a sketchy awareness of who Jack is and there were many brief answers which did not really cover the range of the extract.

Chanda's Secrets

Most responses showed some tracking of Mrs Tafa's speech and behaviour in the extract and where candidates began to see below her surface politeness to the rather cruel and poisonous character she is at this point in the novel examiners could award high marks for their responses. Some noticed the detail that she was 'listening in' to Chanda's phone call to Tiro and could see the hypocrisy implied in her praying as she did so even though their explanation was often simple. The conspiratorial way in which she tries to cast aspersions on Esther's character and family was seen as cruel by some but there was some misunderstanding too where candidates thought her warning was friendly in nature or genuinely protective.

Weaker responses were brief and spotted one of two things that Mrs Tafa said and did and tended to take them at face value rather than to really show an understanding of her behaviour here.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Wide-ranging coverage of the extract**
- **Sustained focus on the character and question**
- **Textual references to support points made**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **Practice going beyond simple paraphrase to comment on what is read rather than reproduce it**
- **Practice making a range of focused points, each with a supporting quotation**
- **More awareness of what is being assessed here**

Essay questions

Of Mice and Men

Most candidates chose to write about Curley and there was a very wide range of responses to this question. The best followed the bullet points to help them structure their responses but there was a detailed discussion of each rather than a few statements and at this level candidates could offer some reference to specific events and some apt quotations to support their ideas. Curley's position as the boss's son gave some an opportunity to consider how the Great Depression granted him a false status over the men which he exploited by 'playing the part' of a Boss despite his obvious weaknesses. Similarly, most candidates awarded marks in the top band could see that his relationship with his wife was affected by the misogyny and routine sexism of the day and age, although many, somewhat disappointingly, made reference to the film in trying to show how he treated her. Those who noticed Steinbeck's technique of keeping husband and wife apart until she is dead could make more accurate and productive use of the reference. The violence and aggression which surrounds Curley was tracked through the events of the novel and in the description of him by Steinbeck at different points. The end of the novel gave candidates a chance to reflect on the brutality of ranch life and how unfeeling characters are seen to be.

Weaker responses tended to follow the bullet points but with only brief and general comments on each. Many also made very limited reference to the wider social context or none at all, inevitably limiting their marks. Quite a few were aware of Curley's main characteristics but made very little reference to the text to show how these were presented. There was some misunderstanding in places too, with Curley often cited as the killer of Candy's dog or as fighting with Crooks and many candidates impugned him with a deep racism which is not really borne out in the novel.

The alternative question on heroes in the novel required some organisation of ideas and some clear argument. Where candidates considered particular characters as potential heroes in some detail and discussed how and why they were or were not, it was possible for examiners to award high marks. This was especially the case where the impact of the Great Depression and the rather competitive and exploitative nature of society at the time was considered. Some candidates simply but effectively showed how George or Slim could have been heroes if it were not for the prevailing mores of the time which permitted them some cruelty towards Lennie or the drowned puppies, for example.

Where fewer marks were awarded it was often because candidates made no real mention of contextual factors. Lists of characters with a brief comment about why they could or could not be heroes were fairly common and although focused they were often very under-developed and lacking reference to the text.

To Kill a Mockingbird

The question on Jem gave candidates a chance to show a clear knowledge of the text and some were able to structure their responses to include comments on how the character grows up and whose influence affects him. Where candidates could range across the novel as a whole with some sustained discussion of Jem and provide some commentary on how contextual factors such as racial discrimination influenced his development, examiners could award very high marks. Most were able to include comments on his early games with Scout and Dill and followed the bullet points to address some of the most important lessons about tolerance which Atticus taught him. The last bullet point was a nudge towards selection of events and their impact on Jem. Able candidates tended to choose the trial of Tom Robinson and the incident with Mrs Dubose but often there was a tendency to rely on generalities.

Weaker responses were thinner and there was often a much narrower range of ideas. There was usually some implicit reference to racial discrimination in Maycomb but less explicit discussion of context as a force which influenced and shaped the character.

The alternative question was less popular but sometimes well addressed. Most referred to how the trial affected Atticus and his family and there was sometimes some comment on other characters such as Calpurnia and Tom Robinson. Here again, explicit reference to wider society and how the trial began to challenge Maycomb's old prejudices and narrow-mindedness were quite rare, although most knew what the trial was about and that Tom Robinson was innocent but convicted of rape nonetheless.

Chanda's Secrets

Most candidates chose the first question about the relationship between Chanda and her mother and made productive use of the bullets to help them cover a range of points and ideas across the text. There was much sympathy and engagement with Chanda's predicament and how her growing awareness of her mother's illness impacts on her and her family. It was fairly rare, however, for candidates to consider how the suspicion and fear of disease in the wider society shapes their relationship and interactions with others.

Weaker responses showed a less secure knowledge of the text or gave only a brief and sketchy account of Chanda's story with some focus on her mother's return to Tiro and the pitiful state of her health. At this level there was very limited reference to the kind of society in which they lived and how it affected them although examiners could credit where some implicit understanding was shown.

For the second question, the few candidates who selected it focused on some of the ways in which the poverty of the community was shown, most commonly the burial of Chanda's little sister at the start of the novel.

Characteristics of good text essay responses:

- **A clear understanding that context means the wider society and its values and how these affect characters**
- **Relevant use of contextual factors which are specific to the question**
- **Selection of events which help to illustrate points made**
- **Development of ideas and supporting references rather than assertions and simple statements**

Ways in which performance can be improved

- **Develop an awareness of texts as related to/commenting on the society in which they are set**
- **Practice supporting points with references to events in the text**
- **Be aware that questions test knowledge of the novel, not the film**

Poetry comparison

Most candidates attempted to address the two poems and tried to find some links between them. There were many under-developed and rather immature responses here in which candidates struggled to comment productively on the content and language of the poems. Where they were able to select and consider meaning, think about why the poet had used a particular word or phrase and make a range of comments on each poem, however, they were often much more successful and were given high marks. 'Winter' was generally better understood and there was some thoughtful selection and discussion here. For many who understood the poem's setting, it evoked familiar scenes from their own school days and there was some recognition of the 'pain on the tender skin' and the 'ache in the blood' as an effective way to describe the cold on the body. The blowing of 'white smoke' through the fake cigarette also struck a familiar note for many candidates who remembered playing in similar ways in cold weather. Some saw the description of cold weather as unpleasant and painful whereas others found some sense of comfort in friendship and camaraderie in the poem and both these responses made sense to examiners.

'Frost' presented more of a challenge to many candidates. The use of imagery to describe the effect of frost on the landscape was not always understood but when it was some thoughtful ideas about how the poet used these images to create beautiful pictures of nature sometimes emerged. Even where there was not a secure understanding of the imagery, many candidates spotted that the 'old man /Who might not see April' might have had something to do with the disappearing frost as the weather warmed. Better candidates compared the depiction of cold weather in each poem and some noted how winter is viewed as a painful thing to be endured in one but as a magical and beautiful influence in the other.

Weaker responses struggled to make sense of the poems and showed a limited awareness of figurative language in 'Frost' and of the setting in 'Winter'. References which should have helped were missed such as the playground setting. Many thought the different stanzas in 'Frost' depicted different jobs done in the winter and while this approach tended to limit the development of their ideas, others who recognised the metaphors sometimes did little with them. Most attempted to find links between the poems but weaker responses relied on repeating the rubric or pointing out what was in one poem but not the other, such as rhymes.

Characteristics of good poetry comparisons:

- **A thorough examination of both poems**
- **Clear comparison of ideas, mood and some reference to how the poets use language**
- **Detailed selection from each poem and comments on these selections**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **Exposure to a range of poems and poetic techniques, including imagery and figurative language**
- **Encourage confidence to comment on meaning and ideas rather than feature-spotting**
- **Experience in reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets**



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