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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**SUMMER 2016**

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2016

UNIT 4201

### 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, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* and *Anita and Me* were also evidently enjoyed by a growing number of candidates. Candidates of all abilities clearly 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, relationships and aspirations. More able candidates, as usual, managed to interweave their comments on context with their observations on characters and themes. Across the ability range as a whole, however, the influence of the social values surrounding the characters in the novels has become a natural part of candidates' study of the texts and these approaches benefited them in the examination. A small number of candidates whose grasp of their chosen text was otherwise secure showed some confusion about where on the question paper their knowledge of context was required. 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 willingness to probe the subtext and a tolerance for ambiguity in language and images characterised the best responses on both tiers. On both tiers, however, even quite able candidates sometimes resorted to rhyme counting, device spotting and unlikely interpretations. This lack of confidence in discussing the ideas and language of the poetry was frequently noted by examiners, even where the novels were handled with sensitivity and engagement.

### Higher Tier: Extract questions

#### *Of Mice and Men*

The Steinbeck extract question asked candidates to focus on George's behaviour and speech in this scene and most managed to track the most important features – his shock, despair and resolution – with some detailed reference to the language of the extract. Examiners were sensitive to different interpretations of George's behaviour as Steinbeck's presentation of him here is largely dependent on inference and an implicit grasp of his deep love for Lennie.

There were many thoughtful commentaries which focused on the way George's behaviour here conveys his growing resignation and despair as the impact of Curley's wife's death sinks in. Better responses also covered the ground in more detail, supporting their observations with focused references. Some sensitive responses studied in detail George's progression from disbelief and stunned shock through false hope and hopeless self-blame towards some resolution and determination to protect Lennie even in these desperate circumstances. Detailed reference to, and interpretation of the imagery used by Steinbeck such as 'his face was tight as wood' was typical of these better responses.

Weaker responses lacked both coverage and real understanding of George's frame of mind here. Some were over-engaged with George's opening question and its meaning while in other responses there was only patchy focus on the extract. Contextual information about the social position of migrant workers, while potentially relevant in explaining George's despairing vision of his future without Lennie, tended to overwhelm some responses. In some cases, candidates misread George's reaction and thought his bitter representation of life without Lennie showed some relief of being free of Lennie from now on.

### ***Anita and Me***

The scene selected for the extract focused on Meena's changing relationship with her father and the impact of Anita on Meena's naïve perception of herself and her family here. Examiners awarded high marks where candidates were able to comment on the way Meena is portrayed here as half-aware of the changes in her own attitudes and the magnetic attraction she feels for Anita. 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. Meena's perception of herself as moving beyond and above her Indian relatives and their rituals and relationships was handled with sensitivity by able candidates.

Weaker responses tended to be less probing and relied on reproducing some of Meena's inner monologue with less comment on how the extract presents the character here. A simpler grasp of Anita's influence on Meena's priorities, often without detailed support, were typical of these responses.

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird***

Candidates were asked to comment on the way the relationship between Atticus and Jem is presented in this extract and most made sensible, focused comments about Atticus' quiet wisdom in teaching his son about courage and Jem's emotional and conflicted response to Mrs Dubose' death. Better responses gave detailed support for their comments and showed how Atticus' usually careful and detached parenting style changes in response to Jem's tears. The speed with which he reacts to Jem's distress – 'in a flash' – was seen as evidence of a more emotional aspect of Atticus' parenting style than that seen before in the novel. The direct and persuasive way in which he explains Mrs Dubose's behaviour to Jem was noted while Jem's response was unpicked in better responses to show how his emotional outburst was gradually replaced by a more measured and mature reaction under his father's kind but persistent tutelage.

Weaker responses focused on one or two parts of the extract but were less confident in showing how the incident described is important or significant in the portrayal of the father-son relationship which is central to the novel. Some made too much of Jem's addressing of his father as 'sir' which, while interesting, is not specifically relevant to the extract. Some were more judgmental than analytical in approach, offering opinions on the behaviour of the characters rather than exploring what is revealed about their behaviour here.

## ***I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings***

Candidates who tackled this extract mostly offered a thoughtful commentary on Maya's behaviour and attitude here, particularly towards the hapless Dolores. Better responses were able to explore how Maya's self-consciously constructed idea of herself as 'basically good' gives way to a less mature cruelty towards Dolores following the latter's bitter attack on her. The teenage vanity implied in Maya's construction of herself in her own eyes as 'just' and 'merciful' was sometimes explored and some candidates also saw that Maya did have some genuine sympathy for the woman which was quickly undermined by Dolores' nasty retaliation.

Weaker responses relied on fairly simple paraphrasing of the text with limited awareness of Maya's true feelings of sympathy for Dolores or for her self-perception in 'a favorable and Christian light'. Her self-righteousness was sometimes taken at face value, missing the subtext here, and her subsequent reaction was considered justified but not explored critically.

### **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**
- **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:**

- **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 Lennie was equally as popular as that on the idea of 'real friendship' and both elicited a very wide range of responses. Lennie's main attributes – his disability and innocence - were tackled in different ways by candidates, many of whom could show how Steinbeck's presentation of him reflected 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 catalyst, a vehicle for Steinbeck to expose the discrimination and cruelty suffered by other characters in the novel, such as Crooks and Curley's wife as well as himself. Examiners were, as always, open to convincing interpretations and approaches to the task if there was enough discussion and selection to support them. Some at the top of the mark range explored how Lennie's essential goodness is conveyed through imagery, such as the reference to 'bleating' in the fight scene, and builds characterisation in order to shed a critical light on the values of the society around him. One able candidate, for example, referred to 'the skill with which Steinbeck ensures that the death of a murderer is seen as the most horribly sad thing that happens in the book'. Lennie's conversations with Crooks and Curley's wife were sometimes explored in some detail, not just to show Lennie as a plot device but to show how the character is used to expose the effect of social factors on individuals.

Weaker responses sometimes drifted into discussion of other characters rather than Lennie – often Curley’s wife or Crooks – and lost the focus on what Steinbeck uses these interactions between Lennie and the other characters to tell us. Some did not really tackle what the character tells us about American society at the time. Broad, sweeping generalisations about social factors (‘disabled people were usually tortured’) tended to make it difficult for examiners to reward for context or there was 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 Lennie’s conversation with Crooks, candidates retold the story but did not discuss its implications or its significance. 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 to what extent ‘real friendship is impossible in the grim world’ presented in the novel. At the top of the mark range, examiners found much to reward where candidates addressed the question evaluatively. Some, for example, considered whether the relationship between George and Lennie is a ‘real’ friendship and broadened this idea to include an analysis of how friendships of all kinds in the novel are vulnerable or easily destroyed. Some argued that characters who seek friendship in the grim world of migrant workers in 1930s America are doomed to failure and disappointment while only Slim, who seems not to need it, remains untouched by tragedy. At the highest level, an appreciation of the writer’s shaping of our reactions to characters and events was evident throughout and ideas about themes, characterisation, language and context were interwoven in convincing arguments.

Weaker scripts were characterised by less assured or less relevant use of contextual factors or by sketchy outlines of relationships in the novel. Some at this level wrote about the Great Depression and its impact on workers but did not really link this knowledge to the specific friendships outlined. In relatively few cases, but still significantly, responses were dominated by historical details with limited reference to characters and events in the novel.

### ***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 social mores of Britain in the 1960s. The first question elicited some thoughtful ideas about how Meera Syal presents the racist attitudes, both overt and implicit, of the society of the time through the character of Sam Lowbridge. Able candidates often understood that Syal’s portrayal of Sam Lowbridge is not straightforwardly judgmental: one thoughtful candidate, for example, suggested that Syal ‘exposes racism as stupid rather than just wrong in her portrayal of Sam by how Meena leaves him behind by her education and maturity’. Others at the top of the mark range explored how the relationship between Meena and Sam is essential to Meena’s growing up, that his racist outbursts lead to her realisation that the society around her is hostile and capable of brutality. The trajectory of their relationship was, for some, a mirror of Meena’s growing awareness of the world around her. Occasionally, some sympathy was shown for the paucity of opportunities for Sam and young men of his class at the time and there was some useful contrast between his family background and that of Meena.

Weaker responses made reference to one or two scenes involving Sam and Meena, typically his racist behaviour in the Fair or his involvement in the denouement of the novel, but did not really explore the ways in which British society at the time comes under scrutiny in the portrayal of their relationship. Some responses at this level showed a limited appreciation of the relationship between them or why Meena behaves towards Sam in the way she does at the end.

The second question required some critical appraisal of Meena's childhood as compared to those of her white friends for the highest marks to be awarded. Some candidates chose to consider separately both aspects of the question – 'more difficult' and 'more interesting' – which sometimes elicited strongly evaluative responses. Specific events and relationships which helped to build an argument around the question, as well as an overview of the novel, contributed to some high marks here. The influence of Nanima, Anita and Meena's growing awareness of the racism in British society were important in most high-scoring responses.

Weaker responses were less rooted in a discussion of events which illustrated Meena's childhood experiences and there was less focus on arguing a case in response to the question. 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. There was often some confusion about 1960s Britain; candidates frequently thought that Margaret Thatcher was in power at the time, for example.

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird***

The question on Scout elicited responses across the mark range. Better answers showed that candidates were usually mindful of how Harper Lee positioned the character in relation to the racist, and sometimes sexist attitudes of the time and some were also able to explore how Scout's innocence and naivety were used by Lee to expose the injustice of Maycomb society through a child's eyes. Atticus' influence and the lessons he taught Scout about tolerance and racial hatred also helped to root candidates' responses in the time and place the novel was set. Scout's changing attitudes were sometimes mapped thoroughly in better responses, particularly with reference to Boo Radley and the trial of Tom Robinson. Weaker responses here tended to remain general and impressionistic rather than detailed and evaluative. Comments about Scout's relationships with her father and others lacked focus and detailed selection and although often quite credible, comments were only rarely supported by illustration from events in the text.

The question on Lee's use of the mockingbird motif in the title of the novel also drew a range of responses from candidates. Examiners allowed for a range of ideas about the meaning of the mockingbird symbol and interpretations of characters who embodied it. In the best responses, the idea of the mockingbird as well as its importance in understanding the novel was explored with reference to the specific conditions of life in the American South in the 1930s. A few candidates also considered the writing of the novel in the 1960s at a time when civil rights were once more under scrutiny and showed how the depiction of innocent, unjustly treated characters shed light on the plight of black people. As well as selecting characters from the novel to illustrate the mockingbird idea, some able candidates considered the prevalence of prejudice and inequality in society at the time and how, as one put it, 'the black community of Maycomb and throughout America could be seen as innocent victims of prejudice and hate, mockingbirds too'.

In less successful responses, the mockingbird symbol was loosely understood but candidates found it difficult to decide who might be a mockingbird and why. While the reference to mockingbirds made by Atticus and Miss Maudie was often quoted, the focus of weaker responses was less secure and sometimes comprised a list of characters with a simple explanation of why they might be considered a mockingbird.

## ***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. Bailey Junior's fluctuating relationship with his family, particularly the rather stormy relationship with his mother, was discussed in detail by some candidates awarded the higher marks. There was clear knowledge of the story and its characters in evidence here, where better responses made specific reference to events and relationships to support views. Some of the more scarring experiences of Bailey's life, such as the killing of the black man in the street, were cited as ways in which the prejudice and segregation of the wider society began to have an impact on Bailey's attitudes. Weaker responses here were characteristically sketchy and impressionistic and were not adequately rooted in reference to specific events and relationships.

The second question on the significant influences on Maya as she grew up gave candidates some scope to consider characters, relationships and the impact of racial prejudice on her life. Characters considered influential to Maya included her grandmother and her mother and a good case could be made for either as significant in teaching Maya how to cope with and combat prejudice. The incident with the white girls outside Momma's shop or her argument with the dentist were commonly used to illustrate resistance, as was Mother Dear's encouragement of Maya in her working life in the later stages of the book. Weaker responses, as is often the case where some evaluation of characters is required, tended to rely on lists of characters with brief comments on ways in which they influenced Maya.

### **Characteristics of good essay responses:**

- **Clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and storylines**
- **Selection of a range of apt events and specific details to support thoughtful ideas**
- **Some analysis of the writer's techniques and his/her intentions**

### **Ways in which performance could be improved:**

- **More focus on developing a personal engagement with the text rather than formulaic answers**
- **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 wherever and however candidates compared the texts but in most cases there was some cross-referencing of details as well as some comparison of mood and imagery. Many candidates found some helpful focus in comparing the poems, often linking them by suggesting that in both the appearance and demeanour of the workers belied their dedication or success in their work. Sophisticated and detailed comparison of ideas, language and effects was quite rare but there were some very polished and assured responses.

Good responses tended to tackle both poems with a sound grasp of detail and substance, showing a confident understanding of the tone of celebration in the Morris and the sympathetic but cynical stance of the poetic voice in the Holden. The grotesque imagery used to describe Auntie Jane Fish gave able candidates plenty to focus their attention and

there were some engaged and engaging analyses of how the poet pulls off an endearing and likeable portrait using such language. Jane's total identification with her work was seen as reflected in the sensory and olfactory images used to portray her. Candidates made meaning of the linking of 'grin and grumble' through alliteration and rhyme to create a larger-than-life picture of the market fishmonger. In the Holden poem, the added perspective of the poet's voice as he observes the hapless young salesman was understood better by candidates at the top of the range, particularly as a way to create sympathy in the reader. The 'façade' of his smile and the nervous tic of 'knotting and unknotting' was noticed and discussed productively by the majority of candidates and some astute responses also analysed how the poet ridicules and critiques the language and behaviour of selling in 'retailing the air with such piety' and the rather sinister image of 'someone else's voice/crawl out of my mouth'.

Weaker responses tended to miss, misread or misinterpret the subtext of one or both poems. Some candidates got no further than the grotesque description of Auntie Jane and saw the poem as a disgusting portrayal of a woman doing a horrible job or were taken in by the 'cheerful', 'well-groomed' initial impression of the salesman in the Holden. While some of these limited interpretations were feasible if lacking sensitivity and imagination, some interpretations were insecurely rooted in the texts. Some, for example, imagined that Jane sold her body rather than fish and struggled to make unlikely and tortured interpretations of the details in the poems. Greg the salesman was confused with the poet's own voice or the observer in the poem became his employer or his father, creating some muddle if the ideas were pursued into the comparison. Candidates quite often looked for meaning in the shape of the poems – 'the poem is fat like the character' etc. – which is rarely a productive approach.

Perhaps more damaging than doubtful interpretations was the tendency to resort to counting rhymes or lines or instances of enjambment or other devices. In some cases there was little real engagement with the language, meaning and ideas at the expense of less fruitful consideration of enjambment, caesuras etc. A more straightforward approach to structure was often much more meaningful than vague references to caesuras (not always accurately identified) or describing enjambment as having the power to speed up, slow down or otherwise alter the pace or flow of the poem. Candidates who said, for example, that the ambiguity of the portrayal of Auntie Jane Fish is only really resolved in the last couplet were better rewarded for a specific example of a pertinent feature of the poem.

#### **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 imagery, language and the effects they create**

#### **Ways in which performance can be improved:**

- **More exposure to ways in which poets use language imaginatively**
- **More focus on how ideas are conveyed through imagery**
- **Careful reading of poems to look at how subtexts emerge**
- **Practice in supporting ideas with detailed reference to the poems**

#### **Foundation Tier: Extract questions**

## ***Of Mice and Men***

There were some detailed and focused answers to this extract questions and many Foundation Tier candidates showed an instinctive understanding of George's shock and despair here and how his behaviour gives it away. Some were able to pinpoint specific illustrations of George's stunned shock at the beginning of the extract and those who could sustain their discussion and exemplification of George's speech and behaviour could get very high marks for their perseverance. George's sadness and despair as the impact of Lennie's actions sink in were tracked in detail by many candidates who did well on this task.

Weaker responses were patchy in their coverage of the extract or lacked a sustained focus on George, sometimes drifting towards Candy or wider comments on context in their commentary. There were also some responses which showed a misreading of George's thoughts and feelings here. Some candidates misread the ending of the extract as showing he was entirely selfish in wanting to shift the blame from himself and saw his description of life without Lennie in the future as a welcome change from looking after his friend or a renewed determination to achieve his dream of a farm of his own.

## ***To Kill a Mockingbird***

The main character traits shown by Atticus and Jem in the extract were often identified simply and in better responses there was clear and apt support given for points made. Atticus' blunt way of telling Jem about the death of Mrs Dubose and the way he tries to convince Jem that she was courageous was often mentioned as was Jem's anger and tearful outburst.

Weaker responses tended to be brief and sketchy or focused on tangential detail such as Jem addressing his father as 'sir'.

### **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 and to give some informed opinion about what is happening in the extract**
- **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 Lennie and there was a very wide range of responses to this question. The best followed the bullet points to help them structure their responses and where there was a detailed discussion examiners could award high marks for response which offered some reference to specific events and some apt quotations to support their ideas. Lennie's disability gave some an opportunity to consider how the Great Depression made him even more vulnerable to the likes of Curley who exploited his position as the boss's son. Lennie's relationship with George was examined quite closely by some candidates, with reference to the different ways in which he needed George's protection and some of the incidents which illustrated this, such as the fight with Curley. The animal imagery used to describe Lennie also featured at the top of the mark range and there were the beginnings of an understanding of the characters as devices for the writer to criticise the

society of the time. As one thoughtful candidate wrote, 'Without Lennie in the book we wouldn't know how badly treated Crooks is and that would mean we wouldn't know how horrible the lives of black people were.'

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, although it was rare for no mention at all to be made of context. Quite a few were aware of Lennie's main attributes but made very little reference to the text to show how these were presented.

The alternative question on friendship in the novel required some organisation of ideas and some clear argument. Where candidates considered particular characters and relationships in some detail and discussed how and why these characters found friendships difficult to make, it was possible for examiners to award high marks. This was especially the case where the impact of the Great Depression and the competitive, insecure and exploitative nature of ranch life at the time was considered. Some candidates simply but effectively showed how characters such as Crooks or Curley's wife were isolated by prejudice and discrimination which was prevalent in wider society at the time. Where it was properly understood, the description of the ranch as a microcosm of society as a whole was apt here.

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 find friendship were fairly common and although focused on addressing the question they were often under-developed and lacking specific reference to the text.

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird***

The question on Scout gave candidates a chance to show a clear knowledge of the text and some were able to structure their responses to include comments on some of the salient features of her character as she matures. Where candidates could range across the novel as a whole with some sustained discussion of Scout and provide some commentary on how contextual factors such as the racial discrimination against Tom Robinson or social isolation of Boo Radley influenced her development, examiners could award very high marks. Most were able to include comments on her early games with Scout and Dill, at school and followed the bullet points to address some of her important relationships with Atticus, Alexandra or Calpurnia. Abler candidates tended to choose the impact of the trial of Tom Robinson and some mentioned Scout's involvement with the crowd outside the jail 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 Scout's attitudes and personality.

The alternative question was sometimes well addressed where candidates had some understanding of what the mockingbird motif meant for Atticus and the writer. Most referred to Boo Radley as a contender for the mockingbird title although many missed the opportunity to discuss the trial of Tom Robinson. Atticus was often chosen as a mockingbird and there was often some sensible justification of him as a lone voice enduring the social opprobrium of his town while fighting for justice. Here again, explicit reference to wider society was not always evident, although most recognised that the mockingbird was a symbol of people who were oppressed in some way.

### **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 general impressions**

### **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**
- **Develop an understanding of the main ideas or themes in the text and how they are shown**

### **Poetry comparison**

Most candidates attempted to address the two poems and tried to find some links between them. 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, examiners could award marks in the higher range. Although a detailed comparison of ideas and language was rare, as is usually the case on Foundation Tier, many candidates were able to see some connection between the subject matter in the two poems.

'This Morning I Could Do A Thousand Things' was generally quite well understood and candidates were often able to comment, albeit simply, on the joyful tone of the poem. The listing of potential activities and the repetition of 'I could' was also noticed by many – both simple comments on style which could be rewarded by examiners. Better responses showed a clear understanding that the narrator in the poem chose to celebrate a beautiful day in April by simply observing the otherwise unnoticed beauty of nature. Even where this sense of a deliberate choice was missed, candidates often commented on the way the day is enjoyed or the way time seems to pass slowly while the narrator does nothing. Weaker responses lacked this awareness of the subtext and tended to consider the narrator lazy or wasteful of his time.

'In Your Absence' sometimes, though not always, posed more of a challenge. Where candidates noticed that the cherry blossoms were too early, there was sometimes an awareness of the tree as a symbol of time passing. One candidate discussed how there was a hint of violence in 'pried open' and the 'furtive' wind, for instance, and another saw how the moon, the seasons and the vulnerability of the blossoms were all linked with the too-fast passage of time for the poet.

Weaker candidates struggled to find links in the subject matter of the poems if they missed the rubric or if they misread the subtext in the first poem. These responses tended to comment on the glossed use of 'metronome' or the lack of rhyme but struggled to find more meaningful ideas. There was, however, often some grasp of the more melancholy mood of the second poem compared with the first, a feature which could be rewarded even where the way the mood was conveyed was less well understood.

### **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**
- **Encouragement of intuitive understanding of mood**
- **Experience in reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets**

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2016

### UNIT 4202

The structure of the report has been amended this year. Before the main report 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'.

#### **Characteristics of a good essay response:**

- **Tackle context as part of the question**
- **Stage directions are discussed in plays**
- **Candidates looked at the whole text**
- **Candidates established timelines and key events as part of preparation**
- **The question has been answered!**
- **Apt links to key scenes are provided**
- **The structure of texts is considered**
- **Sound knowledge of key moments in the texts**

#### **Ways in which performance could be improved:**

- **Avoid 'bolt on' history lessons**
- **Avoid misplaced and inaccurate references to context**
- **Do not use the third person or the conditional tense when answering empathy questions**
- **Film versions should not be referenced**

#### **Overall**

The papers were well received and, gratifyingly, contained evidence that messages from CPDs, Online Exam Review, reports, and so on are making their way back to the classroom.

Team Leaders particularly wanted a couple of messages to be fed back to centres after this round of marking. The first relates to handwriting and general legibility. If candidates are perceived to have problems with handwriting, arrangements can be made for them to use a word processor for their exams. The use of technologies of various kinds may have been influential in this evident increase in illegible scripts, as handwriting at length and at speed takes practice, built up over time. The second point is related, in a way, as some centres do not attach the necessary documentation to scripts where there have been some sort of access arrangements and this can cause difficulties in the application of the mark for SPaG.

Across the four papers, organising timing did not seem to be an issue, and it was gratifying to see where candidates had jotted down a little aide memoire to remind them when to move on to the next part of the paper, although, as always, some, particularly on the Foundation tier, showed evidence of fatigue by the final question. A few centres had apparently advised their candidates to write their answers to the 20 mark questions first, and, whilst there is no compulsion on candidates to answer in any particular order, the design of the papers allows them to settle in with the extract question, then move on to the essay.

In general terms, extract responses elicited focused responses, with those who took time to read and think first, perhaps underlining key words and phrases from across the extract (beginning, middle and end), with an eye on the question, were those who scored highest, lack of coverage being a limiting factor with some responses. As time is limited, with twenty minutes being recommended, including reading and thinking time, as well as writing, judicious selection of supporting evidence is key. Mood and atmosphere questions seemed less of a stumbling block than has sometimes been the case in the past, when the catch-all “tension” was to be found everywhere, although there is still an element of this. Indeed, one candidate averred that “the tension is very calm.” Other choices were also less successful, as in “an unrelaxed and uncalm atmosphere”, or “the mood becomes questionable as Ralph doesn’t know what to do.” Candidates who have a wide range of apt vocabulary for this type of question are at an advantage. Of course, it is also important to remember that mood and atmosphere tends to arise from what is happening, and what characters are saying and how they are behaving. There is a bit of a trend to focus on small details of punctuation, or words in isolation, without taking into account the context in which they occur. For example, “a lot of anger reinforced by the exclamation mark”, without further elaboration, is not much beyond empty feature spotting.

The essays in general were well received, and the strengthened aspect of context seems to have bedded down better this year, with fewer bolt-on history lessons. As the requirement to address context is clearly signalled in the questions (on the play in Specification A and the novel in Specification B) the best way to tackle it is as part of the question, such as discussing factors that influence the characters, in most cases. Of course, there is still some leakage of contextual factors into extract responses and the “other” essay, where, if accurate, it can be valid as background information. Margaret Thatcher seems to seep into a significant number of responses, and not always accurately. For example, she was apparently responsible for ensuring that only the rich could get into university and get good jobs - in both *Blood Brothers* and *A Christmas Carol*.

As far as choice of texts goes, although responses to every play and novel were in evidence somewhere, this seems to be narrowing, particularly with Specification A, where the overwhelming majority had answered on *An Inspector Calls* and *Heroes*, significant numbers of examiners seeing nothing but these two texts. On Specification B, *Blood Brothers* seems to gather in popularity every year, with *A Christmas Carol* and *Lord of the Flies* the most frequently studied novels by a fair distance.

## UNIT 2A

**Othello**, although not frequently studied, works well, and can be accessible to all, with its powerful story, relevant themes, and strong, clearly delineated characters. This is evident when candidates answered on it accidentally, owing to its place on the paper, and still had a pretty good idea of the dynamics between the characters (even the candidate who assumed that Iago was female!) Those who chose the character essay often chose Othello, understandably, but others went for more minor characters. Some who chose to answer on destruction discussed the destruction of trust and relationships, as well as considering how Iago so effectively destroys Othello’s sanity.

***Much Ado About Nothing*** seemed to have a few more takers this year, which was pleasing to note. The extract worked well, with all candidates showing a clear grasp of Leonato's anger with Don Pedro and Claudio, and the best exploring his long and emotional speech. The character essay was the more popular of the two, with Beatrice and Benedick, understandably, frequently chosen.

***An Inspector Calls*** was by far the most popular play, and the questions on it worked across the ability levels. Gerald Croft has always had a certain appeal for some candidates, as well as for the ladies of the play, and the extract exposed this, with some only seeing his knight in shining armour qualities, with purely philanthropic motives, but others probing his possible motivation, well supported by discussion of the stage directions and words such as "made" and "insisted." Both essays worked well, with some candidates seeing Sheila and Mrs Birling both as products of their time. The concept of Sheila as potential suffragette seems to be growing in popularity, too, once she'd got over her excitement at her engagement ring, which was quite often, rather harshly, held against her. It is always good to see that candidates have the confidence and knowledge to tackle the "to what extent" or "do you agree" type question. They certainly did here, with strong arguments on both sides.

***Hobson's Choice***, although still not studied in large numbers, really seems to engage candidates, who appreciated Maggie's brusque, no-nonsense tone, with some showing clear appreciation of the humour in the extract. Maggie and Willie are always popular, so this essay is what most chose to answer on, although those who answered on its popularity found relevance in its portrayal of the fall of "great" men, family arguments, strong women, work ethic and so on - in fact the stuff of much good drama, including contemporary soap operas.

***A Taste of Honey*** is equally relevant today, and is also enjoyed and appreciated by those who study it. In some responses on the extract, Geof got a bit sidelined (as in the extract and the play, in fact) but there was plenty of material for discussion providing that selection of key parts had been made prior to writing: it was a pity when the significance of the last few lines was overlooked, for example. Both essays worked well. The best responses on the play's title linked any fleeting happiness to contextual factors, whilst those who wrote on Jo and Helen found plenty to say, with the bullet points on the Foundation tier proving facilitating.

***Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*** has never been studied by many for this examination, however it always elicits thoughtful and engaged responses, and this year was no exception, and there was some really sensitive writing on the extract, as well as the essay. Although the essay question about families was the one more frequently chosen, there were also some perceptive discussions of Paddy's ambivalence towards growing up in response to the question on the Higher tier.

***Heroes*** is by far the most frequently studied novel in this part of the paper. As the extract was shorter than some, it was rather surprising that quite a significant number stopped short, usually at the point where Francis knocks at LaSalle's door. It may therefore be worth reiterating that every extract starts and, in particular, ends where it does for a good reason, and missing the ending is likely to be self penalising. Something else which examiners commented on was the tendency to treat this extract as an unseen ("the character seems to be determined to do something," for example) although the essay subsequently proved otherwise. Having said all that, there were also some closely read and analytical discussions of the extract. Perhaps because it started with the powerful image of the gun as tumour, this was successfully addressed and understood by candidates across the ability range. At the top of the mark range, candidates saw how Cormier's use of the senses helped create mood and atmosphere, some suggesting how this suggested that Francis's high adrenaline had

heightened his senses. The Francis and Nicole essay was probably the more popular of the two, and ranged from fairly straightforward, sometimes patchy, narrative, to sensitive and evaluative discussions, with the very best noting that the fact that we see Nicole through Francis's eyes suggests his presentation of her character and their relationship may be unreliable. As always with this novel, some find the use of flashbacks difficult to cope with, so the establishing of timelines and key events as part of preparation is particularly important, even with such a relatively short novel. Responses to the question about secrets were often very interesting to read, as candidates had had to think on their feet, and there were some lovely fresh responses, showing quite a bit of insight, although a few turned out to be something of a list of secrets. Some, however, went beyond the more obvious secrets of the main characters, including LaSalle's grooming of Nicole and Francis, to discuss the war and its impact on the whole community, and some linking it to the title of the novel, that the "big" secret is that no one is actually a hero.

***Never Let Me Go*** seemed again to work well for the possibly increasing numbers who study it (usually the more able on the Higher tier, although some are also evident on the Foundation tier). Those who tracked the extract, and thus saw the development of mood and atmosphere from nervous tension at the chance of finding Ruth's "possible" to the final sentence with the reference to "broke the spell" and "giggly panic" were well rewarded, with some going on to appreciate the pathos of the situation. This sense of pathos was also evident in some of the responses to "hopes and dreams" in view of the situation of the clones. Responses on Kathy showed empathy and awareness, with some evaluating her behaviour towards Ruth and Tommy, taking into account her own situation.

***About A Boy*** continues to engage those who study it. With the extract, it was relatively rare to see candidates appreciating its humour, or Will's wry viewpoint, and there was quite a lot of sympathy for Fiona, with most seeing how relationships had shifted, with some noticing how this is represented by Marcus moving towards Will. With the "outsider" question, there was an interesting range of responses, which had a freshness to them. Some focused on "celebration" (on Higher tier) as representing something fresh and different, some thought all the main characters are outsiders of one type or another, some believed the message was that outsiders need to change in order to fit in, whilst others saw the unconventional "family" at the end is, in fact, composed of outsiders. The essay on Marcus and Will was also successful, with, in many cases, really good knowledge of the text evident in candidates across the ability range.

***Resistance*** is not frequently studied however it elicits strong and knowledgeable responses. There was plenty in the extract for candidates to get their teeth into, with Sarah's control and determination creating an atmosphere of power, represented by the flames. Most chose to write about Sarah, and did so with sensitivity and understanding, with only a few writing about fear. Those who did so, sensibly focused on key characters and events.

## UNIT 2B

***The History Boys*** extract allowed for a range of responses, and the best were very closely read, noticing, for example, how the Headmaster, in his fulsome praise of Irwin, adds Dorothy almost as an afterthought. All responses showed empathy for Rudge and saw right through the Headmaster. Essays on Mrs Lintott were often impressive in their knowledge and detail, with the best seeing how she contributes to the plot, acts as a confidante, provides comic relief, gives a feminist viewpoint ("I have not hitherto been allotted an inner voice") and helps make arguments "less of a rant." Some noted that she is factual in her approach to life, as well as in her teaching style. Whilst the question on humour was less often tackled, all could discuss humorous parts of the play, with the best seeing how humour helps the playwright explore less savoury themes.

**Blood Brothers** is very popular, on both tiers. There was a range of responses to the extract. Some never got much further than noting the characters' use of "slang" or shortening words and names, sometimes linking this to their class, and never looked at what was actually happening. Some missed Linda's contribution, particularly in creating some light relief. The best, however, saw the subtext of Edward's behaviour, with some understanding that just before the extract opens, he and Linda had been "having a moment." Those who organised their time well managed to use the stage directions at the end and explored their implications, and most candidates succeeded in selecting and highlighting apt detail to support their judgements. The Mrs Lyons essay was successful in encouraging candidates to look beyond what can be quite a stereotyped presentation, and candidates showed empathy for her childlessness, her rather neglectful husband, the views of her held by the local children, whilst still noting her actions in threatening Mrs Johnstone with a knife and telling Mickey of Linda and Edward's relationship. Those who focused on the question on wealth/poverty (money and the lack of it on Foundation) tended to fare rather well, focusing on key moments where money is influential. Some, however, drifted into discussion of class (apparently, in those days, there was 1st, 2nd and 3rd class) at a simple level. At least one candidate made an astute observation, linking the sum of money offered to both Mrs Johnstone and Mickey and noting that, as a result of this, whilst Mickey went to prison, Mrs Lyons paid a heavy price for her abuse of her wealth later. As always with this play, there were quite a lot of misplaced and inaccurate references to context, such as Mickey and Linda going to "public school", and some lack of balance, with the opening scenes given more attention than those later on. It was, however, pleasing to note that better use was made of the song lyrics this year.

**A View From The Bridge** continues to work very well for candidates on both tiers and of all levels of ability. All could place the extract accurately, and made good use of the stage directions and characters' speech to support their discussion, with the immigration officers being (aptly) discussed as well as the more central characters. Many showed empathy and admiration for Beatrice and Catherine, noting how their behaviour has changed, from more compliant to shocked, defiant, and forceful. The essay on plans, hopes and dreams elicited a range of interesting responses, from those who just listed lots of plans, such as buying a table cloth, or Louis and Mike hoping to go bowling with Eddie, to thoughtful discussion, often, sensibly, built round characters, linking Eddie's hopes and dreams for Catherine, hers for a future with Rodolfo, Marco's dreams to support his family in Italy, Rodolfo's to build a new life in America, and Beatrice's dreams of a secure family life. Some extended this to discuss Alfieri's dreams of compromise, and a pleasing number noted that the blame for the failure of all these essentially can be laid at Eddie's door. The empathy question took some candidates by surprise. Some wrote in the third person, or conditionally ("As Catherine, I would..."), whilst some made careful reference to stage directions without blending them into the character's possible view of events, and some wrote what was more akin to a write on, with projections way beyond the end of the play (including the naming of Catherine and Rodolfo's baby, and Beatrice, rather surprisingly, marrying Marco.) Some, however, wrote with real engagement and understanding of Catherine and her relationships, with excellent incorporation of detailed reference to the text.

**Be My Baby** is not frequently studied, but there were sensitive discussions of Queenie in the extract, useful advice was given to the actor playing Matron, with most appreciating her situation, necessitating a certain amount of "tough love," and thoughtful essays on the varying "hopes and dreams" of the girls. This is an engaging, well-crafted play, and it is a pity that it has not had a greater take up.

***My Mother Said I Never Should*** saw some very successful Higher tier responses, particularly from candidates who appreciated the poignancy of the scene through sensitive and analytical readings, paying due attention to features such as the pauses, Margaret's staccato responses, the symbolism of the kite, and Margaret's displacement activity in the opening of letters. For the essay about the character most deserving of sympathy, Doris, Margaret and Jackie were all chosen, with apt links to key scenes, and the best candidates showing understanding of how the waste ground scenes add to our understanding of their characters, and their emotional inheritance. The question about the influence of the past was less popular, but the best responses showed an understanding of how each character has internalised her mother's emotionally restrictive behaviour, apart from Rosie, who has not been brought up by her birth mother. Some perceptive responses also explored what was described as the play's kaleidoscopic structure, with scenes echoing one another, with different characters, but similar events.

***Silas Marner*** works well for every level of ability, with its strong storyline, clearly delineated characters and accessible themes, as well as clear contextual features. Those who answered on it this year clearly understood what was happening in the extract, and responded to the sense of mystery and wonder created by Eliot. The essay on the character of Silas Marner was the more popular, with candidates showing a sound knowledge of key moments in the novel. The question on forgiveness elicited some interesting responses, again linked to key events.

***Pride and Prejudice*** had an extract that was rich with detail, and some candidates encountered difficulties on deciding what to focus on, with the result that Darcy tended to get neglected. The best, however, picked up on Elizabeth's courage and regret leading on to embarrassment and awkwardness on both sides. The essay on Elizabeth led on nicely from the extract, and all found plenty to say, with the best seeing her independence, linking that to contextual features. Those who wrote on money and wealth also linked these factors well to the context of the novel and key events and characters, often, understandably, relating to courtship and marriage.

***A Christmas Carol*** seemed to have more studying it on both tiers this year, and it was interesting to see how there were very clear levels of response to the extract. For example, some did not appreciate that it was a school that Scrooge and the Ghost were visiting, some did not know that the child was the young Scrooge, and quite significant numbers did not grasp the significance of Ali Baba (although plenty felt great sympathy for someone so lonely that he is forced to read). Nevertheless, others showed close reading skills in their discussion of the extract, and explored its detail, with many empathetic responses, particularly on the Foundation tier, expressing their understanding of how this has changed their initial view of Scrooge. The essay on children was the less popular of the two, but most addressed young Scrooge (as seen in the extract, of course), Tiny Tim and the other Cratchits, Ignorance and Want, the children in the miners' families, and even the children of Caroline and her family in the final Stave. The influence of previously set extracts could perhaps be seen in the tendency for some responses on the character of Scrooge to dwell disproportionately on the beginning of the novel, but candidates of all abilities found plenty to say about him. As always with this novel, film versions crept in, to such an extent that examiners had to check and double check that, for example, Scrooge did not, in fact, take the pennies off the cold, dead eyes of Jacob Marley. On the plus side, however, contextual features were much better incorporated this year. There has been real progress in this aspect of the specifications, it appears.

***Lord of the Flies*** is the second most popular prose text and the questions on it worked well in allowing candidates to show their knowledge and understanding. With the extract, most recognised, to one degree or another, the chaotic scene and Ralph's desperation, with close readers picking up on details such as Henry and Johnny's obliviousness to events, the unusualness of Piggy running, the "desperate violence" to Ralph's naked body from the "rasping creepers" and his using "precious breath to swear." Those who addressed the significance of the "smokeless and dead" fire at the level of symbolism were usually operating at the higher end of the marks. Both essays proved popular. The one about the relationship between Ralph and Jack sometimes became more of two separate character studies with the "relationship" bit being neglected, though more assured responses noted how the initial "shy liking" developed into a sort of quite friendly rivalry but quickly became hostile and life threatening. The question on fear, perhaps because it had not been anticipated, elicited interesting and often fresh responses, with features such as the Beast, Simon's encounter with the dead parachutist and subsequent murder, Jack's behaviour, and, although not often, Ralph's intense fear at the end. Some, however, stayed at a more general level, with references to "the boys." With this novel, in particular, a lack of confidence about addressing key events is sometimes evident, so this would be worth addressing in the classroom. When it comes to contextual features, whilst some candidates, sensibly, let this arise naturally through discussion of different types of societies and leaders, some still tried to pack everything in, with references to Freud, Hitler, the Cold War and so on. As for William Golding himself, he was said to have been a soldier, a sailor, to have witnessed both World Wars, been a Jew, and a teacher of varying subjects (only some of which is true, of course.) Indeed, he sometimes seemed to be a kind of Forrest Gump figure, embracing every aspect of the mid 20th century. With context, as was mentioned in the introduction to this report, it is far preferable to let it arise naturally, or as naturally as possible, from the content, characters and themes of the text.

***Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve***, is still a minority choice, although it tends to be done very well (usually by Higher tier candidates.) In the extract, the evocative imagery and use of language, such as the effects of the snatches of song and dialogue, provided a rich seam for mining, and the essays all proved accessible.

Therefore, once again, it only remains for me to thank team-leaders, examiners, teachers, and candidates for their hard work.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2016

UNIT 4203

#### Administration

Since the administrative aspects are common to all the Specifications, it seems sensible to deal with them under one heading rather than considering them for each Unit separately. These remarks, therefore, apply to both Wales and Out of Wales centres and to all the specifications.

Virtually all centres managed the administrative aspects with ease. Familiarity with the Internal Assessment Mark Input System (IAMIS) and the helpfulness of the staff at WJEC have resulted in a system where information and advice has been readily available to those who feel uncertain of any aspect. Moderators' reports have also helped in this process.

Where there were problems, they generally stemmed from a lack of familiarity with the system. Sometimes moderators felt that centres had not taken sufficient care when reading the advice available on-line or were unaware of the existence of that advice. The step-by-step list of guidance about how to prepare and send off the sample has certainly been a useful tool for the vast majority who have consulted it.

Problems that did occur were all too familiar to moderators and included: late despatch of the sample; changes to the sample without explanation; unsigned coversheets; incorrect marks entered on IAMIS; the use of incorrect tasks and texts; in Wales, missing Reading materials. Systems to solve these problems have been in place for some years and they did not delay proceedings to any great extent this year.

Some problems, however, are more serious and, even after the full run of the specifications, have not been solved. Despite all the advice and explanations of the regulations, some centres still allowed students to use inappropriate notes for the English Reading tasks (in out of Wales centres) and Literature work (in all centres). This has been as much of a problem this year as it has in the past and this seems to suggest that information and advice in general reports such as this and individual centre reports, where such issues are clearly flagged up, have not been observed. It is, and always has been, the teacher's responsibility to check to see if notes are unsuitably detailed before the assessment session begins. Moderators have certainly found it disheartening when previous reports have highlighted this issue over a number of years. The rules and regulations regarding the use of notes were published before any centre started teaching the courses. This makes it even more surprising when centres contravene the rules and then claim that they were unaware of them.

The other main recurring issue is the lack of annotation and commentary on the candidates' work. This too has been a requirement since the start of controlled assessment and yet in a number of centres there does not seem to be an understanding that annotation is there to justify the mark given in relation to the assessment criteria. The flagging up of errors in the Writing work is also a requirement. However, very often when errors were not flagged up, the SSPS mark was optimistic.

Despite the rigorous administration of controlled assessment sessions, there are still incidents of candidate malpractice. This year saw no drop in the number of candidates found to have lifted sections of their work from the internet or other sources. Of greater concern are the occasions when it is clear that a number of essays on a particular task are very similar in structure, vocabulary and phrasing, suggesting that students have used notes provided by themselves or others. Such cases of suspected malpractice are dealt with by the Compliance section of WJEC.

We are grateful to those centres which year in and year out have submitted helpfully presented folders and where all the complex administrative aspects have been completed with superb professionalism.

## Tasks

The themes for this year's cohort were Loss and Commitment. Both seemed to work well and allowed a variety of approaches. They were similarly popular with perhaps Loss just having the edge. The two most popular Shakespeare plays were, as they have been in the past, 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Macbeth' though some centres saw the opportunity to branch out and use texts which were admirably suited to the themes. 'King Lear' made a number of appearances with students considering the way the daughters' commitment to their father was manipulated. This play also was well-suited to the alternate theme with a close examination of the King's loss of position and love. 'The Merchant of Venice' was also popular with Shylock's progressive loss of daughter, money, position and religion. The best candidates saw that Portia's 'The quality of mercy' speech presented a code of behaviour that only applied to fellow Christians. Other plays included 'Measure for Measure', where candidates could consider Angelo's escalating loss of commitment to honest rule and 'Twelfth Night' where Malvolio's loss of position and status could be investigated. Hamlet's loss of commitment to Ophelia was fully investigated by some candidates and there were occasional attempts to look at commitment in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' though the internal politics of this play made for some confusing work since the commitments are constantly changing. 'The Tempest' made occasional appearances with candidates examining commitment in Ferdinand and Miranda's relationship and Prospero's involvement. The remaining plays in the canon were only very rarely spotted.

In work on 'Romeo and Juliet', there were two main approaches to the theme of Loss. Candidates could either look at a particular aspect of loss, for example, loss of innocence or loss of familial affection and respect or they could look more generally at the theme picking up the various ways in which loss was exemplified by the action. This approach resulted in rather fragmented structures where successive paragraphs on loss of love, loss of family, loss of life, loss of political authority and so on produced essays with little cohesion. It also made the linking with the chosen poetry difficult since candidates had to cherry pick aspects of the poems that fitted the particular 'loss' under consideration.

The alternative theme, commitment, also worked well with 'Romeo and Juliet'. Here the line of development was perhaps more easily established with an investigation of the protagonists' movement from commitment to family and, in Romeo's case, Rosaline to the new total commitment to the love relationship. Candidates were well able to see the stages of this change in the young people's attitudes and the best could trace through the language usage the characters' development. Some candidates tried to look at the theme in a wider context, covering commitment to law and order in Verona, family loyalty, Capulet's commitment to arranging a suitable marriage for Juliet, the Friar's commitment to settling the feud, Romeo's initial commitment to Rosaline and so on. As with the generalized approach to the Loss theme, this method tended to make for some rather loosely structured essays.

Both themes worked well with the other popular text, 'Macbeth'. Lady Macbeth's commitment to the murder was frequently investigated, as was the marital relationship. Their marriage also allowed candidates to look at the loss of love and in many cases the loss of sanity as guilt became more apparent.

The two themes certainly gave the candidates plenty to think about and it was pleasing to see how their often extensive knowledge of the plays was used to shape responses to the task. The outcomes were often very pleasing with a genuine sense of engagement apparent in most work. It was also particularly gratifying to see that all the poems from both selections had been used albeit some rather rarely.

For the Commitment theme, the most popular poetry choices were 'Cousin Kate', 'Valentine', the two Browning dramatic monologues, 'They Did Not Expect This' and 'A Woman to her Lover'. Most candidates sensibly limited their responses to two poems but often reference was made to others. As with the Shakespeare work, there was clear evidence of real engagement with the verse, particularly 'Cousin Kate' where many could see the unfairness of the treatment of the narrator. The stronger candidates could also grasp the twist at the end of the poem, which gives the narrator the final ascendancy. 'They Did Not Expect This' connected well with Macbeth's deteriorating relationship with his wife while the flippancy of Donne's 'The Flea' and Marvell's sublimely witty 'To His Coy Mistress' were an excellent contrast to the commitment of Romeo and Juliet.

'Cousin Kate' also reflected the theme of Loss in relation to Romeo and Juliet's breaking of social rules while 'What has happened to Lulu' matched the increasingly tense relationship between Juliet and her parents. 'Catrin' was often drawn into service to illustrate the way that mothers and daughters feel tension in their relationship leading to a loss of closeness. The loss of a young person's life and the parental reactions to such a sad event were well served by the linking of the Capulet's desolation with Jonson's anguished poem on his son's death plus Heaney's youthful view of the family reactions to his brother's accident.

As has always been the case, the linking of the poetry and drama was the most difficult aspect of the task. Undoubtedly, the most successful approach was to look at the texts closely before attempting to link them. Those candidates who tried total or partial integration generally fared less well. As has been noted in past reports, the investigation of the poetry generally suffers when an integrated approach is taken since the poems are often simply seen as a series of pegs to hang links on rather than as valuable pieces of literature in their own right.

## **Assessment**

Whilst not a requirement of the specification, the information given out in CPDs and in previous centre and overall reports, was to score the three Assessment Objectives discretely. This year, where this happened, the marking was for the most part reasonably accurate. When there was no indication of the marks for each AO and a holistic approach had been taken, generosity was frequently apparent. Hence, marks of 20+ were given to work where there was very little evidence of any linking. Almost inevitably, this situation led to a re-moderation of the affected folders and quite drastic mark reductions ensued.

The other major problem in the assessment was the result of the presumption that it was sufficient to simply put side-by-side examples for the chosen theme from the texts. This spotting of similarities does not constitute linking. Only those who could relate one text to another and discuss the different ways that the theme was revealed could score well in AO3. The highest marks were, of course, reserved for those who could make astute comments on the way language was used by the writers to reveal feelings and shape our responses.

## Final comments

This is the last year full cohorts take this specification and perhaps it would be permissible to make some valedictory comments. Since its inception, the Shakespeare/poetry linked task has been seen as a worthwhile part of the Literature course. Undoubtedly it has been testing but as a discriminator it has been very successful. It has given candidates the opportunity to display their skills fully and has introduced all candidates to quality poetry and drama. The 64 poems in the WJEC Poetry Collection have served us well over the years that the specification has been running. This success illustrates the wonderful flexibility of great literature. Credit must be given to the many teachers who have embraced this task, chosen the texts with care and inspired their candidates to write with engagement and enthusiasm. Finally, we must pay tribute to the extraordinary efforts and commitment of the cohort of moderators who have so ably assisted us in the regulation of this unit.





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