GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GCSE (NEW)
ENGLISH LITERATURE

SUMMER 2017

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UNIT 1

General comments

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. There were responses written to questions on all the other novels but apart from small numbers on *Anita and Me*, these were rubric infringements where candidates were unsure about what to do when faced with the question paper. This was much more marked on Foundation Tier but on both tiers a significant number of candidates wasted a lot of their time reading extracts and answering questions on novels they had never read or studied.

Examiners needed to take account of the extent to which candidates had addressed the different assessment objectives relevant to each question. They 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 context is assessed. The character of Crooks, featured in the *Of Mice and Men* extract, particularly exposed this lack of understanding as many candidates on both tiers focused on the racial divide of 1930s America rather than what his behaviour reveals about him in this specific extract.

The poetry comparison question was generally handled with a clearer understanding of the need to cover both poems and the comparative element. Only a few candidates this year wrote about the poems but did not compare them. 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.

Extract questions

Of Mice and Men

The Steinbeck extract question asked candidates to focus on Crooks' behaviour and speech in this scene and most managed to track the most important features here. Some were aware of why the character here needed the 'layers of protection' after his encounter with Curley's wife and understood that despair and bitter humiliation lay at the heart of his behaviour here. Weaker candidates tended to take what he said at face value – that he wanted to be alone, that he really had changed his mind about wanting to join the others on the dream farm. A wider understanding of Crooks' characterisation across the novel helped better candidates to focus on the meaning of his behaviour in the extract but, as mentioned

above, some candidates were deflected into commentary on racial segregation and prejudice without focusing on the detail of the extract. This often meant that there was little selection and comment on language and images, required for AO2, and there were sometimes several paragraphs of contextual information that examiners could not reward.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Candidates were asked to comment on the presentation of Mrs Dubose in this extract and on Higher Tier most made sensible, focused comments on the character's malice and prejudice. Weaker candidates tended to look for evidence of her age and senility (the 'arthritic finger' and her apparent forgetfulness about which day it was) but missed the more important savagery of her attack on the children and what it revealed. As above, there was some drifting into the wider context of the novel with reference to her attitude to Scout's overalls but most were able to see this as a reflection of her contempt for Atticus' more liberal views.

AO2 was better covered by more able candidates on this text. Descriptive language to describe her behaviour such as 'yelled' and 'bawled' and the unsavoury physical details to describe her were picked out and commented on by some at the top of the mark range who clearly understood how Steinbeck controlled and manipulated the reader's reactions to Mrs Dubose.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the specific extract, not the context of the novel**
- **Selection of short, apt references to support points made**
- **Discussion of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas**

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, not relying on surface meanings**

Essay Questions

Of Mice and Men

The question on the relationship between George and Lennie was a popular choice on both tiers and examiners awarded the whole range of marks to these responses. Better candidates tended to focus on going beyond describing the main characteristics of their relationship and wrote about its significance in the novel and what Steinbeck wanted to convey about his society through his portrayal of the doomed friendship between the characters. Such interpretations were often insightful and perceptive, suggesting that Steinbeck wanted to draw attention to the harshness and prejudice of the times by charting the demise of a true friendship. Others saw some reflection of the exploitation of migrant workers in their relationship and a desperation on their part to shore up a lonely worker's existence by clinging on to an unlikely and unequal friendship.

Ways to describe the main features of the relationship were commonly offered, such as father/son, brothers, master/servant, master/pet. These were useful as long as candidates could support such ideas by close reference to events and quotations from the novel.

Key events were selected by better candidates to show the development of the relationships, the love and companionship between the men and some of the underlying tensions between them. At the lower end on Higher Tier and more commonly on Foundation, this approach sometimes led to less focused narration and where this was evident there was also a tendency to neglect the contextual factors which affected their relationship. There was, on the whole, less of the 'bolted on' paragraph of historical information about the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. However, on Foundation there were many responses in which no reference was made to context and it was difficult for examiners to see much implicit grasp of when and where the novel was set.

The alternative question was generally better handled in terms of context and most candidates on both tiers related the different dreams and aspirations of the characters to the prevailing conditions of the time. Again, as in the other questions, better candidates tended to see these dreams and aspirations as Steinbeck's vehicle to comment on his society and to offer a critique on the limitations and miseries of his characters' lives. Some at this level commented on the significance of the dream farm as a magnet for the poor and dispossessed, offering them autonomy, independence and control in a world where every detail of their lives is surrendered to whoever pays their meagre wages. Curley's wife's dream of becoming a Hollywood actress was more readily seen as an example of 'false hope' because of the restrictions and limitations imposed by her society on women's lives. There were some thoughtful distinctions made between characters and the meanings of their dreams by more sensitive candidates. Crooks, for example, was seen as temporarily seduced by a veneer of racial equality he barely glimpsed while Candy was considered by some to have suddenly revived a dream 'in the DNA of migrant workers then and now' when he saw a chance to make it real. The extent to which these dreams were merely examples of 'false hope' proved a useful line of argument and discussion for many candidates on both tiers. The purpose of the dream farm for Lennie as a motivator and a way for George to control his actions was noted by many across the mark range and there was some thoughtful discussion of whether or not George ever really believed in it for himself. The lack of any false hopes in the form of aspirations and dreams was sometimes seen as the basis for Slim's high status and the respect he is shown, and candidates who showed this willingness to explore the nuances of the question often did very well.

Weaker candidates tended to look for reasons why dreams failed within the narrative, such as Curley's wife's dream being curtailed by her death or George's by the death of Lennie. Where this approach was adopted, candidates did not see the influence of wider society on the characters and tended to assume that dreams and their outcomes were personal and individual.

Foundation Tier candidates often described each dream quite simply and sometimes described as fact some aspirations which were not always borne out by detailed support. Crooks, for example, was commonly believed to harbour a dream for racial equality in his society and Curley was described as wanting to be a professional boxer.

To Kill a Mockingbird

The question on Atticus and Aunt Alexandra proved popular on both tiers and where candidates could use its wording to discuss the differences in their values, they were often able to weave into their responses some sophisticated understanding of the impact of the social mores of the time on both characters. On Foundation Tier, the bullet points guided candidates towards a more evaluative approach and some candidates were able to shape their responses accordingly for the higher marks.

At the highest level, the fact that both characters had a similar background in Maycomb helped candidates to tease out the ways in which Alexandra had assumed the prejudices of time and place but Atticus challenged them. Less sophisticated candidates tended to see their differences more starkly and to offer as support their differing views about heredity, men and women and race as if they were individual traits of character. The impact of the trial of Tom Robinson was interestingly explored by many candidates and the way in which the siblings' views began to converge was commented on with some detailed reference to the text.

The alternative question was similarly addressed by able candidates who often had a thorough knowledge of the detail of the novel and could muster their evidence to show that there was indeed hope despite the horror. Most candidates pointed to the length of time it took for the jury to convict Tom Robinson, how peaceful, compassionate solutions were found to problems such as the lynching of Tom or the appearance of Boo Radley at the end of the novel. Weaker candidates ranged less confidently across the text and relied on one or two events which did not always make the point they intended convincingly. Only rarely did candidates neglect to mention the social context of the novel but on Foundation Tier especially there were some brief and under-developed responses to this question.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

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

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Practice in how to use the wording of a question to show knowledge and insight**
- **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. Very few candidates on both tiers did not include some comparison of poems although the quality of such comparison varied widely.

On Higher Tier, the poems were widely understood in general terms as explorations of how children behave collectively and the relationship and attitudes that school pupils have towards school. 'Assembly' was carefully examined for the impact of its range of images by able candidates but nearly all candidates saw that the poet's intention was to create a sense of mounting tension. More subtle readings understood how the repressed power of the 'feral' was also an underlying feature. The contrast between the vastness of the hall and its silence with the small children and the small noise they made was discussed with varying success. Able candidates used the imagery to show how the poet evokes the atmosphere in the hall while weaker candidates could pinpoint the tense atmosphere but were less able to say how the poet created it.

The ending of the poem was only rarely selected for particular analysis. Some candidates noted the intended humour of it but a few candidates saw how the apparent authority of the headmaster and the fear he instilled in the pupils was undermined and mocked. There were some thoughtful interpretations which suggested that the pupils actually had the upper hand from the start and that the control of the teacher was illusory.

There were some misreadings which were fairly common: some thought the child pointed at had arrived in the wrong uniform or had arrived late and a few struggled to find meaning in the imagery or did not recognise that they were images.

'The Nighthawks' was successfully explored by candidates who were comfortable with imagery and figurative language and were confident enough to interpret and consider their impact. Some perceptive responses based their responses on the extended image of the harbour and of the sea and could show how this contributed to an atmosphere of slightly illicit freedom and companionship after school. There were many literal readings or misunderstandings of the scenario, however, where candidates thought the pupils were still in school, on their way there or were in an actual harbour where they worked or had left school and were now employed or unemployed. A few felt the poem's 'message' was to work hard in school to avoid such a fate.

Inevitably, candidates who had explored ideas, images and mood more effectively in the poems were more successful in making comparisons between them. Some highly analytical responses unpicked how the very different atmospheres in the poems were created and how the different portrayals of children's collective behaviour were developed by language and imagery. The implied attitude to school in the second poem was seen as reflecting the mood of restriction and repression in the first and that children acting as one was a common theme in both. Less effective comparisons relied on more random connections of word choice ('windows', often) or on straightforward factual details such as one poem being about school, the other after school.

On Foundation Tier, there was usually some clear understanding of the content of the poems in general terms and some attempt made to select words and phrases and offer simple explanations of them. There was often much speculation and guesswork about which animals were being described and while examiners were not looking for accurate identification to reward, there were some unlikely assertions. However, even where the animals were wrongly identified, candidates could often comment on why images of pickpockets and sky-divers had been used by the poet to describe movement in the first poem. In the second, quite a few candidates were struck by and strongly empathised with the sense of connection between human and animal and wrote with engagement about an encounter which was variously described as 'unforgettable', 'awestruck' or 'touching'.

The comparison between texts was only very rarely not attempted and where candidates had managed to explore some of the different ways in which the poets described the animals a more substantial and meaningful comparison could be made. The images used were sometimes sensibly compared and the way in which the poets conveyed an attitude of admiration and appreciation for each animal was also a productive approach at the top of the mark range.

Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- **Coverage of both poems and a developed comparison of ideas, techniques and effects**
- **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**

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UNIT 2

General comments

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'.

This was the first sitting of the new specification for Unit Two. There were no major problems with any of the papers or with specific questions. More detailed reflections on individual questions and texts will follow but there are some general points to be made.

An Inspector Calls and *Heroes* remained the most popular text choices on Unit 2A, although some excellent work was seen on many other texts such as *About A Boy*, *A Taste of Honey* and *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*. On Unit 2B the popular texts are *Blood Brothers*, *A View From the Bridge*, *Lord of the Flies* and *A Christmas Carol*. Text choices were somewhat narrower on Foundation Tier and some texts had not been studied by any significant numbers at all.

No SPAG: the major change with the new specification was the removal of the discrete marks for SPAG which is no longer a separate Assessment Objective. An acknowledgement of the need to structure and communicate clearly is still included in the generic mark schemes for all four papers.

Extracts: These were generally well attempted across all the texts. At times there was some unnecessary dipping into context (AO4), which is not assessed here. An increasing tendency to 'spot' subject terminology also caused occasional problems when this was not linked to meaning. There was evidence that increasing attention is being paid to working through the whole extract successfully.

Essays: *Blood Brothers* on Unit 2B was one of several texts where some groups of candidates are still including unnecessary context (AO4) in their answers. This can be unhelpful as it leaves the candidate less time to address the question directly. It was good to see increased use of relevant contextual detail for texts such as *A Taste of Honey* and *Othello* on Unit 2A. Thematic and character questions were both popular. It was good to see the various interpretations of some questions, such as the one asking about responsibility in *A Christmas Carol*, showing real engagement with the whole text and the ability to adapt detailed knowledge to the task at hand.

Unit 2A Higher Tier: Extract Questions

Othello

A surprising number failed to see Iago's devious scheming though candidates who did explore the appearance and reality did so with competence, demonstrating a high level of analytical skill and a real appreciation of the use of language. One example of this was Iago's use of "my noble lord". Most were able to state that this revealed his respect for Othello but the more successful recognised that this was apparent or feigned respect. Many

identified and discussed the irony in the extract, the implication of the “monster” in Iago’s thought etc. the fact that Iago’s behaviour here is an act was not always explored though.

Much Ado About Nothing

This text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

An Inspector Calls

Candidates at all ability levels engaged with the extract question and most were able to offer a competent response, with some showing a sensitive appreciation of mood and atmosphere and how it was created here. This year fewer responses were reliant on contextual discussion, although this is still happening occasionally even though no marks are given for AO4 in extract questions. The stage directions offered plenty of opportunity to support candidates’ exploration of mood and atmosphere, and most embraced this. The quick-fire nature of the conversation and the effect of language choices and pauses in dialogue were also addressed by many candidates to gain marks for AO2. Stronger candidates explored Mrs Birling’s initial greeting as a method by which to dismiss the Inspector under a veneer of politeness, whereas weaker candidates saw this introduction as genuine. Sometimes there is quite a bit of the, *‘This creates mood’* approach, unfortunately, when a well-placed adjective would make all the difference. With this in mind, it is worth candidates being made aware of how best to express mood. Comments such as, *‘This creates a mood of talking to each other’* are clearly not about mood, but rather about what is happening.

Hobson's Choice

This text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

A Taste of Honey

Many candidates did extremely well with this question. The relationship between Helen and Jo was explored at various levels. Some saw Jo as ungrateful for not appreciating the flat and took some of Helen's comments at face value. Moving up from here there were those who saw them both as fractious and saw their relationship as very negative. At the top of the range there was some appreciation of the humour in this extract and some sensitivity about the complexities of this relationship as it is initially and dynamically shown in this first scene.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

There were a number of strong and sensitive responses to this extract. Knowledge of Paddy and his Ma and their relationship across the rest of the book supported analysis of this extract. There were some lovely, perceptive comments about moments such as when Paddy says that his Ma smiled at him to make sure he knew she wasn't laughing at him. There was a great deal to tackle in this extract. Candidates did well in discussing the shape, style and structure of this piece as well as by looking at the use of language and Paddy as a narrator. The very best saw much of the humour and how the narrative presentation added to this.

Heroes

The extract question was done well with a significant number of candidates tracking through the passage with care. The air of disappointment/sadness was pinpointed and discussed as was the extreme awkwardness. Some struggled to move beyond “awkward” as a description of the mood and atmosphere. Some of the best responses often did much with the plopping ball sound/ping pong ball/gunshot connection.

Most were able to place the events in the text although some thought this came immediately after the assault rather than much later. Some candidates treated it as a relationship question, and this was a starting point rather than an examination of mood and atmosphere. The passage offered a lot of scope for analysis of language and technique. Most candidates explored the characters' language choices, the significance of their pauses, the weight of the silences between them and the questions used to deflect one another from awkward topics.

Never Let Me Go

Most candidates were able to place this extract and identify the increasing tension during this extract. Some seemed to muddle Ruth and Laura a little and there were varying interpretations of Kathy's role in this scene. The better responses did more than treat this as an isolated episode by making something of Kathy's initial comments and showing that the reader is on side with Tommy and that there is much sympathy for him here. Some sensitive responses went as far as suggesting that this extract shows how normal these children actually are in the way that they set Tommy up as they enjoy seeing his anger explode.

About a Boy

Candidates engaged well with the extract, demonstrating secure understanding of character, although occasionally focus was more on Will than on Marcus. Lots wrote well about narrative technique here and the interior monologue. Whether Marcus is mature or the opposite was a much discussed point, with evidence provided for both points of view. Stronger candidates considered Marcus' reasons for underplaying his experience of bullying, whilst less confident candidates suggested that Marcus was oblivious to it. Marcus' dependence on his mother and the push/pull that he feels towards her was explored with real sensitivity.

Resistance

Only a few attempted this text but those that did were able to see the tension in this extract and made much of the dynamics of the relationship between Sarah and Maggie at this point in the novel. The better responses were able to relate this to the information given to us at this point about Maggie's past.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on the extract**
- **Frequent selection of apt references to support points made**
- **Critical probing of inferences, with an awareness of the significance of this extract within the wider text**
- **Wide-ranging coverage of the extract including developments within it**
- **Close examination of how the language/imagery used helps to convey meaning**
- **Awareness of the audience and the significance of specific stage directions for extracts from plays**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **A more useful vocabulary to describe mood and atmosphere**
- **More sustained and detailed coverage of the extract**
- **Increased selection of supporting references rather than general comments**
- **Not spending any time at all on AO4 (context) as it is not assessed here**
- **More focus on probing the subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract**

Unit 2A Higher Tier: Essay Questions

Othello

The two essay options appeared to be equally popular, with candidates demonstrating secure knowledge of characters and plot. Many offered perceptive and evaluative responses.
Essays about Desdemona were often well supported by apt quotation and detail from across the text, with a solid background in relevant contextual knowledge, especially of women's status and attitudes to race, marriage etc. Some erred towards just looking at the presentation of Desdemona, rather than her importance to the play as a whole. For the second essay choice there were a number of well-controlled arguments that proved the prevalence and importance of trickery and jealousy in the play. This was a more open question and there were some impressive examples of candidates using this opportunity to show a perceptive and adaptable overview of the whole play, including issues of context for AO4.

Much Ado About Nothing

This text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

An Inspector Calls

Both essays attracted large numbers of responses.

The question about Eric encouraged some thoughtful answers. Candidates argued well, both in support of Eric and his presentation as an outsider in the family and thereby an object of sympathy, and against him as a selfish man driven by his sense of entitlement. His drinking habit, poor relationship with his parents, closeness with Sheila and perceived inferiority to Gerald were all well documented. Most were able to write relevantly about context – privilege/ status of women/ lack of a benefit system etc. Less successful responses tended to confuse Eric with Gerald. There were also many references to events and details that are not in Priestley's work. Many of these seem to be from more recent filmed productions. These inaccuracies are not helpful to candidates as such material is redundant and cannot gain marks, thus limiting the remaining time available to them.

The most common approach to the second task was to work through all the suspects and arrive at shared responsibility but some made a case for a single character, usually Mrs Birling. Some straightforward responses did just work through the events leading to Eva's demise without really offering conclusions about responsibility. Many did consider the contextual factors as being mostly responsible for Eva's death with some candidates using these to address the, 'what is most responsible' aspect of the question. The latter responses were often more original and more informed.

Hobson's Choice

This text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

A Taste of Honey

The essay about Jo was the more popular choice. Context was applied successfully to many issues in Jo's life as shown in the play. The more straightforward responses sometimes stuck to statements about the shocking nature of her relationship with her mother as in the 1950s this sort of answering back was not expected. Others added much more to this by discussing Geof and Jimmy and the contextual issues of race and sexuality related to them.

The same contextual drivers were used well to discuss troubled relationships for the other question. Here many responses were very successfully driven by applied context and provided a perceptive overview.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

Both essay questions were attempted by similar numbers. There was some outrage that a story about the break-up of a family could ever be seen as funny, but this worked well to bring out some impassioned and informed responses. Others looked at the humour and saw how this was balanced with increasing sadness and distress for the reader as the book progresses. It was impressive to see some sensitively exploring the black and disturbing childhood humour of incidents such as Sinbad and the lighter fluid. Paddy's relationships with his parents were discussed in detail. There was some nice AO2 work on the final scene with his father, in particular, with much made of Paddy seeing him through glass and the distance implied.

Heroes

Choice between the essay questions was pretty much equally divided and both elicited some engaged and insightful responses.

For the first question the more straightforward responses looked at the superficial changes made by war – such as to Francis' face. More thoughtful answers included a range of considerations, including the changes made to minor characters. There were some extremely insightful answers that explored how war did not cause Larry's attack on Nicole but only served as a delay to the fruition of his plans, or, alternatively, that the war caused the attack as Larry's status as a returning hero allowed him to legitimise the assault as something he had earnt. It has to be said that all of this was dependent on an accurate understanding of the narrative structure and sequencing of events. Quite a number thought that the assault of Nicole took place before the war after the table tennis tournament, for instance.

The relationship question was addressed with confidence. Consideration of flashbacks, narrative approach, choice of tense, key turning points and Cormier's control of unfolding events were productive inclusions for the achievement of AO2. More straightforward responses jumped from the beginning of the novel to the end but there was very little of this, with most exploring a wide range of points in the characters' relationship. The idea of its 'change' was also considered carefully.

Never Let Me Go

The relatively small number of candidates who studied this text did well with both of the essay questions. Friendship was quite a popular choice, with Ruth and Kathy, Kathy and Tommy amongst those considered. More straightforward responses worked through relevant events to show how friendship was presented whilst the issue of its importance was addressed with insight and overview by others. Ruth was also a popular choice and did not get quite such a bad press as might perhaps have been expected with some sensitive readings of her character, particularly in relation to Tommy and Kathy.

About a Boy

The two essay choices proved equally popular. Many candidates explored Marcus and Fiona's relationship in close detail and also tracked its changes. Few candidates looked at the characters separately, which could sometimes be an issue with relationship questions in the past. This could be testament to how much the characters' affect each other in this text.

If there was a weaker area of coverage it was the latter sections of the book and particularly the developments in the relationship shown at the police station.

There were some extremely strong responses to the question about Will. Will's character and development was explored with real sensitivity by a high number of candidates. Narrative technique was often confidently explored. For some less successful responses this became more of an essay on Marcus and Will's relationship than one on how Will is presented and others did bring in events and detail from the film version of this text but generally this task was well attempted.

Resistance

There were only a few responses to each essay. Relationship responses mostly chose to focus, often productively, on Albrecht and Sarah, although others did well with Maggie and Sarah and other relationships, with the best returning to the terms of the question to offer a judgement and overview. Maggie's importance was considered thoughtfully for the other task. There was some sensitive work showing how her decline after the shooting of the horse provides some impetus for Sarah's strength at the end of the novel, almost a handing on of the baton.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **For the plays a clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and storylines, related directly to the task in hand**
- **Selection of a range of significant events and specific details to support a clear and thoughtful focus on the question**
- **Some analysis of the writer's intentions, including those related to context, though only where appropriate (plays)**
- **A demonstration of a secure knowledge of characters and themes that could be adapted to meet the demands of a specific question**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **For the plays a better application of context to the question in hand, using AO4 to drive discussion where appropriate**
- **More focus on exhibiting a personal engagement with the text rather than just providing a list of relevant details and events**
- **Practice in keeping a strong and direct focus on the question asked, including context where appropriate (plays)**
- **For *Heroes* in particular a better understanding and confidence with the series of events and chronology untangled from the narrative structure**

Unit 2A Foundation Tier: Extract Questions

Only the texts that were attempted by any significant numbers will be considered.

An Inspector Calls

Candidates were able to achieve at all levels with this extract. Some confusion arose about when this happens. Quite a few saw this as very near the beginning of the play, perhaps because of Mrs Birling's welcome to the inspector. This didn't help them to see Sheila's attitude to her mother which was a key point of development for many of the more successful responses. Very many candidates did well with exploring the mixture of defense and horror from Sheila exhibited here and saw that she has now gained an understanding of the inspector's methods. Those that tracked through systematically also did well with the final exchange between the inspector and Mrs Birling. There was some pleasing attention

paid to the likely response of an audience, linking detailed judgements made to the terms of the question

A Taste of Honey

This extract was very well handled by most. There were lots of judgmental comments about Jo and Helen's speech and behaviour. More straightforward responses tended to make an initial, often negative judgment of Jo based on her first comment, 'And I don't like it'. Many were then happy to adapt this initial judgment as the extract progressed deciding that she was justified rather than ungrateful, or perhaps that both of them were as bad as each other. There were some lovely, thorough responses showing thoughtful understanding of the relationship as it is shown here and full marks were not uncommon.

Heroes

The more successful responses to this extract knew when it occurred in the book and its narrative structure. This allowed for more than straightforward comments on what is happening and some more thoughtful discussion of the exchanges between Francis and Nicole. It was easy to see where understanding of the events of the book was more or less complete from the series of comments made on the specific details selected. The conversation about Larry in the latter half of the extract was found a little trickier to interpret but many did account well for Nicole's reluctance to discuss him and the attempt by Francis to reassure her.

About a Boy

There were some outraged and empathetic responses to this extract with some general comments about bullying, but most were more successful by working through it in detail and accounting for Will's comments in particular. There were some thoughtful comments about the nature of Marcus and Fiona's relationship as suggested by the discussion about haircuts and some clear and insightful understanding of his note that if his Mum was still around in four years' time then that would be good.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Fuller coverage of the extract rather than focussing on just the beginning**
- **Sustained focus on the question**
- **Accurate textual references to support points made**
- **Ability to show some appreciation of how this extract fits into the text as a whole, perhaps to show how the behaviour of a character is typical or otherwise, for instance**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **Practise going beyond retelling of the extract to give some informed comment on what is happening and its significance to the question asked**
- **Making a range of focused points, each with a supporting quotation, working through the extract to reach the end**
- **More complete awareness of what is being assessed here, ie AO1 and AO2 but not AO4.**

Unit 2A Foundation: Essay Questions

Only the texts that were attempted by any significant numbers will be considered as not all were on Foundation Tier.

An Inspector Calls

Both essay choices had many takers. The more straightforward responses to the question about blame tended to narrate the events leading to Eva's demise and then make a concluding comment expressing which character was thought to be most to blame. Some of these dealt with context and some didn't but the most successful were able to show how context added to the apportioning of blame. For instance, Mr Birling and his capitalist values, Mrs Birling's false charity, Gerald's ability to use a lower class woman etc. The blending in of context, even at a straightforward level, was available here and often embraced.
Eric received very mixed reviews. Many saw him as a sympathetic character who has awful parents and a forgivable drinking problem. Others were less impressed and condemned him for his actions towards Eva. Context was addressed through his attitudes towards his father and his ability to intimidate Eva as well as his role in the family. There were problems with film references at times, and quite a few mixed more than simple details between Eric and Gerald.

A Taste of Honey

Both of these essays were addressed with much success. Jo was given sympathy by many. Detailed responses looked at her various relationships and her pregnancy in particular. Context was accessible through all of these points and was succesfully applied by many. Some drifted into discussion of Helen but this was not too common. Troubled relationships proved fruitful for applying context too. Most who attempted this question went with Jo anyway and concentrated on Helen, Geof and Jimmy, as well as Peter at times. There were also some interesting and thoughtful responses based on Helen.

Heroes

The question about Larry and Francis was the more popular choice. The bullet points were used to help keep the narrative in chronological order but there were still some problems with key events. For instance, many candidates incorrectly place the assault on Nicole as taking place immediately after the table tennis tournament. Most of the more thoughtful comments were made about their final meeting and the level of disclosure and manipulation from Larry before he takes his own life. Some drifted into talking about Francis and Nicole's relationship at length, but most were successful, focused attempts.
The changes brought about by war were discussed in various ways. Some took this as an opportunity to visit the plot as a whole, suggesting that war leads Larry to attack Nicole after he returns a different man, and therefore leads Francis to his later actions. This worked well for some but became less clear and effective when the chronology of events and therefore motivations was not clear. Minor characters such as Arthur were used well by others to create a more general picture of the effects of war on the community.

About a Boy

Will was the much more popular choice from the two essays. Bullets were generally used successfully to structure these essays but some became distracted into an extended discussion of the relationship with Marcus and then of Marcus himself. The third bullet about Rachel was also a stumbling block for some who were uncertain of her role and others who confused her with Suzy. The more successful responses got to the end of the book and were clear about Will's development through it.

Those who wrote about Marcus and Fiona did rather better with early events. There was some thoughtful work at times, particularly about her vulnerability and Marcus' care for her.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **For the plays the discussion of relevant contextual factors which are related directly to the question**
- **Events and details selected relevantly and with some range to develop the answer relevantly**
- **Probing of subtext to show more than a surface understanding, most often achieved by engaging with the terms of the question in a direct and sustained manner**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **For the plays a better blending in of contextual elements to the body of the essay. Keeping context relevant and applied**
- **Using direct references to help to move on from more general retelling of texts**
- **Probing subtexts by addressing the question directly, returning to it regularly in each paragraph and at the end of the essay**

Unit 2B Higher Tier: Extract Questions

The History Boys

Overall this extract was treated successfully. The most successful answers focused on the contrast between Hector and Irwin's teaching and the teasingly playful mood of the students. The best answers compared this to Irwin's guarded behaviour and the underlying tensions between the characters.

Blood Brothers

Candidates were mostly able to track through the extract addressing relevant areas, though some did not have the necessary vocabulary to identify mood and atmosphere; 'a sly mood'/ 'an angry atmosphere' for example. A lot of candidates treated this scene with insight, particularly with regards to the function of the Narrator. Most candidates focused mainly on the interaction between Mickey and Edward and the tension between the two. Those who focused in on the detail of the stage directions tended to reach the higher marks as there was a lot of rich language to analyse.

A View from the Bridge

Candidates were able to write insightfully about Eddie and Beatrice at this point in the play. A lot of candidates were quite blunt about Eddie, seeing him as a bully because of the way he refers to Rodolpho. Many also made reference to him as unintelligent or uneducated because of his Brooklyn dialect. More successful candidates wrote perceptively about the relationship between husband and wife and Beatrice's strength in standing up to Eddie. Most candidates recognised the troubling signs within the marriage, as pointed out by Beatrice, and highlighted Eddie's feelings towards Catherine as a significant factor.

Be My Baby

This text was not attempted by many. Responses tracked through the text well, showing good understanding of the characters, particularly how an audience would respond to Mrs. Adams. The best answers focused on the contrast between Mrs. Adams' manner and that of Matron, seeing the mother's mixture of embarrassment and defensive practicality.

My Mother Said I Never Should

This text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

Silas Marner

This text was not attempted by many. The stronger responses probed the language confidently, focusing on actions Godfrey wishes to do: 'spring…wrench…flog'. The best answers used the tension between the two characters to identify the mood and atmosphere throughout.

Pride and Prejudice

Very few responses were seen. Candidates engaged well with the extract and wrote insightfully about the characters' feelings towards each other, tracking through systematically.

A Christmas Carol

Some candidates struggled to locate this extract successfully, not realising this was the ghost of Jacob Marley (even though he is mentioned) but most were able to pinpoint its place in the novel. Successful answers identified the mood and atmosphere by tracking Scrooge's actions – there was a lot of rich language to analyse.

Lord of the Flies

This extract was tackled in its entirety by most candidates. The initial relationship between the two characters was at the heart of the extract and many picked up on this encounter as the beginning of an important relationship. Others focused in on the signs that all would not be well – with Piggy looking like he may be a victim on the island. A lot of sensitivity was shown towards Piggy, with his 'quivering lip' and 'spectacles dimmed with mist'.

Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve

Not many were seen. The extract was successful, with candidates tracking to the end, picking up on poignant moments between characters.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on the extract**
- **Frequent selection of apt references to support points made**
- **Critical probing of inferences, with an awareness of the significance of this extract within the wider text**
- **Wide-ranging coverage of the extract including developments within it**
- **Close examination of how the language/imagery used helps to convey meaning**
- **Awareness of the audience and the significance of specific stage directions for extracts from plays**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **A more useful vocabulary to describe mood and atmosphere**
- **More sustained and detailed coverage of the extract**
- **Increased selection of supporting references rather than general comments**
- **Not spending any time at all on AO4 as it is not assessed here**
- **More focus on probing the subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract**

Unit 2B Higher Tier: Essay Questions

The History Boys

Most of the responses completed the thematic question well, taking the approach of a few key areas to address love and learning and considering them in turn. Most responses were balanced, considered and thoughtful.

The question about Hector was a popular one and responses focused well on key areas of the text. Hector's inappropriate behaviour was dealt with sensitively and a few candidates considered how the adults are particularly disapproving, yet the students rarely make an issue of it. Some candidates recognised that Posner is the student most in the vein of Hector's view of the world and, just like Hector, Posner struggles with feeling like an outsider. Overall, Hector's character was dealt with sensitively.

Blood Brothers

Both essay questions proved popular and it was pleasing to see that references to contextual issues were few and far between although redundant when they did appear as AO4 is not assessed in this half of the exam paper. Some candidates became horribly tangled with contextual information regarding Thatcherism, class and popular culture etc. that was most often not relevant to the arguments they were building about childhood in the play or the relationship between Mickey and his mother.

On the whole, the question about childhood was addressed very successfully and was a very popular choice. The most successful answers selected key areas from various parts of the texts and discussed them thoughtfully, with apt textual references to support points made. The most thoughtful answers reflected on the pressures of growing up in different backgrounds and educational systems which bring the boys problems later on. Candidates sensitively reflected how it is the different experience of growing up/childhood that ends the friendship between Edward and Mickey. There was more than one way to tackle this question in that some chose to compare childhood to other stages of the play, whilst others looked at the times of childhood in more concentrated detail, although often still referring successfully to the significance of these times to the rest of the play. The least successful candidates were often those who brought in other themes such as superstition and then lost focus on the question and on childhood.

The key part of the second question was the 'changing relationship' between Mickey and Mrs Johnstone, and this was considered insightfully by most candidates. A range of contributing factors was considered. A relatively small number of candidates did struggle with focus and talked about Edward and Mickey, or Edward and Mrs Johnstone, or even Edward and Mrs Lyons, without returning to the question often enough. Those who did well were able to stand back and consider how the thread of this relationship is presented through the various events of the play. There were some impressively sensitive responses to this task.

A View from the Bridge

The question about betrayal and love was the most popular choice. Most candidates wrote thoughtfully and insightfully. Most answers ranged across the whole text and it was reassuring to see candidates focusing in on Eddie's death scene and highlighting the way the balance between betrayal and love is somewhat redressed here. Some of the less successful responses looked for all sorts of instances of betrayal within the play, some less central and significant than others, whilst not emphasizing the key events that Eddie is involved in. However, it was good to see various perspectives considered, such as an

overview suggesting that Eddie already feels betrayed by Catherine at the start of the play and that this explains some of his later actions.

The greatest sympathy question was attempted in a number of ways. Some candidates chose a character and wrote solely about him/her, providing sound evidence for why they deserve most sympathy. Others wrote about a number of characters, giving a range of reasons for sympathy for them, before finally settling on one who deserves utmost sympathy. Both methods worked, but the first approach was more successful in general as it allowed the candidates to write in greater detail on one character. A small number of candidates tried to write about Alfieri here, which was rather challenging. The more popular responses were Catherine, Eddie and Beatrice. There was some interesting work on Marco, who was not an unreasonable choice at all.

Be My Baby

Candidates tackled the question about greatest sympathy in different ways. The most successful answers focused on one character in detail and wrote about how other characters interact with the character to cause audience sympathy. The best answers had a real grasp of 'how' Whittington creates sympathy, most often for Mary, but not always.

The question about the relationship between Mary and Queenie was generally answered well. Candidates understood the contrast between the characters and focused on the unlikely alliance between them. The best answers wrote about how Queenie's character appears more complex as the play progresses and focused on Queenie being much more vulnerable than originally perceived. The successful answers wrote about key aspects from throughout the play.

My Mother Said I Never Should

This text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

Silas Marner

The few candidates who wrote about this text responded enthusiastically and knowledgeably to the question about love and gain. Some of the more successful responses included events at Lantern Yard as well as writing about characters such as Godfrey Cass and the poignancy of his loss of Eppie. Answers to the question about Silas and Eppie ranged across the whole text, noting how Silas becomes a changed man due to Eppie's arrival and how she is devoted to him. Candidates commented insightfully on the relationship and its influence on the structure of the novel: Dunsey's theft of Silas's gold and Eppie's appearance on Silas's doorstep – rather than any actions Silas takes of his own accord – are the major events that drive the narrative forward. The relationship was discussed sensitively in the main.

Pride and Prejudice

Very few responses were seen. For the types of love most candidates focused on Darcy and Elizabeth, and how he is initially repulsed by his feelings for a young woman whose family is not only rather common, but not wealthy. Candidates tracked through key areas of the text, using the full range of details, so that they were able to discuss, ultimately, a triumph for love over social class and class structure. This was the way to embed context into a successful discussion. Some perceptive responses acknowledged that this is what Jane Austen loves to celebrate in her novels, because she herself was a victim of social class prejudice in her own love life. A minority of answers wrote well about Mr. Collins' constant fawning over Lady Catherine DeBourgh. They wrote how Mr. Collins brags constantly about Rosings, as if it

should be worshipped. Answers to the Mr. Darcy question were insightful and focused, showing a detailed appreciation of his character and how it develops during the novel. Candidates again incorporated relevant contexts well.

A Christmas Carol

Some candidates struggled to get to grips with the word 'responsibility' in the first essay question, but those who did interpret the text through this perspective did produce some sensitive work. They were able to express how far they agreed and bring in ideas about redemption and various other contexts to show that the book is about many things and that responsibility is just one of them. Those who tackled this idea by linking it to ideas about treatment of the poor and particularly the children Ignorance and Want were particularly successful.

For the second essay most candidates wrote knowledgeably about Bob Cratchit, and how the Cratchit family unit symbolises happiness and contentment. Key scenes were discussed in detail, particularly the treatment of Bob at work, with his lump of coal and comforter, and the contrast to the happy scenes at home, regardless of their poverty. Context was handled well here. Bob was a popular choice.

Lord of the Flies

The task about the breakdown of order was a popular question, with a wide variety of responses. Some candidates tried to re-hash previous questions, which did not quite have the right focus, but most answers were fresh. Most responses tracked through key areas, starting from the relative friendliness of the initial meetings to the terror at the end of the novel, when the whole island is on fire and Ralph is running for his life. The Beast, Simon's death and Piggy's death were almost always mentioned, and many discussed Golding's message that humanity has a basic flaw, whereby if rules are not followed, violence and chaos will ensue. Context was addressed largely through social elements, as might be expected.

Candidates wrote knowledgeably about Piggy. An interesting way into the question involved candidates writing about 'firsts and lasts'; Piggy being the one with key general knowledge from the outset, being brutally murdered by an intimidating tribe at the end. Most mentioned Piggy's asthma and auntie who runs a sweet shop. Interesting points were made about why his hair does not grow, when the other boys all look like savages. All in all, there were a wide variety of original and perceptive responses showing thorough understanding of the novel and its contexts.

Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve

The autobiographical nature of the novel framed the first question for most. The majority of candidates selected key points from the novel and discussed them in detail expressing why they were found to be sad or funny and what they teach us about the world of this book. The question about Keith was answered well. Most responses discussed his friendship with Dannie in detail. Most were able to reflect thoughtfully on events involving Henrietta and, of course, the impact of the end of the novel. Keith's death was discussed by almost all candidates with sensitivity and maturity, suggesting that the book ends with the death of innocence.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **For the novels a clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and storylines, related directly to the task in hand**
- **Selection of a range of significant events and specific details to support a clear and thoughtful focus on the question**
- **Some analysis of the writer's intentions, including those related to context, though only where appropriate (novels)**
- **A demonstration of a secure knowledge of characters and themes that could be adapted to meet the demands of a specific question**
- **For the plays the ability to see how characters and themes are presented to an audience in various ways, including evidence from stage directions**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **For the novels a better application of context to the question in hand, using AO4 to drive discussion where appropriate**
- **More focus on exhibiting a personal engagement with the text rather than just providing a list of relevant details and events**
- **Practice in keeping a strong and direct focus on the question asked, including context where appropriate (novels)**
- **For the plays, more recognition that this is something that is being presented to an audience and how this is significant to the question in hand**

Unit 2B Foundation Tier: Extract Questions

Only the texts that were attempted by any significant numbers will be considered as not all were on Foundation Tier.

Blood Brothers

The extract worked well. Most candidates placed the scene successfully within the text and many also answered directly by focusing on Mickey's comments, mood, feelings and reactions in depth. Generally responses to the extract were sustained and candidates found plenty to discuss.

A View From The Bridge

Candidates wrote well on the extract and there was a good range of responses discussing both characters. The better responses moved from being overly judgmental to appreciating some of Eddie and Beatrice's reasons for what they are saying in this part of the play.

A Christmas Carol

This extract worked well in a range of ways; some candidates were able to achieve even though they focused on Scrooge's reaction without reference to Jacob Marley, better responses included an appreciation of the subtext and implied comparison between the two characters. Some did more with language than others as might be expected at Foundation level.

Lord of the Flies

It seemed that there was plenty to discuss for all abilities in this extract. Many focused on Piggy and Ralph's characters in a simple but effective way. Many candidates recognised the subtleties of approach to rescue evident in the subtext.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Fuller coverage of the extract rather than just the beginning**
- **Sustained focus on the terms of the question**
- **Accurate textual references to support points made**
- **Ability to show some appreciation of how this extract fits into the text as a whole, perhaps to show how the behaviour of a character is typical or otherwise, for instance**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **Practise going beyond retelling of the extract to give some informed comment on what is happening and its significance to the question asked**
- **Make a range of focused points, each with a supporting quotation, working through the extract to reach the end**
- **More complete awareness of what is being assessed here, i.e. AO1 and AO2 but not AO4.**

Unit 2B Foundation Tier: Essay Questions

Only the texts that were attempted by any significant numbers will be considered as not all were on Foundation Tier.

Blood Brothers

Essays about Mickey and his mother were approached in a very straightforward way. Some candidates tended to focus on very general aspects of the relationship such as playing with toys together and spending time with each other. Many candidates were successful in tracking the text and the way the relationship developed by focusing on Mickey as a small child, teenager and then as an adult and the way his mother dealt with him at each stage. Essays on sad and funny aspects of the text were completed less successfully where candidates only dealt with one or two simple events. Selecting which parts of the text to focus on seemed a little problematic for candidates at times. Some candidates selected events but did not discuss the mood and just listed events. Better responses tracked a number of significant events and discussed both moods in more depth.

A View from the Bridge

The sympathy question gave candidates plenty of scope for choice. Many characters wrote about Beatrice as the focus of their sympathy, while other characters such as Marco were also seen. Eddie was perhaps a more tricky choice but was often still attempted. Candidates were able to give a range of reasons supported by examples from the text. The thematic essay was dealt with successfully by most with a mix of love and betrayal used to help track through events. The task leant itself to discussion of Eddie's character or relationship with Catherine which helped candidates take a range of different routes to answer the question, although many other relationships and characters were also chosen.

A Christmas Carol

Bob Cratchit proved a popular essay choice; however candidates sometimes struggled to say very much about the character and rather listed his appearances. There were some successful links to context and representation of the working classes, less successful essays neglected this element or discussed context separately to their work on Bob. Inevitably there were some references to other versions of the story and incidents that do not appear in Dickens' book. The second essay was the less popular choice. Many responses tracked

Scrooge's journey through the text and this was an approach which helped support less able candidates discuss the question in more detail.

Lord of the Flies

Piggy was the popular choice. Candidates were able to link Piggy to context in a range of different ways and tracked through the text successfully to support an engaged discussion. The range of events and details considered was not always wide. Consideration of a range of events was also very useful for the thematic question and those who looked across the text as a whole did do rather better here.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **For the novels the discussion of relevant contextual factors which are related directly to the question**
- **Events and details selected carefully and with some range to develop the answer**
- **Probing of subtext to show more than a surface understanding, most often achieved by engaging with the terms of the question in a direct and sustained manner**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **For the novels a better blending in of contextual elements to the body of the essay, keeping context relevant and applied**
- **Using direct references to help to move on from more general retelling of texts**
- **Probing subtexts by addressing the question directly, returning to it regularly in each paragraph and at the end of the essay**

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2017

UNIT 3

Administration

Moderators reported that most of the centres submitted the samples by the deadline. It was pleasing to see that the opportunity to flag up qualities in the candidates' work on the new style coversheet had been embraced by most centres. The requirement to note the marks for the different Assessment Objectives had been fulfilled by all but a couple of centres.

Folders were for the most part presented in a suitable way for moderation. However, it is helpful if polypockets are not used since they delay the moderation process. Excessive use of the stapler is also to be discouraged since frequently all staples have to be removed before the work can be accessed. Treasury tags without staples remain the best approach. Moderators commented on use of narrow lined file paper which was considered to be unsuitable for candidates who had problems with legibility.

The specification clearly states that the candidates are not allowed to take into the assessment sessions any notes and that only clean copies of the texts are permitted. A number of centres sent the copies of the poems used with the folders. Often these copies were covered with annotations and it was not clear whether these notes had been made during the assessment session (permissible) or previous to it (not permissible). **In future it would be helpful if it was made clear that any annotations on copies of the poems were made during the assessment session. This would prevent any misunderstanding.**

Contents/tasks and annotation

Since the tasks were specified by WJEC and this is the first time Unit 3 has been attempted, it was unlikely that there would be any problems with the content of the folders.

It is important that centres realise that social and historical context is not assessed in this Unit. In a number of essays credit seemed to have been given for background information about authors or the social conventions of a particular age (for example, the woman/wife's role in Elizabethan England). The assessment criteria for this unit do not mention these social and historical aspects. The inclusion of such material in essays is perfectly acceptable but it cannot gain marks.

Section A

Virtually all the centres managed to find appropriate routes into the Shakespeare tasks with *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* being the most common texts in Section A. The two themes were about equally popular with both texts. Other texts used included *Henry V* with the emphasis on the Anglo-French battles. Often work on this text was limited to the major speeches from the king. This resulted in the display of rather too limited a range of knowledge as the specification requires evidence of the study of the complete text. A similar problem arose in work on *Hamlet* where some candidates only considered the soliloquies. *The Merchant of Venice* provided an excellent route to the consideration of the conflict

between the Christians and Jews. Work on this text was often very perceptive and detailed. *King Lear* provided ample opportunity to investigate the relationship between the king and his daughters while the conflict between Caliban and Prospero in *The Tempest* was often very sensitively considered. On the other hand, work on the conflict between the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was usually less successful since the complicated relationships between the characters rely on a good deal of narrative description. The love triangle between Orsino, Viola and Olivia in *Twelfth Night* provided plenty of material for candidates to investigate and analyse while the obvious conflict between the conspirators in *Julius Caesar* gave ample opportunities to study character and motive.

However, the vast majority of candidates had studied either *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth*. The conflict between the Montagues and Capulets was an obvious choice and many candidates were happy to concentrate on the appropriate scenes in the play, although this could sometimes be rather formulaic. The relationship between the protagonists and the development of their love was also extremely popular. Candidates attempting this large topic unfortunately often ran out of time before reaching the final stages of the play so the conclusion of the drama was not considered. Nevertheless, the abiding interest in and enthusiasm for this tragedy was often apparent in the work.

Macbeth's disintegrating relationship with his wife attracted a large number of candidates and proved to be a manageable and engaging task. Again, some candidates failed to get beyond the murder of Banquo, thus missing the collapse of Lady Macbeth's sanity and Macbeth's dismissive attitude to their relationship before the battle. However, work on this task showed a good understanding of the power dynamics within the marriage and a willingness to examine Lady Macbeth's language. The inner conflict in Macbeth's mind was also a very popular task, which had the benefit of encouraging a close examination of his language.

Throughout the work on Shakespeare, there was a pleasing engagement with the characters and their feelings. However, the quality of the language analysis Assessment Objective 2 (AO2) was noticeably weaker than that seen in the work in Section B. Given the size of the texts relative to the poems, perhaps it is unsurprising that this aspect tended to get overtaken by plot narration and general assertion.

Section B

In choosing the specified poetry, care was taken to provide a range of difficulty allowing centres to shape the choices to the ability of the candidates. Linkings were generally thoughtfully structured though there were occasions when moderators felt that more able candidates had not been stretched and less able candidates had been over-stretched.

It is pleasing to note that all the poems from the selection for the 2017 cohort made an appearance in the candidates' work. The most popular linkings were Gillian Clarke's 'My Box' with John Ormond's 'In September', 'Antonia's Story' with 'Eclipse', both by Owen Sheers, Alun Lewis's 'In Hospital: Poona' with 'Eclipse' and Paul Henry's 'Daylight Robbery' with Emyr Humphrey's 'From Father to Son'. All the combinations worked well and suggested that teachers and candidates had given considerable thought to suitable linkings. There was also evidence that for the most part care had been taken to suit the poetry choices to the perceived abilities of the candidates. Just occasionally, moderators felt that the candidates had been outfaced by the choices made for them.

There were three structural approaches to the task. The majority chose to adopt a tripartite structure, writing about each poem in turn before attempting the linking/comparative section. A smaller group wrote about the first poem before attempting to draw links while writing about the second and the third approach employed a fully integrated structure where both of

the chosen poems were discussed at the same time as the linking. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. In the first approach candidates were able to address each poem in full and there was often a clear and full discussion of the content, theme, viewpoint, mood and style of the individual poems which was generally developed and thoughtful. The risks were that sometimes candidates ran out of time and the linking section could be hastily addressed at the end. This approach tended to score highly in AO1 but could lose marks for AO3, the highly weighted linking section. The risk with the second approach is that the second poem does not always get the attention it deserves and instead simply becomes a peg to hang some comparisons and links on. This limitation endangers the AO1 achievement since there is unlikely to be 'detailed reference to text'. The risks with the third approach is that whilst it perhaps gives more emphasis to the AO3 comparative element it may restrict ability to fully respond to the poems as whole texts. It can therefore suppress the marks for AO1 as neither poem is seen as a separate artefact worthy of consideration in its own right and instead the essay simply becomes a list of points of contact between the texts and the reader receives no clear picture of the poems. WJEC does not specify a specific approach and centres must look at the approach that best suits the individual candidate.

Some candidates felt that analysis was a matter of finding examples of figures of speech and other poetic devices, making links by just noting that 'both poems contain metaphors' or 'both poems employ enjambment' with examples. It should be understood that this approach does not score credit for the AO2 aspect of the assessment. Spotting poetic features does not equal analysing the language used. Sometimes candidates seemed to feel that it was essential to make some kind of comment on named poetic devices. Moderators learned, for example, that alliteration 'gives fluidity', creates an 'enjoyable rhythm', 'enhances the pleasant tone of the poem', 'is used to show pain' and 'gives a more negative/sad mood'. It is hardly necessary to suggest that without a close examination of the particular way such a device is used within the poem as a whole, such assertions are not of great value. Similarly, we learned that 'enjambment and caesura are used to slow the poem down' and that free verse 'means that what they see is what they mean'.

The vast majority of centres only required the candidates to link two poems, as is implied in the generic task. Just occasionally moderators encountered centres where the candidates seemed to have been encouraged to write about three or more poems. This seemed to be an unhelpful approach which diluted the work on each poem, resulting in only the superficial content being considered.

Assessment

Many centres were accurate in their assessments and in the best examples there was clear evidence of an internal debate about the most suitable mark. The new style coversheet which requires marks for each AO for both Sections seems to have concentrated attention on exact achievement rather than a general impression. This is to the good and should result in more reliable totals. However, some centres were generous in their marks. The practice of noting in the margin of the essay when a particular AO has been achieved is to be encouraged. However, it is important that the Band achieved is also noted.

In Section A, the AO1 mark was generally fairly accurate. Candidates generally had a good grasp of the plot and relationships between characters and were able to support such views with reference to the text. However, the AO2 marks were frequently generous. In some centres, AO2 credit was given for simply quoting from the text or paraphrasing. This is essentially an AO1 skill ('selecting relevant detail'). Marks for AO2 are gained when the candidate is able to comment on 'features of style and structure'. This does not simply mean spotting when metaphors, similes, alliterations, enjambments and so on have been used. To gain credit, candidates need to examine in detail the way language has been shaped. So a comment like 'Shakespeare uses alliteration' is not worthy of credit beyond Band 1.

In Section B, the AO1 marks were often generous when there was limited investigation of the poems as complete pieces of literature in their own right. This could be the case when the partial or wholly integrated approach was taken to the structure of the essay. When marks for AO2 were generous it was generally for the reasons noted above in the notes on Section A. It was also the case that AO2 marks were slightly inflated as a result of the narrow mark range available. Moderators often noted that a Band 3 mark was given when the actual achievement was more in line with the criteria for Band 2 or even Band 1. Candidates are likely to find AO2 the most difficult aspect to handle.

The AO2 criteria also cover 'structure' and many candidates were at pains to point out that a poem was, for example, a 'sonnet'. This led to comments about the 14 line structure and the rhyme scheme which was duly rewarded as 'understanding of structure'. However, the 'structure' of a poem is about more than this simple aspect. The more important implication of the word is concerned with how the poem is put together, how it develops and how the imagery is chosen and used.

To gain credit for AO3, candidates were expected to find links and comparisons between the poems. Some took an easy way out and made comments based on simple points of contact, for example 'both poems have three verses', 'both poems have metaphors', 'both poems employ caesura or enjambment' and 'both poems use the word 'golden'. This type of response, dependent on development, is unlikely to score more than a Band 1 or at best Band 2 mark. The high marks went to those candidates who could 'compare and make some kind of evaluation of subject, theme, character and the impact of the texts' (Band 4 criteria). It is important too, if high marks are given, that the candidate has displayed a range of developed links. Those who could examine how the theme was developed, the choice of imagery, the mood of the poem, the viewpoint and cross-reference these aspects were likely to score highly.

Conclusion

Moderators reported that the new Specification seemed to have been embraced with enthusiasm. The reactions to the literature presented suggested that candidates had found their studies rewarding and enjoyable.

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