



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE (NEW)
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

SUMMER 2018

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCSE (NEW)

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UNIT 1

General comments

There will be a further report on the minor texts in Unit 1 in the coming weeks.

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, including some by students who had studied *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *Chanda's Secrets*. Although more prevalent on Foundation Tier, a significant number of candidates on both tiers wasted a lot of their time reading extracts and answering questions on novels they had never read or studied. This remains a serious problem for candidates who may well have studied one of the texts over a long period of time but, in answering a range of extract questions, only will have been awarded a mark out of ten for their efforts.

Examiners needed to take account of the extent to which candidates had addressed the different assessment objectives relevant to each question. In most essay responses, some detailed and focused understanding was shown of how social factors at the time the novels were set affected characters' lives. There were very few responses where there was no explicit commentary on the context of the novel studied, an improvement particularly marked on Foundation Tier. Most candidates on both tiers used their contextual knowledge thoughtfully to inform their response to the essay questions, although there remains some confusion and misunderstanding about where on the paper context is assessed. Sometimes in the extract question, for example, candidates focused more on aspects of the novel outside the scope of the extract itself. Answers to the question on the presentation of Lennie in the *Of Mice and Men* extract sometimes elicited a wider commentary on the relationship between George and Lennie which was not always matched with a close focus on Lennie's frame of mind in the extract itself.

One hitherto unusual error in approaching essay questions was noted by Examiners on this occasion: there was a significant number of essays in which context almost or wholly overwhelmed text. Although the weighting of the assessment objectives suggests that context is important, candidates need to be reminded that contextual knowledge is only relevant in so far as it illuminates and informs their understanding of the text. Knowing about the Dust Bowl or the stock market crash or the lives of black people in 1930s America will not, on its own, gain many marks.

The poetry comparison question was generally handled with a clearer understanding of the need to cover both poems and the comparative element. Very few candidates wrote about the poems but did not compare them or mistimed their responses so that only some elements of the task were covered. Strong responses, as always, looked closely at the language and imagery used in the poems and focused more on meaning and interpretation rather than simple identification of devices, although there was still some tendency to 'spot' techniques with limited commentary on effects. In weaker Higher Tier responses, a

significant number of responses discussed punctuation, enjambement and alliteration without really addressing what the poets had to say about older people on Foundation Tier or about memories and a sense of place on Higher Tier. Better responses on both tiers included a range of sensible interpretations of ideas and comparisons while those at the highest level on Higher Tier looked very closely at the way language and imagery was used to reveal subtle differences in tone and ideas about the nature of memory and loss.

Extract questions

Of Mice and Men

The Steinbeck extract question asked candidates to focus on Lennie's behaviour and speech in this scene and most were aware of where the scene took place in the novel though not always of its significance. Successful responses focused on the details and the language used to describe the character's reaction to his accidental killing of Curley's wife. The way Steinbeck shows Lennie's misery and his underlying sense of remorse although the best responses showed care to support these ideas by reference to the detail in the text. Some were able to identify Lennie's incongruous and short-lived sense of pride in having remembered George's instruction to go back to the brush and there were sensitive ideas about how Steinbeck uses this temporary moment of relief to highlight Lennie's inability to process what he has just done or to recognise its significance. Lennie's gesture of pulling his hat over his eyes was also considered by stronger candidates who offered a range of possible interpretations such as his need 'to hide from his own sense of guiltiness' or 'to cover up his shame'. The sense of Lennie as a person who could only half articulate his terror or even understand his own fears was discussed perceptively by some candidates who suggested that his instinct to 'go right off and live in a cave' showed a desire to run away from the consequences of his actions or to 'give George his freedom in an act of self-sacrifice'. Those who understood the significance of Lennie's hallucination of Aunt Clara were usually more able to consider how conscience and a mounting sense of terror that George would abandon him both played a part in creating the turmoil in his mind at this moment. Close references such as 'Lennie moaned with grief' and the way Aunt Clara's speech patterns closely match George's helped some candidates to anchor their insights firmly in the extract. Lennie's hopeless resignation at the end of the extract – 'George ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits now' – was sometimes seen as much more than a self-centred, childish focus on insignificant matters in the face of much bigger consequences. Some thoughtful comments on this part of the extract included the idea that 'tending the rabbits was always for Lennie a symbol of freedom and peace' and that 'even Lennie knew it wasn't just about rabbits, it was about a future with George where no one could hurt them and now he'd killed that dream.' The latter comment from a Foundation Tier candidate showed how an engaged study of the text can inform extract responses in very productive ways.

Weaker candidates tended to rely on comments which could be applied to Lennie's characterisation at any point in the novel with less focus on what is revealed about him here. This, as well as some drifting off the extract itself, was what kept quite a lot of marks on Higher Tier lower than they might have been. Lennie was seen as 'childlike' in taking pride in remembering to 'hide in the brush' and the reference to him speaking 'softly' was sometimes used to show how he was calm or gentle. The overwhelming fear of loss and abandonment was often missed at this level, even when the hallucination of Aunt Clara was understood as Lennie's imagination. Some candidates mentioned how Lennie was seeking to manipulate George and that Aunt Clara was 'trying to prick his conscience' – both ideas rather misreading Lennie's frame of mind here. A range of candidates on both tiers sought to outline how selfish and self-centred Lennie is here, citing as evidence his grief at not being able to tend the rabbits or how he wouldn't be able to live by himself and didn't recognise that he needed George. While there was some selection and comment which could be

rewarded, some of these surface or general readings of Lennie's character tended to run counter to a more insightful grasp of what's really going on for Lennie at this point.

As mentioned above, some candidates were deflected into commentary on contextual factors or their comments drifted from the extract and into reflections of Lennie's relationship with George and others. This often meant that there was little selection and comment on language, required for AO2, or supporting references for ideas for A01. Lennie's dependence on George up to this point and their previous arguments about ketchup and Lennie's previous threat to go and live in a cave were sometimes useful in shedding light on his present predicament but weaker candidates saw little difference between the two incidents. Some, mostly Foundation Tier responses, showed some confusion between the two and thought that George was being spoken to or that Aunt Clara was actually present. References to the lives of migrant workers or disabled people or general comments about the friendship between the two men showed some weak understanding of how marks for extracts are awarded.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the specific extract, not the context of the novel or storylines**
- **Selection of short, apt references to support points made**
- **Clear grasp of subtext, what's 'really' going on in the extract**

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Clear knowledge 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 George asked about both his character and what Steinbeck's characterisation of him shows us about the values and attitudes of the society in which he lived. Better candidates showed a sound understanding of the character's underlying attitudes and motivations at different points in the novel and had clear and well considered views about the impact of contextual factors on his own behaviour. Such interpretations were often insightful and perceptive, suggesting that Steinbeck wanted to draw attention to the limitations and lack of opportunity of migrant workers' lives in Great Depression America in the 1930s. Many saw George as a strong character, struggling to care for his friend at a time when empathy and inclusiveness were alien to most people in his situation. In some thoughtful responses, this appreciation of his role as a father and protector for Lennie was discussed alongside other traits which were seen as more typical and reflective of social norms at the time. Detailed reference to support these ideas included references to George's uneasiness at seeing Lennie in Crooks' room and his constant denigration of Curley's wife as not only dangerous because of her status as Curley's wife but because she is a woman. Some also saw in George a quick-temperedness which sometimes spilled into violence, reflecting an aggression and hyper-vigilance which seemed to pervade society at the time. There were also some interesting insights into George's attitude to the American Dream and how his more generally realistic view of life changes gradually, showing the seductiveness of such powerful evocations of freedom, independence and escape.

Weaker responses focused narrowly on George's relationship with Lennie with some brief comments about discrimination against disabled people, or in trying to address the ways in which social mores are reflected through his character candidates drifted away from George and onto other characters. For example, many responses included references to the distrust and misogyny revealed in George's attitude to Curley's wife but less focused approaches then went on to discuss her dreams, her past and her fate at the end of the novel. Similarly, George's casually racist view of Crooks sometimes drifted into an extended discussion of how Crooks' character is presented, his loneliness and his interactions with others when George was not present. While Examiners could credit candidates' knowledge of the text and context, it is essential for the higher marks on both tiers that the focus of the question is consistent and thorough.

The alternative question on whether 1930s America robbed people of their ability to form important relationships was a popular choice and there were some excellent responses to it. On Foundation Tier, candidates were asked to select characters who illustrated that American society adversely affected people's ability to form important relationships. Most candidates were helped by choosing one or two characters and explaining in what ways they were affected by social norms and values. Many sensibly chose Crooks, often alongside Curley's wife, and explained how the racism of the time kept the first isolated and lonely and how the latter was viewed as both dangerous and irrelevant, reflecting the status of women at the time. Some chose the relationship between Curley and his wife to show how women were driven to loveless marriages through lack of opportunity and education. Curley was often seen as an insecure but privileged man who reflected the sexist views of his society in treating his wife as no more than a trophy or, as one Foundation Tier candidate said, 'a toy that he could keep locked up and only take out when he wanted'. Better candidates on Higher Tier made some strong, perceptive points and argued their case cogently. Some detail was used to make thoughtful arguments. Carlson's indifference to Candy and reaction to Lennie's death revealed a gross lack of empathy which a competitive and brutal economic system had engendered, for example, or Curley's wife's racist cruelty towards Crooks was the mirror image of his own cruel taunting of Lennie: such ideas showed not just a secure knowledge of the text and context but a perceptive insight into how Steinbeck highlights the brutalising effect of American capitalism during the Great Depression on individual personalities and relationships. Some well-focused responses showed an ability to evaluate and discuss ideas at a high level. While largely agreeing with the statement and supporting this with detailed reference to the text, some also held out the friendship between George and Lennie as an exception to it. The rarity of such friendships, as evidenced by others' reaction to it and its eventual demise, was used by some to show how Steinbeck presents one of the few loving relationships in the novel to highlight how problematic it was to take care of weaker people in society at the time.

Weaker responses here were usually less developed or there was less integration of context and text. On Foundation Tier, there was often some sensible choice of characters but limited reference to events in the novel. Context was limited to some rather sketchy, sometimes sweeping comments about the status of women or black people, although on both tiers in responses to this question there were some who wrote only about context with very limited or often no reference to the novel at all.

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

Most candidates on both tiers understood that both poems and the comparison between them must be addressed to give them the best chance. Examiners rewarded comparison wherever they found it although most candidates looked at each poem first before making comparisons. Some compared all the way through their responses while others discussed the first poem and then compared it with the second, making comments on meaning, imagery and mood about both poems as they did so. A minority sacrificed a close examination of the poems themselves in trying to compare them and there were also some whose comparison between poems was much weaker than their examination of the poems.

Higher Tier candidates were given the rubric that 'the poets recall memories of places and people' and better responses looked at ways in which places had become imbued with the memories of and perhaps the spirit of people the poets knew in the past. The best responses began to develop interpretations which included some perceptive ideas: how time itself, as well as place, seems frozen or captured by places and how memories are distorted or enriched over time. The strange tone Kooser's poem gave able candidates plenty to discuss. Many saw in the imagery of light and the idea of the kitchen 'falling through time' an evocation of a time in the past as well as a place, while some wrote about the quality of the memory itself being unreliable in 'you can't see beyond its windows'. In one insightful response, the candidate wrote that the short opening statement 'It's a kitchen' suggested that the poet 'wished that was all it was, but there are dark shadows lurking in his memory of it.' The figure of the grandmother is ambiguously portrayed and for many of the most successful candidates a rich source of interpretation and comment. Some saw the matter-of-fact language and tone with which the poet speaks about her death as reflective of her life as well, that she lived an unassuming life which left few traces on the world except the 'dry leaf' of the dish rag.

Compared with the sadness of Kooser's poem, 'Family House' was generally thought to be more nostalgic and happy in its mood. The way the landscape and the quiet beauty of the poet's childhood home is evoked was commented on in some detail in better responses, which also sometimes cross referenced the rather stark details of Kooser's kitchen. The nature of memory itself, experienced through glimpses of sensual detail here, was also compared with the almost clinically accurate recollection of Kooser's kitchen. Turning points in both poems where the mood changes were found in the way the language and imagery reflects a sadder, darker sense of loss. The image of the 'rotten gourds of juice' was particularly examined in the best responses, with many candidates seeing in it a sense of lost innocence or an acceptance that time changes everything and cannot be stopped. One candidate wrote that 'for both poets, time has stolen their memories and left them with a longing for a simpler life before they knew what would happen'. Others wrote of a sense of resignation and acceptance that the past was over and memories stay frozen in time and can't be retrieved.

Weaker responses, as is often the case, looked for more concrete interpretations of the poems and showed less awareness and tolerance of ambiguity. There was much focus on the identity of the woman mentioned in Clarke's poem or what might have happened to the

grandmother in Kooser's. The kitchen was seen as a real room which had been preserved or abandoned rather than a memory, and the reference to the grandmother who had 'moved through this life like a ghost' was literally interpreted as haunting the kitchen after death. There was often some attempt to compare the use of light imagery in both poems and the mention of 30 years in both poems was also mentioned but often without really showing an understanding of the poems as powerful memories of places and people from the past. There were also quite a few responses which listed, sometimes accurately but often not, the techniques used by the poets with limited understanding of what they were trying to say. Some images were noticed but given rather mechanical meanings – 'light always connotes happiness', as one candidate said, and the colour blue seemed to suggest sadness however it was used. At this level, the organisation of lines and stanzas was noted or alliteration/caesuras/enjambment identified but without comments which really focused on meaning and ideas there was sometimes little understanding for Examiners to reward.

The Foundation Tier poems gave candidates two different views of old age and this was generally, if simply, understood as a point of comparison by most. Maya Angelou's poem gave abler candidates a perhaps unusually defiant old person's voice and perspective and there were some insightful comments about her sense of independence and pride. The exclamations and the use of imperatives in the first stanza were commented on by candidates who recognised the defiance of the speaker. The rocking chair was also seen as a symbol of stereotypical old age in better responses and the image of 'a sack left on a shelf' attracted some thoughtful ideas about how others see old people compared with how the poet sees herself. Many also saw the liveliness and humour of the speaker's voice and commented on how she counted herself lucky to be still alive. 'Childhood' was perhaps more challenging for most candidates although many were able to comment on how a child's perspective of old age is shown through images such as 'small fat snakes' and the old lady having to 'grope' for her beads. There was some sensible paraphrasing of the child's realisation that the lady was 'helplessly old' and in the best responses some understanding that the young and the old have much in common in being 'helpless' and dependent on others. Comparisons focused mostly on the different perspectives of the poems and the different portrayals of old age in each.

Weaker candidates tended to miss the defiant tone of Maya Angelou's poem and to rely on perhaps their own views about old age rather than really looking for what the poet has to say about it. At this level there was often some misplaced sympathy for the speaker and the 'message' of the poem was misread as a plea for people to 'look out more' for the old or to feel sorry for and help them. While there was some sense of neglect implied in the 'sack on a shelf' image, candidates needed to look more closely at the whole poem for its meaning. Similarly in 'Childhood', the poem was sometimes seen as a warning of what's to come or as a child's view of old age but without the moment of realization at the end. In many cases, a closer reading of the poems was needed to avoid imposed interpretations of meaning which, in the case of Maya Angelou's poem, were the opposite of what the poet was saying about old age.

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 second 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 Othello. On Unit 2B the popular texts remain 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.

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 use subject terminology also caused occasional problems when this was not linked to anything more than labelling. Some general phrases such as 'The word tells us,' seem to be more common and are not often helpful. There was further evidence that increasing attention is being paid to working through the whole extract without taking away from the time needed to complete essay responses, but there is still room for improvement.

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, especially with questions such as the second option for 'An Inspector Calls' where the invitation to write about context was made very directly in the stem of the question.

Unit 2A Higher Tier: Extract Questions

Othello

On occasion there was thoughtful analysis of Othello's character in this scene, and a range of interpretations was offered for his behaviour. Candidates put forward insightful explanations for Othello talking about himself in third person narrative. His distress was explored with understanding, and a range of imagery and linguistic techniques were analysed. Few tackled the last two lines of the extract, however. This was a shame and it's worth remembering that the extract has been selected in order to offer opportunities for analysis throughout. The importance of knowing the text well is obviously important – a few candidates (although they were in the minority) thought that Othello had not killed Desdemona yet, which obviously led to misinterpretation of some of the ideas.

Much Ado About Nothing

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

An Inspector Calls

Students at all ability levels engaged with the extract question and most were able to offer a detailed discussion of Birling, acknowledging his arrogant and pompous personality. This was examined through the opening stage directions, his control over his family, his misplaced self-assurance and dismissal of Eric's views. A range of techniques were also considered, including the length of his speech, reiteration of first person pronouns and the question he sets up and then answers himself. Candidates provided a good spread of points from across the extract, right up to Mr Birling's patronising close. Many responses were heavily reliant on contextual discussion but this was unavoidable as the extract made many contextual references which were intrinsically linked into revealing his character. Most candidates were aware of the dramatic irony, with the more able candidates seeing how Priestley uses this to make the audience view Birling as a fool/unreliable/a liar throughout the rest of the play. There was a clear understanding of Birling liking the sound of his own voice. More able candidates addressed the condescending way he speaks to Sheila. Many also addressed the point that he hi-jacked Sheila's celebration to make a speech about himself and his business. The use of stage directions was also discussed to show Birling's control over his audience.

Hobson's Choice

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

A Taste of Honey

The relationship between Jo and Geof was explored with real understanding. Geof's calming influence in the face of Jo's outbursts was discussed with sensitivity. Candidates tracked through the effects of Geof's varied offers of help, including tempering Jo's shocking statements, offering to find the baby's father and trying to ground Jo in reality. His thinly veiled hurt at being a prop for Jo rather than someone she takes seriously, was also explored.

Candidates showed awareness of the unusual nature of Jo and Geof's relationship, discussing the platonic love with many referencing his implied homosexuality. More able candidates contrasted their relationship with that of Jo and Boy and Jo and Helen, looking at Geof's language of reassurance and maternal or 'sisterly' love. There was some appreciation of Geof's efforts to bring Jo to her senses and out of her dream world.

Paddy Clarke Ha ha ha

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

Heroes

Candidates explored mood and atmosphere carefully, with very few responses offering assertions of 'a mood' without stating what this was. Enrico's pain and the early simile of his laugh '*like a saw through wood*' offered an effective way into understanding the extract's mood and atmosphere. Most candidates did not take the humour at face value, but understood that it masked a much darker mood. Francis's disavowal of his silver star was addressed by some, with more thoughtful candidates appreciating where in the novel this

extract appears. Candidates appreciated the wistful nature of the 'always Nicole'. Some candidates also addressed the fact that Francis lay awake considering Enrico's comment.

The best answers included close attention to specific words and phrases, and then linked these to their effect on the mood as a whole. This move from specific to overview is a confident and successful approach. Quite a few candidates tracked systematically through the extract, with accurate points being made about characters' feelings, but with little consideration of the effect on mood as a whole. In these kinds of answers, each selected quote was commented on as unrelated to the last. This approach can only go so far. Once again, candidates are advised to avoid saying that there is a 'dull' mood, as it is often unclear whether this means it is dark, unclear or boring.

Never Let Me Go

Candidates generally tracked the mood and atmosphere of this piece with some success. It was inevitably very helpful if they realised whereabouts in the book this exchange occurred, which most did. Ideas of sadness and anger expressed towards the end of the extract helped them to see the pathos of this final scene.

About a Boy

Candidates engaged with the given extract extremely well. The dynamics of Will and Marcus' relationship was explored with insight, and there was clear understanding of Will's own feelings as opposed to those he presents to Marcus. Will's developing sensitivity in not wanting to hurt Marcus' feelings was discussed well. Marcus' blunt delivery and the impact of the quick-fire dialogue was also explored with care. Many candidates concluded by drawing a thoughtful comparison between both characters' loneliness, with Will's insecurities being acknowledged as well as Marcus's fear of rejection. As ever with this text, appreciation of the humour helped in achieving the higher bands.

Resistance

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on detail from within 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, especially any developing mood or atmosphere for relevant tasks**
- **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 and specific vocabulary to describe mood and atmosphere**
- **More sustained and detailed coverage of the extract including its ending**
- **Increased selection of supporting references rather than general comments**
- **Staying within the exact task more consistently**
- **More focus on probing the subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract**

Unit 2A Higher Tier: Essay Questions

Othello

The first essay question was dealt with extremely well, with candidates addressing Cassio's importance in driving the plot forward and as an illustration of various themes. Answers were often mature and strong on AO4, although a few contained only fleeting/basic references to social, cultural and historical context. The majority of students integrated contextual references throughout the body of their essays. Detailed evidence was generally purposeful and specific.

There were also a number of well-controlled arguments that discussed the destruction of love by hate with careful consideration. The best answers showed how love was turned to hate. An interesting and relevant approach was also to consider whether Othello ends up hating Desdemona at all, as her murder is done with reluctance and consistent expressions of his continued feelings for her. Some candidates took the valid approach of considering the destruction of love by other emotions, such as jealousy and pride. Context was embedded into argument well. Responses were less successful when candidates just presented evidence of love in the play, and/or evidence of hate.

Much Ado About Nothing

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

An Inspector Calls

Both essays attracted large numbers of responses.

The question about Gerald proved popular and encouraged thoughtful answers. Candidates argued well, both in support of Gerald as a good character and as a bad, and weighed up which side of him prevailed. There was also an excellent spread of ideas from across the play, from Gerald's first interactions with the Birling family, through his treatment of Eva, to his behaviour when he returns in Act 3. A significant percentage of candidates argued that Gerald was good because he helped Eva – which is a perfectly relevant argument. This approach was stronger though when candidates presented the Inspector's evidence that Eva had indeed been happy for a while, and less successful when concluding that it was a relationship of reciprocal love that was only thwarted by class barriers. There were a significant number of extremely subtle and insightful answers. These candidates recognised that Gerald was only using Eva, and that his excuse of helping her was only a front for a manipulative and duplicitous man who believed he had the right to exploit. Candidates seemed well prepared to weave contextual reflections on behaviour in Edwardian society into their answer.

The second question asking what Eva Smith tell us about her world was equally popular, with candidates assessing the Birlings and Gerald's effect upon Eva and how their beliefs and behaviour were shaped by society at the time. Some of the best answers highlighted the fact that the Inspector is Priestley's voice and that Eva Smith is a representative of the struggling working class of 1912 as a whole, while relating these views effectively to the question.

Candidates were generally very well prepared by centres, and considered contextual factors with clear understanding. A few candidates retold the plot without direct links to the question, although this kind of approach was not seen often. There are increasingly more film references from the 2015 BBC film adaptation creeping in, with some candidates relying entirely on the film for their quotations, which invariably led to some misinterpretation of characters and events.

Here, observations about context were being elicited more explicitly, and the majority of candidates, it seemed to me, seized this opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned about the plight of women, and the working class in the early 20th century. Some candidates chose to make this, still, a 'who was most to blame' question, yet even going through the involvement of all of Birling family one by one, they were often able to demonstrate satisfactory responses to the question.

Hobson's Choice

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

A Taste of Honey

The first question, about Helen, was the more popular choice. This question was answered extremely well. Candidates demonstrated confidence with the text and were able to draw on a wide range of evidence. Candidates appreciated Helen's troubled nature and past, looking at her social status to explain her motives. Different aspects of Helen's character were analysed, with candidates appreciating that she comes across as both a selfish character and also as someone desperately trying to survive in a society that looked down on single mothers. There was discussion of the issues Helen faced in life as a working class, single mother at that time, which may have made her ill-equipped to be a good parent. Her treatment of Jo, interactions with Peter, vicious judgement of Geof and racist views were all explored, with precise textual evidence used to support points. There were mixed feelings on why she returns at the end of the play, with more able candidates discussing both her disappointment in Peter and her genuine care for Jo. Responses proved that the play is clearly being very well taught in centres and that candidates are preparing extremely thoroughly for questions on this text.

For the Kinds of Love essay candidates addressed maternal/child love, sexual love, platonic love, love of money. Context was addressed through attitudes towards homosexuality, single mothers and racism, with some looking at post-war poverty. Candidates did not always differentiate between love and lust or love and necessity.

There were some very sensitive explorations of various relationships, mostly between people, but occasionally Helen's love for money was discussed, and, on one occasion, her love for alcohol.

Paddy Clarke Ha ha ha

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

Heroes

There was a large number of answers to each of the two choices.

For the first question about Francis candidates did need to ensure that they addressed the idea of decisions rather than just presenting what Francis does. Thoughtful answers explored how Francis' life changed as a result of these decisions, and a number of candidates also looked at whether Francis is, indeed, an '*ordinary young man*,' considering that both his parents died and he is involved in such striking events. An interesting angle was also to consider whether events are caused by Francis' decisions, or whether he is just a pawn to Larry. Practically all candidates showed awareness of the decision not to intervene during the rape, with more able candidates discussing how this wasn't really a decision as such, more a compulsion as a result of Larry's manipulation and Francis's young age. More thorough candidates looked at his decision – if it was such a thing – to idolise Nicole and his decision to seek revenge on Larry. There were conflicting opinions as to whether the jumping on the grenade was a good or bad decision. Some candidates discussed his killing of the two German boys as well.

Most candidates presented a clear argument, with sustained focus on the extent to which the reader can or cannot agree with the question's statement. Some candidates still interpret *'How far do you agree'* as an instruction that they must agree, which can lead to candidates arguing ideas that they don't really believe in. For the second question the majority of candidates chose Francis, and presented a convincing case for sympathy. Nicole was also a logical choice, and her experiences were written about with maturity and delicacy. Her attack was the obvious focus, but candidates also presented her initial move from Albany and to a new school, her shy nature, the destruction of her dream and her changed appearance as points which invite sympathy. Essays which presented a number of characters were also successful, and, although the case for Larry is a difficult one to argue, the idea that he has lost the use of his legs and his eventual suicide effectively doing Francis' job for him, were regarded as valid ideas. It was nice to see the number of candidates who also considered the veterans. There were some very sensitive responses to how Cormier creates sympathy for them.

Consideration of Cormier's structure, Francis' narrative and choice of tense were productive ways to secure achievement in AO2.

Never Let Me Go

The relatively small number of candidates who studied this text did well with both of the essay questions. Candidates who tackled the first question focused on the idea of Tommy's importance to the novel. There was an impressive range of points, with inclusion of ideas about Tommy's role at Hailsham, the cottages and as a donor. The best answers did not only examine Tommy's character traits and his role in the plot, but also how he helps the reader to understand the main themes of the novel, such as identity and friendship.

The second question about having answers by the end of the book invited candidates to explore the issues raised by the novel. A consideration of plot was a clear way into the question, which most candidates took, but ideas of character and thematic development were also explored in more sophisticated responses. Some candidates listed questions they still had. This is part of the answer but only showed a snapshot of candidates' textual knowledge. A more successful approach was to present the questions a reader might have at the novel's beginning and how these are duly answered or not as the story progresses, such as our unfolding realisation of the students' role, what their artwork is for, the idea of *'possibles'*, how relationships develop and how the students' future lives play out.

About a Boy

The first essay proved the more popular of the two. Candidates showed good knowledge of Ellie as a character and there tended to be a great deal of reference to text, specifically her initial description, her 'adoption' of Marcus and the incident in Royston. Candidates discussed her protection of Marcus from the bullies, his induction into popular culture through Nirvana, his adoration of Ellie and his eventual realisation that she wasn't right for him. Candidates explored Ellie's presentation as an archetypal, rebellious teenager, but also as someone with a more complicated and sensitive side at times. Her varying roles in the novel were also considered with understanding: as confidante, protector and catalyst for Marcus' change. The idea of *'How is the character important?'* was never far from the focus of these essays, with lots of sensible ideas put forward. Particularly perceptive answers looked at Marcus' eventual decision to reject Ellie's melodrama. As a whole, responses demonstrated what can be achieved when candidates are really confident with their study text.

Candidates answered the second question best when selecting humorous incidents and discussing how they tempered the sad events in the novel. When linked to an overview of serious themes, such as depression, suicide, bullying, broken families and loneliness, really perceptive answers were produced. The strongest candidates constructed a cohesive

argument about the cumulative effect of Hornby's humour, backed up by specific examples. Some really sensitive essays were constructed like this, and explored the idea of humour offering access to difficult themes rather than diluting or distracting from them. A less successful approach was to generally debate what humour is without linking ideas to the novel. Hornby's techniques were often explored well, with candidates considering the humorous imagery of 'koala bars' and 'piranhas,' the outlandishly arrogant statements made by Will, and Marcus' blunt and literal statements offering opportunities for humour.

Resistance

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

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**
- **A close focus on the exact terms of the chosen task**
- **Some analysis of the writer's style and craft usually addressed through the idea of 'how' and including context for the 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:

- **Looking carefully at the exact terms of the question before starting to answer and realising that there is not much that they want to say – greater length of responses for many.**
- **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 for the play texts.**
- **A wider range of detail and events from the text to give a more thorough and structured approach to support a personal view.**

Unit 2A Foundation Tier: Extract Questions

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

An Inspector Calls

Candidates were able to achieve at all levels with this extract. Candidates almost always understood Mr Birling's arrogance, or self-importance. Some focused more on his happiness over his daughter's engagement while showing an understanding that his happiness was based on a selfishness and business acumen. Higher ability candidates were able to move from general details about Mr Birling's feelings over the engagement to his inability to understand society, the impending war and his poor relationship with his son. Some candidates were able to link Mr Birling's comments towards Eric to his lack of care over Sheila, ultimately commenting on age and responsibility. Other candidates were able to discuss Birling's view of the world in great detail, they showed a clear understanding of his character and the use of dramatic irony. This was an appropriate way to include contextual knowledge without moving away from the task, even though AO4 is not being assessed here. Higher ability candidates were also able to comment on Priestley's use of dramatic irony to develop the audiences' response towards Birling and the theme of social responsibility in general.

A Taste of Honey

Most candidates appreciated Jo's callousness and rejection of her pregnancy/child and were able to contrast this with Geof's caring and re-assuring attitude. Many candidates widened their knowledge of Geof by mentioning the reasoning for his kindness and compassion was his homosexuality and desire to have a family relationship with Jo. Weaker responses did not fully appreciate the sub-text behind some of Geof's more sarcastic and cutting comments.

Coverage of the extract was usually in detail with supporting references. Responses discussed Jo's fear of becoming a mother/grown up with some mature insights. They were sympathetic to her situation, and saw how Geof was trying to calm her down. There were some thoughtful comments about Jimmie being "only a dream" and how he was there for Jo at Christmas.

Heroes

This extract allowed candidates to access the full range of marks. Those that commented on Enrico's joking nature and caring side, ultimately looking out for Francis, were generally successful. Similarly, those who recognised how both men were in pain both physically and mentally accessed the higher bands. Some candidates wrote very thoughtfully on Enrico's suffering recognising the impact war had on all the characters, not just Francis. Unfortunately, not all candidates commented on Enrico and chose to focus their attention on their sympathy for Francis.

Many responses showed appreciation of the sympathy for Francis no longer seeing Nicole and being 'unfairly' called a hero. Most of the responses, did not however, understand the real reasoning behind Enrico's comments about the 'blind girl.' Some less successful responses wrote about Enrico's cruelty to Francis, prejudice against blind people, and thought that Francis turns away "in disgust" because of this.

About a Boy

Candidates understood the awkwardness of Will and Marcus in this extract, often mentioning the persistence in both of their responses. The best answers noticed and commented on the humour and sarcasm from Will and the situation.

Responses showed awareness that Marcus was not fully aware of the impact of what he is saying to Will and supported the point with apt quotes. The majority of responses were perfectly aware that Will really didn't want to go to Marcus' for Christmas and captured his awkwardness and guilt well. In the same way there was a lot of sympathy for Marcus, as well as admiration for his ability to guilt-trip Will. There was a good amount of discussion of the writer's style as well, picking up on the short phrases and clipped conversation.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Fuller coverage of the extract from beginning to end**
- **Sustained focus on the exact terms of the question**
- **Accurate textual references to support points made**
- **Ability to show some appreciation of the significance of particular extracts, events and exchanges**

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**

- **Less personal response that does not refer to the question asked or address specific details from the extract**

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. For the first essay, about Gerald, the majority of candidates followed the bullet points rigidly to work their way up to the higher bands. The weakest of responses often confused Eric and Gerald's relationships with Eva. Most candidates were able to weave context into their answer when discussing Gerald's treatment of Eva. The more able candidates saw that his treatment of her differed to his treatment of Sheila and this was the result of the class system. Some candidates were well aware of Gerald's intelligence and manipulation of certain situations.

For the second question many candidates made one or two selections of events leading to Eva's death. Some other candidates saw it as an opportunity to work through the way that each character's actions lead to Eva's death. Although the question asked for "one or two events", very few actually limited themselves to this. Quite frequently candidates slipped into a 'who is most to blame' style of approach to the question. Some responses relied on narrative retelling rather than awareness of the impact on Eva's death. Candidates tended to introduce which two events/characters they had chosen, write about them, and then add on how the remaining characters had also contributed. Better responses reversed this, by briefly summarising what each character had done in their introductions, and then focusing specifically on one or two examples. The better answers were detailed and were able to talk securely about relevant contexts to support their choices and discussion.

A Taste of Honey

For the first question about Helen candidates were keen to mention her disrespect and homophobic attitude towards Geof, which was then clearly linked to the context of the play. Many candidates referenced Helen's abandonment of Jo and discussed this. Better responses contrasted her abandonment with her return at the end. Some candidates recognised how Jo calls her mother Helen and commented on the lack of maternal relationship, despite her daughter being pregnant.

Less candidates chose to write about love. Detailed discussion was often lacking in these responses. Some candidates mentioned the love between Jo and Boy and the love between Helen and Peter. The best of answers spoke about the importance of having love, and the absence of love - as with Helen and Jo.

Heroes

There were many takers for each of the two essay choices. The essay about Francis and his bad decisions allowed candidates to discuss a range of scenes from the novel. Many candidates carefully considered his actions and inactions and evaluated how they impacted him, and others, negatively. Most candidates chose to discuss Francis' inability to act during Nicole's rape and failing to kill Larry at the end of the novel. Some candidates commented thoughtfully on how Francis enlisting in the army was a mistake because he not only missed Nicole's apology but candidates also recognised he may not have ended up facially disfigured. The more able candidates were able to discuss Larry's manipulation of the children and how this may have influenced Francis' decisions. Candidates were able to discuss Francis' relationship with Nicole and again how this affected his decisions. For this

task responses were more confident in dealing with the chronology of the text than in previous years, perhaps because there was a larger element of choice for the candidate in what to consider as bad decisions and less direct retelling from most.

The sympathy essay generated a range of responses. The majority of candidates felt sympathy with either Francis or Nicole. Some candidates chose to utilize the extract and focused on Enrico, nevertheless there were a few candidates who did this but then expanded their answer to comment on soldiers, including Arthur, broadening their essay to comment on the “real heroes”. These responses showed a detailed understanding of theme and text. A few candidates chose to sympathise with Larry, all focusing on his physical injuries following the war. Some responses were able to show clear awareness of the relationship between Francis and Nicole and how they were both the victims of Larry’s manipulative desires. Some candidates also picked up on the tragic element of Francis’ upbringing living with his uncle after his parents’ deaths, his loneliness and lack of friends; they saw this as a further reason to feel sympathy for Francis. The responses on Nicole were sometimes not as wide ranging but the good ones focused on the contrast between her pre-Larry and her post-Larry selves. There was some pertinent use of detail from across the text.

About a Boy

The first essay about Ellie was the more popular choice. The majority of candidates referenced Ellie’s rebellious nature and the unlikeliness of her friendship with Marcus. The bullet points were used by many candidates diligently. The majority of candidates understood Ellie’s love of Kurt Cobain and referenced her behaviour at his death. The best responses judged Ellie to be misunderstood and still a child, in her essence and actually a kind friend to Marcus who enhances his life in many ways.

Only a few candidates attempted the question about times they found funny. Of those that did, some chose ‘Dead Duck Day’ as funny and explained why. At least one candidate mentioned the hilarity of Will having to buy the car seat and then ‘trash it’ to ensure people believed he had a child. Ellie’s behaviour was also considered funny. Valid examples were given, but in a rather piecemeal fashion by some.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **For the plays the discussion of relevant contextual factors which were then linked directly and closely to the exact question**
- **Events and details selected relevantly and with some range to support points made**
- **Probing of subtext to show more than a surface understanding, most often achieved by engaging with the terms of the question and by referring back to them regularly**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **For the plays a better and more regular 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 and being accurate when attempting quotations**
- **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

Responses generally tracked closely, considering the characters and their behaviour. Some students were able to pick up on the hierarchy through discussion of the Headmaster's dominance and regular questioning of Mrs Lintott. Some furthered this through how Mrs Lintott refers to him as Headmaster throughout and he in return calls her Dorothy after the opening. Candidates differed in their reading of him using her name. Some saw this as friendly whilst others discussed the lack of respect he has for her. Some were able to discuss how the Headmaster is focused on data and results with some commenting on how he seems to be focusing on impressing the Governors. Many discussed how Mrs Lintott seems proud of the boys. The end of the extract was not covered as successfully or often not at all.

Blood Brothers

Candidates understood the extract well, and its significance in the wider play. Most were able to track the extract picking up on the changes in mood and atmosphere. Many candidates were able to pick up on the significance of the plural 'mouths' and some were able to consider how a normally happy event has the opposite impact on mood and atmosphere here.

Some considered the subtle change in Mrs Johnstone – how she is talkative up until this revelation and how her speech becomes more subdued (she speaks less) and the impact this has on the mood and atmosphere. Some commented on the behaviour of Mrs Lyons and how this contributes to the changing mood and atmosphere. There was some confusion at the lower end about the milkman's change of occupation and how this could happen so quickly. Some went on to link this, unsuccessfully, to contextual issues.

A View from the Bridge

Most candidates focused on mood and atmosphere with success, looking at different parts of the extract to support this. Knowledge of where this happens in the play and the background to these events proved to be extremely helpful in accounting for the mood and atmosphere here. Some considered the importance of the stage directions (including Beatrice covering his body almost as if protecting him and linking this to the opening when she tries to make him go inside). Some picked up on Louis' behaviour and how, once the knife is seen, he stops and steps back. Much was usefully of specific details such as them standing up to each other with arms spread wide and how the confrontation becomes physical rather than verbal.

Be My Baby

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

My Mother Said I Never Should

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

Silas Marner

Most candidates tracked well focusing on mood and atmosphere and discussing it with some understanding. Some struggled to maintain a focus on mood and atmosphere and slipped into discussing character instead. Lots discussed Silas' 'visitations' and how this links to the wider novel. There were some responses where candidates were able to track mood and

atmosphere and how choices made by the author contributed to this, e.g. 'mute with astonishment', 'groaned' 'deep flush'.

Pride and Prejudice

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

A Christmas Carol

Some responses relied on retelling the extract but other candidates looked at the language and techniques closely, considering how these were used by Dickens to create mood and atmosphere. There were some confident responses which considered the juxtaposition between Fred and Scrooge, focusing on the way they speak 'sternly', 'repeated', 'pleaded' and the like. Some of the higher candidates also thought about how Fred's message concerning social responsibility lightens the tone and spreads Christmas cheer.

Lord of the Flies

There was some retelling and many found it hard to place these events, for instance some thought Jack was in the scene or that Piggy was holding the conch at this point rather than referring to recent events. Many were much more secure and some were able to pick out and discuss the significance of 'squeaked' and 'in an appalled whisper'. Others considered the way characters behaved and how throughout there was a sense of violence and threat. There were some instances of candidates discussing how Piggy refers to Jack as 'him' and what this suggests about his character.

Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve

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

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on detail from within 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, especially any developing mood or atmosphere for relevant tasks**
- **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 and specific vocabulary to describe mood and atmosphere**
- **More sustained and detailed coverage of the extract including its ending**
- **Increased selection of supporting references rather than general comments**
- **Staying within the exact task more consistently**
- **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

The first option about Dakin was the more popular of the two essays. Students focused on his character, especially his 'cocky', self-confident and attractive nature. Some candidates discussed how Dakin could be viewed sympathetically at times and as a character in need of reassurance (using evidence such as when he realises his mispronunciation). There was lots of discussion of his sexual nature, especially his stories about Fiona, his using sex to get what he wants and his behaviour towards Irwin.

For the second task the majority agreed that they found the ending of the play effective, mostly linking to how it showed Hector's message being passed on and the symbolic importance of this. Many focused on summarising how the boys ended up, some discussing how Rudge's story was the most ironic as he'd been seen as the least intelligent of the boys.

Blood Brothers

For the more popular first task candidates generally spoke carefully about Eddie, considering the impact he had on the other characters and how he links to some of the key themes (Nature/nurture, social class etc). Some candidates considered how he can be seen as responsible for his own downfall and how Russell suggests that he is drawn to his real mother. Some began to consider the structure of the play and the impact this has on the audience, such as the foreshadowing and dramatic irony used throughout by the playwright. In lower bands candidates tended to narrate events relating to Eddie in the play and they struggled to consider his importance.

There were many approaches to the second task about kinds of love in the play. Most responses at least considered the basic relationships and made comments (normally narrative) about them. As responses gained marks they considered a range of 'loves' in the play, considering things such as the love Eddie and Mickey share and the significance that they are actually brothers but do not know this. Some considered how a lack of love (on Mr Lyons' part) and naïve love (Mrs Johnstone) contributed to events in the play and led to the deaths at the end of the play. Some also considered how love underpins everything the mothers do in the play and how their love is for their children. The love triangle with Linda also featured regularly. Generally this question was a successful choice, allowing candidates to range across the play showing detailed knowledge of characters and events whilst choosing which aspects of love to address.

A View from the Bridge

The first question was the more popular choice and there were many detailed, successful responses. However, some struggled to consider the importance of Rodolfo, giving a general summary of what he does within the play. Many responses relied on narrative, following the character through the play but in the higher bands candidates discussed how he could be seen as a catalyst for change in Catherine's character and in the relationship between Marco and Eddie. There were some confident responses that placed Rodolfo against the other characters to show how he represents youth and a different kind of masculinity.

For the second question candidates were able to access the higher bands when they discussed the sense of family honour and how this contributed to the ending of the play, as well as how Eddie's downfall relates back to honour and family. Others focused more on certain characters, mainly Eddie and Marco and their views on family and how this contributes to the play. Some candidates discussed Eddie's changing views and loyalty towards his family. Many also considered how in the case of Rodolpho (and later Eddie) there was a lack of importance placed on family and how these characters were often driven by their own desires.

Be My Baby

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

My Mother Said I Never Should

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

Silas Marner

Godfrey was the more popular choice and responses showed a good understanding of the character and events linked to him in the novel. Many tracked through his relationship with Molly (sometimes developing their discussion of her character). They tracked through his decision to give up Eppie and his marriage to Nancy. Some discussed the tragedy that he and Nancy cannot have children and how they sympathised with Godfrey for this reason. They were also able to embed context in these responses, considering his position in society and how Molly uses this to manipulate him.

Responses to the second question tended to focus on Silas and how Eppie changes him for the better. Some struggled to add context although some began to draw on the idea of Silas as an outsider as well as considering the importance of religion to characters in the novel and the sense of redemption in the novel. Some candidates considered Eppie's lack of change and her loyalty to Silas which was well discussed.

Pride and Prejudice

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

A Christmas Carol

The first question was by far the more popular choice. Most did consider all of the ghosts and their impact on Scrooge, moving chronologically through the text. It was good to see that an increasing number are also considering Marley in their answers. Many considered how and why Marley is significant and how he comes to redeem Scrooge and is therefore used as Dickens' spokesman. Some considered the significance of the spirits in purgatory and how this would move an audience and force them to realise their social responsibility. Convincing cases were made for each of the ghosts and also for the statement that they all change him. As ever accuracy of detail was vital here in attributing the right incidents and actions to the right spirit. Some embedded context well, considering Dickens' message subtly, but successfully.

For the second question there were pockets of responses which made no direct references to the texts and did not show knowledge of the events of the text. Better responses broke the text down to key themes/messages, how these were presented, how they link to context and sometimes, how it links to our modern society. Some began to probe the deeper meaning of key events such as Scrooge being an oyster with a pearl representing the hope we all have for redemption and change. There were lot of links to the Poor Law, Malthus, workhouses and the like although sometimes it was clear candidates did not really understand why they are significant to the overall message. Many struggled to develop their answers as they missed the chance to cover a range of ideas. There were some good points about Want and Ignorance.

Lord of the Flies

For the first, more popular question, sympathy was most often shown for Piggy. Most of the responses on Piggy at least considered the basics: he's fat, lower class, has asthma etc. Some did then consider how this linked to the context, likening Piggy to Jews in WW2. Responses on other characters, such as Simon or Ralph, were sometimes more confident and accessed an overview of the text more readily. For example, some thought about Simon's allegorical importance (embedding context well), how he isolates himself in order to be protected from savagery and the violence surrounding his death. Candidates who considered various characters before saying who deserves the most sympathy also did well when they developed their answers with supporting detail. Responses to the second task were generally confident and demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of Simon's character and role in the novel. Some re-told Simon's parts in the novel and his kindness towards the Littleuns and his being prone to fainting. Again, the higher band responses discussed Simon as a Christ-like figure and one who linked to purity and goodness. Some picked up and discussed how his choice to isolate himself makes him appear odd to the boys but to the reader it is a positive sign. Some candidates discussed Simon's role in being the moral spokesman of the novel and how he understands the inherent evil in the boys and their savage nature. They considered his intelligence and his links to the Lord of the Flies.

Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve

Unfortunately this text was not attempted by any significant number of candidates.

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**
- **A close focus on the exact terms of the chosen task**
- **Some analysis of the writer's style and craft usually addressed through the idea of 'how' and including context for the novels**
- **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:

- **Looking carefully at the exact terms of the question before starting to answer and realising that there is not much that they want to say – greater length of responses for many**
- **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 for the novels**
- **A wider range of detail and events from the text to give a more thorough and structured approach to support a personal view**

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

Candidates wrote well on the extract. There was much engagement and sympathy for Mrs Johnstone with sensible comments about her reaction to the news that she is going to have

twins. Most candidates clearly understood what was happening here and worked through the extract in detail to demonstrate this.

A View from the Bridge

Candidates mostly showed an understanding of this extract from the end of the play. Responses tended to pick out individual details and comment on them without trying to build a more coherent response. More successful answers tended to refer directly to the task and the idea of audience response, with useful comments about stage directions such as 'He has his arms spread and Marco is spreading his'. There was much engagement with the dramatic nature of this extract.

Silas Marner

Most of the responses to this extract showed clear and detailed understanding and were able to place the events within the wider text. There was a good level of engagement with much outrage towards William and sympathy for Silas.

Christmas Carol

Responses to this extract sensibly focused on the contrasting attitudes shown by Scrooge and his nephew. Understanding was clearly shown by most although some were confused by the introduction of Bob into the exchange and attributed his line to Fred, making him the clerk as well as the nephew. Some tried to tackle lines that they did not really understand, such as Scrooge's comment about his nephew going into parliament. This was perhaps short sighted when there was so much else to comment on.

Lord of the Flies

Many candidates found this extract difficult to place within the text and some were confused about who is actually present. Others showed a clearer understanding by building from details such as the first line to show the fear and anxiety that is present throughout here. Working through the extract proved, as ever, the safest route.

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- **Fuller coverage of the extract from beginning to end**
- **Sustained focus on the exact terms of the question**
- **Accurate textual references to support points made**
- **Ability to show some appreciation of the significance of particular extracts, events and exchanges**

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**
- **Less personal response that does not refer to the question asked or address specific details from the extract**

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

The first question about Edward was by far the more popular choice. Answers were generally quite narrative but showed detailed understanding across the text. The most successful responses tracked his development through the whole play rather than just concentrating on his childhood relationship with Mickey. Others did well by considering his relationships with others such as Mrs Lyons and Linda, rather than just stating that he is representative solely of a contrast in class to his twin. The second question produced some engaged answers, often at their best when using Mrs Johnstone as an example of times when love is important, for instance when she gives her baby away. Answers to this task were successful when supported by reference to events and specific detail. Unfortunately, some gave a much more general discussion.

A View from the Bridge

Rodolfo was the more popular choice. The bullet points were used successfully by some, but others gave equally successful answers working through the text in a more chronological or thematic way. Clarity with detail and events was vital and there was some occasional confusion between the two brothers. The second task was rarely attempted and the answers that did appear were often quite brief or general.

Silas Marner

There were some excellent responses to the question about Godfrey Cass. Candidates showed detailed knowledge across the text and were able to use this to build a full picture of this character as he is presented. There was also reference to context relating to his treatment of Molly and the unsuitability of her as a wife in the contemporary social system. As noted on previous occasions, this text provides candidates with a narrative structure that is fairly straightforward, engaging, and apparently memorable. The responses about changes tended to focus on Silas and how Eppie changes him and did well with this approach.

Christmas Carol

The first question was by far the more popular choice and candidates chose sensibly, backing their choices with detail and engaged discussion. There were nominations for each of the spirits, including Marley on occasion. Context was referenced through discussions of Tiny Tim, Ignorance and Want, Scrooge's greed etc. Responses also worked well that considered each of the spirits before deciding which has the most effect. Responses to the second question were sometimes quite general and seemed undecided as to the exact message that they were advocating as the most important. The more successful answers kept close to detail and events from the text.

Lord of the Flies

The first question was the more popular choice. Sympathy was most often given to Piggy. Some worked through a range of characters before making a choice and this was successful when supported with reference to a range of events and detail. Context was accessed through reference to Piggy's background as well as the interactions between the boys on the

island. The question about Simon was a less common choice but worked well for some of those who followed the bullet points to build a response that worked through the text in detail.

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- **For the novels the discussion of relevant contextual factors which were then linked directly and closely to the exact question**
- **Events and details selected relevantly and with some range to support points made**
- **Probing of subtext to show more than a surface understanding, most often achieved by engaging with the terms of the question and by referring back to them regularly**

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- **For the novels a better and more regular 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 and being accurate when attempting quotations**
- **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 2018

UNIT 3

General Report

Administration

There were remarkably few issues relating to the administrative aspects in this second year of the new course. In the vast majority of cases, coversheets had been completed appropriately and obvious care had been taken in the arrangement of the samples. When it had been necessary to adapt the IAMIS created sample list, Heads of Department almost always made the reasons for the substitution clear in a note to the moderator. When copies of the poems used in Section B had been included with the folders, it was also pleasing to see that on most occasions it was made plain to the moderator that any annotations had been completed during the assessment session.

The overuse of staples remains an issue. Very often they have to be removed to access the work fully and it would be helpful in future if their use could be avoided. Treasury tags are preferable. Similarly poly pockets hold up the moderation process and a number of moderators commented adversely on their use.

There were occasions when marks had been incorrectly entered on IAMIS. It is simple for moderators to correct such clerical errors but it is important that the marks are checked before being submitted to the WJEC.

A number of moderators commented on the efficiency and professionalism of those responsible for the administrative aspects. Particular credit must be given to those who have to organise large samples involving numerous teachers.

The inclement weather earlier in the year caused a number of problems for some centres. It is to the credit of the staff in such circumstances that they did their best to ensure that the candidates were not disadvantaged.

Contents/tasks and annotation

In virtually all centres, appropriate texts and tasks had been used. There were occasions when candidates had been entered earlier or later than originally planned and thus had studied texts not on the list for the 2018 cohort. In these cases, JCQ Form 10s (Special Consideration) were generally enclosed with the sample. The WJEC is sympathetic to such issues but it is important that the correct procedures are completed.

Section A

The themes for the Shakespeare work were 'Rejection' and 'Hatred', the latter being the slightly more popular of the two. As in the past, the most frequently chosen texts were 'Macbeth' and 'Romeo and Juliet', though a number of other dramas made an appearance. Work on 'King Lear' is becoming more common along with 'The Merchant of Venice' and 'Hamlet'. The History plays 'Richard II', 'Richard III', 'Henry VI Part One' and 'Henry V' were

also utilised in a small number of centres. Perhaps understandably given the rather negative themes, the comedies were not greatly in evidence.

A study of Tybalt's role promoting hatred in 'Romeo and Juliet' was the most popular task. Most centres used the sample assignment published in the 'Non-Examination Assessment Tasks' document, which required the candidates to consider how Shakespeare presents the character. This proved to be a manageable task for all levels of ability though, since Tybalt dies in the middle of the play, it was difficult for candidates to fulfil the requirement to display awareness of the full drama unless they considered the second part of the task- the 'effect his hatred has on the rest of the play'. Sadly, a large number of candidates did not respond to this aspect and thus weakened their achievement. Suitable coverage of the play was also a problem in other Shakespeare responses. The 'Discuss thoroughly' AO1 criterion for Band 4 is hardly met when only a couple of scenes have been considered. Sometimes it was apparent that the candidates had little knowledge of the rest of the drama.

The hatred between the feuding families was also a popular task and one which encouraged good text coverage. It was particularly important in this task to select material carefully as obviously there is a great deal to choose from. The best responses concentrated on the initial chorus, the three occasions when the families come into conflict, Romeo and Juliet's rejection of the feud and the final scene. There was a tendency to spend too long on the opening chorus, which resulted in the resolution of the enmity not being considered.

A sizeable minority used the sample task on 'The Merchant of Venice' based on religious hatred. There is a wealth of material to investigate in the play on this subject and generally the candidates could track through the text, examining the occasions when the characters display their religious intolerance. The best could see below the surface detail and perceive that Shakespeare was not an anti-Semite but instead found the Christians equally uncharitable. There was much thoughtful work on this self-contained task, which required coverage of virtually the entire play. Those studying 'Macbeth' frequently utilised the remaining sample task based on whether Macbeth was a 'hated tyrant' or a 'tragic figure'. This proved to be more testing for the students to complete since the concept of a 'tragic figure' is quite difficult to handle. Most candidates simply spent their time examining his character, not a particularly hard task, though a number of them failed to mention the slaughter of the Macduff family when considering the 'tyrant' aspect.

A number of moderators commented on the lack of consideration of the thematic aspect of the task in the 'Macbeth' work and indeed this was an issue throughout the Shakespeare section. It must be understood that the chosen theme should be central in the response and that the selection of textual reference needs to be highly focused. The best answers had a clear sense of direction, coming back to the theme frequently to establish relevance. Simple character studies of Macbeth or his wife that did not point back to 'hatred' or 'rejection' were very common.

On balance, the work on rejection was probably more successful and certainly wider in scope and range. Again, all the sample tasks were utilised and it was particularly pleasing to see that Lear's rejection of Cordelia was relatively popular. Candidates attempting it were generally aware that to show coverage of the entire text they could not content themselves with simply surveying the opening scene with its devastating love test. On virtually all occasions, they were able to follow a close examination of Cordelia's rejection with comments on Goneril and Regan's unloving treatment of the king and the redemption of Lear when he meets his forgiving daughter in Act 5. Essays on this task were some of the best to be seen in this series. Having said this, there were also excellent offerings on Juliet's rejection by her parents and the Nurse and Rosaline's rejection of Romeo. When candidates looked at both characters, they ensured suitable coverage of the text. This requirement was more difficult to achieve for those tackling the 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' task unless they

followed one pair of lovers through the play. Those who took this approach gave themselves the opportunity to involve other characters in their discussion though there was a tendency in responses to this task for there to be over-much plot narration.

Lady Macbeth's rejection of her femininity was reasonably popular and this task provided some excellent opportunities for the analysis of Lady Macbeth's language in Act 1 scenes 5 and 7. The best candidates followed the play through to consider the repercussions of the character's rejection of traditional feminine qualities. Macbeth's rejection of morality was also considered in some centres. This well focused task encouraged the candidates to look closely at the protagonist's language especially in the often neglected 'Is this a dagger...' soliloquy. A similar task on Juliet's rejection of the expected code of behaviour for young women also led to some excellent work. Many of the candidates obviously found her feisty attitudes and headstrong behaviour engaging and responses were sympathetic to the rejection of her controlled and controlling environment.

A few centres considered the rejection of Ophelia by Hamlet and others, which again encouraged close examination of language particularly in the Nunnery scene. However, Hamlet is not the only one who treats the woman appallingly and better responses also covered Polonius and Laertes' patronising and paternalistic demands and the repercussions of her madness and suicide.

Throughout the Shakespeare section, there was a pleasing readiness to engage with the texts and an appreciation of their relevance to life in the twenty-first century.

Section B

The theme of 'Parents and Children' clearly engaged the interest of the candidates and many could see parallels to their own situations. The most popular poems were 'Daylight Robbery' (Paul Henry) and 'The Student House' (Peter Finch) often in combination and it is easy to see why. There is plenty within them to compare and both poems are accessible with an apparently simple and appealing content though for the more able there is plenty of clever language usage, particularly so in Finch's poem, to investigate. They also encouraged a good deal of personal engagement with candidates well able to understand the way in which parents and children can become disengaged. Having written this, there were some issues with 'Daylight Robbery' with a number of candidates believing that the seven year old was 'entering adolescence' or 'becoming an adult'. Others mistakenly claimed that the child's relationship with his father had come to an end when clearly Henry is implying that it has reached the end of one stage to begin another. Some thought that the title referred to the cost of the haircut. For the most part though, candidates were able to investigate the imagery quite fully and the best were aware of the subtleties in 'The Student House'.

Another linking which proved to be successful in encouraging the candidates to investigate the language was 'My Mother's Perfume' (Pascale Petit) and 'Walnut Tree Forge' (John Tripp). Here the basic point of comparison, the one parental relationship being remote while the other was close and warm, was clearly apparent and candidates were able to look at the evidence and find many features reflecting this difference. Of the two poems, the former was clearly the more difficult but this did not prevent candidates from trying to establish the exact relationship between the mother and daughter. 'Do not go gentle into that good night' and 'From Father to Son' was a more testing combination and candidates often struggled to understand Thomas's poem while only the most perceptive could see the haunting poignancy of Humphreys' verse. Some took a literal approach to the language in this poem, thinking that the father was still alive and living as a tramp. 'Jugged Hare' (Jean Earle) and 'His Father, Singing' were occasionally linked with the point of contact being the adult reinterpreting a childhood memory. Both these poems are rich in challenging poetic

language and have many similarities and differences. AO3 work on this combination was often very impressive.

All the poems in the selection were represented in the samples. In some centres it was clear that the candidates had studied all the chosen texts and that the teacher had given them autonomy over their choices for comparison. Elsewhere, different teachers focused on two or three poems with all the candidates in the group attempting the same task. In some centres, the entire cohort produced essays on the same pair of poems. This could suggest that the remaining 13 poems had not been studied which is, of course, a contravention of the Specification regulations.

The committee responsible for selecting the thematic list of poems tries to ensure that there is a range of difficulty. It is the responsibility of the teachers to ensure that their candidates are not outpaced or unchallenged by the combinations selected. It was certainly the case this year, particularly with the Thomas/Humphreys linking, that a number of candidates were out of their depth and moderators thought that a more accessible pairing would have benefitted them.

Candidates handled the heavily weighted AO3 aspect rather better this year and very few indeed failed to make some links between their chosen texts. As suggested above, this task was made easier for them if the combination had been carefully chosen. For example, some students struggled trying to find links between 'Do not go gentle into that good night' and 'Not Yet My Mother' (Owen Sheers). While difficult combinations like this still allow the candidates to achieve well in AO1 and AO2, it is very difficult to score credit in the critical AO3 aspect. Careful combination choices are essential if the candidates are to have access to all the criteria.

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. Sometimes this debate resulted in an increase in the marks which moderators could not endorse and more often than not such increases were not justified by annotation. This was especially the case in Section B where the narrower the mark range, the greater the risk of mark inflation.

In both Sections, the AO1 marks were generally fairly accurate. This is probably the easiest aspect to assess since it simply judges the candidates' ability to choose suitable textual references, establish characters and relationships and show an awareness of the content. AO2 assessments were more problematic since candidates were often credited with achievement when they had only cited an apt textual reference (an AO1 skill) instead of investigating the way that language is manipulated to produce a particular effect. Typically, the candidate would note that the writer had used a metaphor or simile and this would be taken as evidence of AO2 achievement when in fact it only constituted device spotting. For example, if a candidate writes 'Lady Macbeth uses a metaphor about milk when describing her husband' there cannot be any credit given for AO2. However, if the candidate writes 'Lady Macbeth says that her husband is "too full o' the milk of human kindness". She is using "milk" to suggest a giving spirit like a mother providing life-giving sustenance to an innocent baby' then reward could be given for AO2. It is acknowledged that the AO2 criteria are difficult to achieve but this is part of the differentiation process.

As noted in last year's report, AO2 also covers 'structure'. It was obvious from the work this year that candidates felt they had to write something about this aspect but were very uncertain about how to do so. Very many retreated into verse counting, rhyme spotting and

other prosodic aspects. For example, when writing about the opening of 'Romeo and Juliet' some candidates wasted their time explaining that a sonnet had 14 lines and a particular rhyme scheme. This is true of all sonnets and is not particular to the opening chorus of the play. It was more important for them to consider why Shakespeare begins his play with this particular poetic form and the themes he covers within it. Work on structure should be concerned with the way the writer has shaped the piece of literature. For example, in 'The Student House' Peter Finch opens the poem with coldness and angular uncomfortable images, slowly building up the sordid picture of the untidiness, which the writer finds depressing, before introducing the young man who is awkward and shabbily dressed. The conclusion, however, with its mention of warmth and 'a kind of love' changes the atmosphere both literally and metaphorically.

AO3 assessments were often too generous. When the work on the two poems ran in parallel, it was sometimes the case that points would be aligned that had no connection. This fragmented the work and did not provide a convincing approach to linking. For example, candidates would write 'This poem is about this... and this poem is about this.' If there was no clear connection made then the point could not gain credit for AO3. On other occasions, extremely peripheral links were made, for example that 'Walnut Tree Forge' and 'Not Yet My Mother' were linked because they both mention horses. Another candidate wrote that the poems were linked because they both ended with full stops and stating the fact that both poems are by Welsh authors is unlikely to gain add marks. Quite often credit was given when a candidate simply reiterated the task title ('Both the poems are about the relationship between a child and a parent').

However, there was evidence that candidates were making a great effort to find and explain viable links and differences. The best responses considered the content, theme, viewpoint, mood and style.

Conclusion

Despite what has been written above, this year showed definite progress in the way AO3 was tackled and it was extremely pleasing to see that, to the great credit of their teachers, many of the candidates had enjoyed working on the texts.



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