



Pearson

# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2018

Pearson Edexcel IAL  
In English Literature (WET03)  
Unit 3: Poetry and Prose

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## Introduction

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International A-Level English Literature provider.

For this unit, WET03, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

For Section A, Poetry, students will use the reading skills they have developed through the course. Students will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed in a separate Source Insert.

For Section B, Prose, students answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, on the two studied prose texts from their chosen theme. Students can select from the themes: *Growing Up*, *Colonisation and After*, *Science and Society* or *Women and Society*. For each theme, there are three set texts, which students should study in detail. Student responses will be informed by an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read. Students should be encouraged to view the texts in relation to each other.

In Section B, Prose, students will study two (from three) thematically linked texts and will learn about:

- the importance of the relationship between texts, making connections and comparisons between texts
- the significance of the cultural and contextual influences under which literary texts are written and received
- how to respond creatively, relevantly and in an informed way to texts using appropriate terminology and concepts as well as coherent and accurate written expression
- how to analyse texts from a critical perspective.

There are 20 marks available for Section A and 30 for Section B. The total mark of 50 represents 25% of the total IA2.

Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1 and AO2.

Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4. AO5 is *not* assessed in this paper.

*Please refer to the full specification for details of the Assessment Objectives and their weightings.*

General Overview of the WET03 Summer 2018 (1806) paper and performance

It has been good to see that the number of entries continues to increase for this specification and paper. As centres have become more experienced with the demands of the specification, the quality of candidates' responses has continued to improve as candidates are dealing with the Assessment Objectives better, although there are some areas that could still be developed further.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B. For this series, a full range of texts had been studied and the full range of marks was awarded.

For Section A, Unseen Poetry, some responses were a little disappointing as students did not analyse the unseen poem in sufficient depth and detail. Others attempted to explore the metaphorical meanings of the poem but had not looked for the most obvious meanings. Candidates would benefit from demonstrating their basic understanding of the unseen poem before moving on and delving deeper for metaphorical meanings and offering alternative interpretations. This way, candidates will demonstrate an overall understanding of the poem and then provided evidence of looking for alternative interpretations.

The most popular prose section was the *Science and Society* option (Questions 6 and 7) and the second most popular *Women and Society* (Questions 8 and 9). Many responses gained marks in the top two levels, although at times candidates did not sufficiently cover all assessment objectives thus preventing candidates receiving marks at the top of a particular level. There were some candidates who did not consider context and others that did not consider the writers' craft and the language, structure and form of the texts. In Section B, some candidates tended to write about each novel separately and there was very little evidence of comparison.

As reported in previous series, some responses were not as fluent as expected at this level. Candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

In order to qualify for marks in higher levels, candidates should be able to identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts and use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination.

The following explores each question in more detail.

## Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

### Question 1

The Unseen Poem for Question 1 was *Sea Reading* by Owen Sheers. This was a particularly successful poem, as it proved to be a good discriminator with a full range of marks being awarded. There were the simple surface readings, without any exploration for deeper meanings, through to the more developed responses where candidates explored the deeper and metaphorical meanings of the poem. The range of interpretations offered was varied and interesting, even though some candidates missed the main idea of the poem. Interpretations included: man verses nature; the journey of life; political oppression and immigration. More unusual interpretations included: a love affair between two people; the events of 9/11 with the 'kamikazing' reference cited; terrorism and racism. The responses

provided a wide range of reading experiences and candidates had clearly engaged with the poem.

For this section of the paper, candidates are required to show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features, conventions in poetry and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts and by responding critically and creatively.

It is recommended that centres make use of the *Sample Assessment Materials* and the mark scheme for this paper in order to become even more familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. For Level 4 and above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Close analysis should be controlled and candidates should be able to identify and provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Unseen Poetry question assesses Assessment Objectives (AO) 1 and 2:

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Responses gaining marks in Level 2 provide a surface reading of the poem and may identify some literary techniques. The response will be straightforward. For this summer's Unseen Poetry section, *Sea Reading*, those candidates who did not demonstrate an understanding of the surface meaning of the poem rarely moved any higher than the top of Level 3, as the main point of the poem had been missed. In order to qualify for marks in the higher levels, candidates must delve more deeply into the meaning of the poem and explore possible alternative interpretations. Ideas should be supported with a range of evidence from the poem and the use of terminology should be used confidently and appropriately. Candidates should not feature spot, but use terminology in support of points made when exploring the writer's craft. Candidates should comment on the language, structure and form and explore why particular devices have been used by the poet.

## Section B: Prose

A full range of marks was awarded for all questions.

Responses were varied. Some candidates demonstrated a surface understanding of their two chosen texts, but sometimes responses were too brief, not detailed enough, took a narrative approach or lacked comparison. Most candidates tended to make general points about their two chosen novels, but references to specific examples were often lacking. A number of candidates did not fully explore the writers' craft and comments in relation to language were often limited.

The bullet points in the mark grid reflect the requirements of the Assessment Objectives (AOs). If a candidate does not address all of the AOs sufficiently, a mark is awarded lower in the level. Candidates should compare their two chosen novels, provided a range of

examples from their chosen texts and included relevant contextual comment to support the points made. The more able candidates successfully embed contextual points and include evidence of wider reading, such as the views of critics.

### Questions 2 and 3

#### *Growing up*

The set texts for the theme of *Growing Up* are: *What Maisie Knew*, *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*.

Question 2: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present education.

There were few responses for the *Growing Up* option, but this was the most popular question. Candidates explored how the protagonists gained an education and some explored the effects of it, such as how Celie in *The Color Purple* gained independence and strength or how Maisie in *What Maisie Knew* gained knowledge through her own observations and led to her gaining maturity. Contextual points were made about the roles of apprenticeships (*Great Expectations*) and governesses. Some considered how Pip's education (*Great Expectations*) and his journey to become a gentleman came at great cost. A number of candidates mentioned the bildungsroman genre, but often the narrative methods were not considered.

Question 3: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray the effect of money.

Those candidates who had studied *What Maisie Knew* successfully considered contextual points in relation to money, wealth and positions in society. Some explored how Maisie's parents' fortune led them to live frivolous lives whilst abandoning their responsibilities as parents. Many candidates who had studied *Great Expectations* wrote about the contrasts of Pip's humble beginnings and his relationships with Miss Havisham and Magwitch. Those who studied *The Color Purple* explored how Celie gained her independence and strength through financial gain and how Grady exploited Shug's wealth.

Most candidates wrote about *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*. There were some missed opportunities to explore contextual points and, in some cases, there was not a balance of coverage of the two texts.

### Questions 4 and 5

#### *Colonisation and After*

The set texts for the theme of *Colonisation and After* are: *Heart of Darkness*, *The Lonely Londoners* and *A Passage to India*. This section was the least popular option for centres with just a small number of responses received.

Question 4: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present friendship.

This was the least popular question for this collection of texts. Candidates wrote about *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* and considered the friendships between Marlow and the men onboard the *Nellie*, Kurtz's relationships with his 'African mistress' and the Russian

trader. The friendship between Fielding and Aziz was the main point of consideration and some included comments about Mrs Moore's friendships with Aziz and Adela.

Question 5: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray injustice.

Again, there were very few responses to this question. Those who did study this theme mostly wrote about *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India*. The two novels are rich with a range of areas that could be discussed in relation to the theme of injustice. The injustices of colonialism and its effects on indigenous peoples were often considered with candidates often sympathising with those who suffered from injustice, such as Aziz or the savage treatment and exploitation of native Africans. Most candidates incorporated some contextual points, but more comment on the writers' craft would have benefited some responses.

Questions 6 and 7  
*Science and Society*

The set texts for the theme of *Science and Society* are: *Never Let Me Go*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Frankenstein*. By far, this was the most popular section and there was a varied combination of texts. Most candidates considered *The Handmaid's Tale* and compared this with one of the other set texts.

Question 6: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray the victims of experimentation.

Candidates fully engaged with this question. Responses to *Never Let Me Go* tended to provide a sympathetic reading for the students, Kathy, Ruth and Tommy who were the ultimate victims of experimentation. Candidates felt that the treatment of the clones was unacceptable and used this as an opportunity to mention the effects of biological engineering. Those writing about *The Handmaid's Tale* always considered Offred and some of the other handmaids, but more able candidates considered alternatives, such as how Serena Joy suffered and became a victim of experimentation. Those who had studied *Frankenstein* tended to consider how the creature, or monster, was a victim of experimentation, but those more successful candidates considered a range of characters, such as Victor, Elizabeth, William and Justine.

As seen in previous series, there was consideration of authorial intent and contextual exploration, although in some instances there was not enough balance in coverage of the two texts. The most successful candidates maintained a sharp focus on the question and made explicit comparisons throughout the essay.

Some long quotations were used and candidates would be better using selective quotations to support specific points made. Some candidates gained marks in the top level but did not achieve of full marks because more exploration of specific language and structure points needed to be included in the response. Evidence was seen of wider reading, with references made to the works of a number of critics.

Question 7: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present the reader with a disturbing view of the world.

Candidates explored how the donors in *Never Let Me Go* have no choice in their destiny and how there is no hope of a deferral or realising personal ambition. Many explored the

dystopian and totalitarian society of Gilead and how women had been stripped of their rights. Some referred to the 'Historical Notes' in *The Handmaid's Tale*, but very few comments about the language or structure of the novel were made. Those who had studied *Frankenstein* commented on the negative outcomes of scientific experimentation and its negative effects on the creature, Frankenstein and those he loved.

Again, a number of candidates made reference to the most recent televised adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* directed by Bruce Miller (Hulu production), but must remember that their essay must be based on their reading of the novel.

#### Questions 8 and 9 *Women and Society*

The set texts for the theme of *Women and Society* are: *Wuthering Heights*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Beloved*. This was the second most popular theme.

Question 8: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present the idea of responsibility.

Candidates tended to respond to this question in a mature and detailed manner. Comments included characters' sense of duty and their roles in society. Those writing about *Wuthering Heights* considered a range of characters, such as Nelly Dean, Edgar, Heathcliff and Catherine. Context was often embedded and included points about social constraints and expectations. Those considering *Mrs Dalloway* commented on Clarissa's role in society and how the doctors lacked responsibility for Septimus and how Septimus took responsibility for his own soul. The candidates who studied *Beloved* often explored the roles of Sethe, Baby Suggs and Denver and others included the roles and responsibilities of plantation owners, the Gardiners, and the ill-treatment of slaves, particularly by schoolteacher. Often, contextual and language comments were included and supported the points made.

Some candidates did not gain marks above Level 3 because the responses tended to become too narrative or had either dealt with the novels separately or there was an imbalance of coverage.

Question 9: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray parents.

Again, some very impressive responses were seen for this question. Candidates considered parental roles of the Earnshaws, Heathcliff, Hindley, Edgar and Isabella (*Wuthering Heights*), Clarissa and Richard Dalloway, Sally Seton and some even considered Mrs Filmer (*Mrs Dalloway*). Those candidates who had studied *Beloved* explored the parental roles of Sethe and Baby Suggs. The effects of parenting were considered and the relationships between parents and children were discussed.

Responses to this question were often critical and evaluative providing a detailed evaluation of the effects of literary features and a sophisticated understanding of the writer's craft. Most candidates considered some contextual points.

Evidence of wider reading was more evident in these two questions. A number of candidates referred to a variety of literary critics, such as Lacan, Sanger, Kermode and Eagleton.



## General points about Section B

For most questions, candidates did not deal fully with the Assessment Objectives. In some instances, little comment was made about the structure of the novels or the writers' craft and some candidates did not analyse and explore the novel in enough depth and detail. The most problematic area for some candidates was the comparison of the texts, but there were also several responses where integrated comparisons were made throughout and were more successful. The other problem was the reference to context. In some cases, there were no contextual points or some were not supporting any points or ideas that were being made.

Comparisons should be integrated and candidates should be encouraged to compare throughout the essay, not just in the introduction and conclusion. Bullet points 5 and 6 in the mark grids directly assess the candidates' ability to compare the texts and therefore this is an essential skill that candidates must address.

Contextual points are also required in order to meet the assessment objective. Bullets 3 and 4 of the mark grids explicitly refer to context.

As in previous reports, guidance is provided in the specification but is included here for ease of reference:

### Guidance on AO3

Context is information that informs the understanding of a text. There are different kinds of context that affect a writer's work and a reader's response to it.

Students should select relevant contextual material to illustrate and develop their response to the question. This could include:

- the author's own life and individual situation, including the place and time of writing, only where these relate to the text
- the historical setting, time and location of the text
- social and cultural contexts, e.g. attitudes in society, expectations of different cultural groups
- the literary context of the text, e.g. literary movements or genres.

The specification states that for Section B, students are required to:

- show knowledge and understanding of how genre features and conventions operate in prose fiction texts
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts, responding critically and creatively
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and make connections and explore the relationships between texts

- show knowledge and understanding of the contexts in which texts have been produced and received and understanding of how these contexts influence meaning
- identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts
- communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and evaluation of texts
- use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination
- make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, referring accurately and appropriately to texts and sources.

## Paper Summary

On the whole, this has been a very successful paper. There were no errors in both the question paper and mark scheme and no erratum notices were issued. Many candidates have gained marks in the top two levels. Centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates so well.

Based on performance on this paper, centres and candidates are offered the following advice for their future success:

- address the assessment objectives and use mark schemes to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques have on the reader or audience
- for Section A, Unseen Poetry, encourage candidates to demonstrate a basic overarching understanding of the poem first before delving deeper for metaphorical meanings
- for Section B, ensure that candidates make comparisons and refer to context when writing about the chosen novels
- context is not simply writing about history but can relate to a whole series of factors – political, social, cultural, etc – that influence both the writer and the reader. Context should be integrated and linked to the ideas and points being made. Context should not be ‘bolt-on’
- avoid narrative re-telling of the texts chosen for Section B. Narrative approaches are rarely successful.
- read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one practised before the exam
- enjoy reading and writing and share enthusiasm with the examiner.

Thank you.

Principal Examiner  
(IAL English Literature WET03)  
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### Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:  
<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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