

# Examiners' Report
# Principal Examiner Feedback

## January 2024

Pearson Edexcel International
Advanced Level in English Literature (WET03)
Paper 01

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## Introduction

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

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

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose, on the two prose texts that they have studied.

For **Section A**, **Unseen Poetry,** candidates will use the reading and critical skills that they have learnt throughout the course. Candidates will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed on a separate Source Insert.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

For **Section B, Prose**, candidates answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, on the two studied prose texts that they have studied. Candidates can select from the themes: ***Growing Up***, ***Colonisation and After***, ***Science and Society*** or ***Women and Society***. Candidate responses should be informed by an understanding and appreciation of the contexts in which their chosen texts are both written and read. Candidates should be encouraged to view the texts in comparison to each other.

In Section B, students will study two out of a choice of three thematically linked texts. They will learn about:

• the importance of the relationship between texts, making connections and comparison 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 number of 50 marks available for this paper represents 25% of IA2.

**Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives A01 and A02.**

**Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives A01, A02, A03 and A04.**

A05 is *not* assessed in this paper.

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

**General Overview of the WET03 January 2024 paper and performance**

This has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose. For this series, the full range of Levels across the mark scheme was awarded with most candidates placed between Levels 2-4.

Firstly, centres should be recognised for how well candidates have been prepared for this section of the examination paper. The unseen poem for Question 1 was ***This Is How They Come Back to Us*** by Barbara Kingsolver.

It was a pleasure to read the range of answers that were produced by candidates in response to this poem. As with the previous exam series, candidates are drawing upon a range of literary and poetic terminology and a knowledge of form and structure. There were fewer responses in this series that ran through a checklist of techniques that *might* be present rather than responding to the poem set. Candidates are also beginning to consider the link between poetic form and meaning more effectively but not all candidates are considering these links in detail. Depth of detail is essential in order to meet the requirements of Levels 4 and 5 for Assessment Objective 1 and Assessment Objective 2.

In the Prose section, the most popular theme was ***Science and Society*** (Questions 6 and 7) with the second most popular themes ***Growing Up*** (Questions 2 and 3) and ***Women and Society*** (Questions 8 and 9) which had an equal number of responses distributed between them. There were very few responses to ***Colonisation and After*** (Questions 4 and 5). Candidates had an impressive range of contextual knowledge, both historical and literary, with the best responses able to integrate contextual understanding seamlessly into their analysis of the texts. Many candidates were placed in Level 3-5.

As with previous exam series, written expression is mostly clear and many candidates are meeting the requirements of writing fluently and accurately. Assessment Objective 4 was not always evenly covered.

Handwriting could also sometimes be an issue. It's incredibly important that it is as clear as possible.

**Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry**

**Question 1**

The unseen poem for Question 1 was ***This Is How They Come Back to Us*** by Barbara Kingsolver. This was a discriminating poem that allowed students to access the full range of the mark scheme. There were few responses at all in Level 1.

The poem is an elegy for the poet's grandfather, although there were many directions in which an exploration of the poem could go and, indeed, did in the responses produced by the candidates. It was a pleasure to read the work produced and many candidates were able to respond sensitively, perceptively and with real insight to the unseen text selecting evidence well to support points.

The themes of family, death and memory are of central importance to the poem and were often recognised as such. The speaker in the poem moves between the life of her grandfather before she was born and the memories that she has of him. Indeed, many candidates were quick to note that the memories presented in the poem are not the poet's with more successful candidates deftly linking their vicarious nature to the wider theme of family and its connection to the reader. As one higher scoring candidate put it the ***collection of memories detailed in the poem are specific to the speaker's family yet they are a familiar set of experiences that many can relate to.***

Similarly, the image of the 'bear smile' as a key memory was also explored by most of the candidates. One successful candidate wrote that the image shows that the grandfather ***deliberately frightens her but she didn't and doesn't resent it because he defuses it with laughter***. The contrast between the images of the tomato and claw hammer as well as the juxtaposition of the images of the sleeping grandfather and his coffin were also commented on, often with wider links and connections made to the contrast between life and death. As one candidate said in their response: ***Kingsolver utilizes this juxtaposition to explore the cyclical nature of life and the inevitable intersection between beginnings and endings.*** This is a good example of how to meet the requirements of Level 5, with an emphasis on a sophisticated awareness and understanding of how the poet has crafted the poem.

All responses seemed to be aware of Assessment Objectives 1 and 2 and of the importance of exploring how meaning is created within a poem and of how literary and linguistic terminology as well as structure and form are used to do this. It was pleasing to see candidates begin to draw suitable links between form and meaning when discussing the layout, structure and, in this case, the graphology of the poem. The justification of the text to the right-hand side of the page is an unusual feature which was explicitly noted by many of the candidates. As one examiner pointed out candidates **'who saw the margin as the dividing line between life and death gained good credit for linking structures to themes'**. The varied uses of tense and chronology were linked effectively to the theme of memory by candidates. It was noted by examiners that thoughtful **'candidates linked the non-linear memories to the idea of them being 'equal', so that chronology ceases to be relevant after death'**.

Responses are most successful where time is obviously spent on planning and considering the meaning of the poem in detail. There is a lot to do in the allotted time: candidates must read, absorb and analyse an unseen poem and a clear plan would help in marshalling together an argument that would help to give responses shape and clarity. Some candidates struggled with an interpretation of the phrase **'I am not alive'**, with less successful responses moving from a discussion of the poet's recollection of her grandfather to a discussion of the poet dying herself. For Assessment Objective 2, candidates who explicitly discussed the construction of the poetic voice were able to successfully explore the way in which the poet ranges across memories that are not her own and could pinpoint that the poetic voice or speaker might be referring to events before she was born.

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 continue to make use of the ***Sample Assessment Materials*** and past papers 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. In order to achieve Level 4 or above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Analysis of the poem should be controlled and well supported with evidence and close reference to the techniques used and should provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Unseen Poetry question assesses Assessment Objectives 1 and 2:

A01: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

A02: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

**Section B: Prose**

Centres should be congratulated on having thoroughly prepared their candidates for the examination. Candidates knew their texts well and many could make perceptive and insightful comparisons between them. The full range of Levels across the mark scheme was awarded. As with the previous examination series, candidates are using a wealth of contextual knowledge in their responses and clearly understand the social and historical as well as literary contexts of their texts. In responses that are placed in Levels and 4 and 5, this knowledge is integrated into the argument made by candidates and used to illuminate points on the writer's craft.

Assessment Objective asks candidates to make connections between a text and its context. One successful response to ***Frankenstein*** for Question 7 was able to situate the title of the novel within popular culture and the now interchangeable name of 'Frankenstein' for the 'Creature'. As the examiner noted, this led to an interesting discussion of who the real monster is within the novel.

Candidates were often less secure in applying the skills needed to meet Assessment Objective 4. There were few responses that dealt with the texts as separate entities, but candidates did not always explore the connections and links between their studied texts in a level of detail that would have elevated their responses. The descriptors for Levels 4 and 5 ask that candidates analyse or evaluate the connections between their texts rather than identifying or making connections. One response to ***What Maisie Knew*** and ***The Color Purple*** for Question 3 very successfully paired the characters of Maisie and Celie, examining the ways in which James and Walker have their protagonists respond to the challenges of growing up. This response was placed at the very top of Level 4 and was very successful in its approach as well as in its application of linguistic and literary terminology.

Candidates who take this approach – tightly linking themes, ideas, devices or characters together – with their texts are invariably more successful than candidates who explore one text and then the other. Where discourse markers such as 'similarly' or 'differently' are used it is often the case that the point of comparison between the two texts is not as strong or as well developed as it could be. There are many comparisons that candidates can make between their chosen texts. These could include characters, theme, setting and context (both social and historical as well as literary) but it is worth remembering that points of comparison can also be

made on the style, technique, form and voice used within the novels. As with Section A, candidates would benefit from spending time planning. Where candidates planned their responses, it was evident in their writing that they had considered connections and comparisons in much detail.

Comments on each question are based on the evidence seen and only included for the most popular questions.

**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 social class.

Candidates answered on all three texts with Assessment Objectives 2 (AO2) and (AO3) 3 being particularly well-handled for this question. On ***What Maisie Knew***, there was often interesting discussion about the status of Henry James himself. As one examiner described: '**domiciled in England but also observing the rigidities of society as an 'objective' American'**. Candidates were also successfully able to link social class to Walker's treatment of race and racism in ***The Color Purple***.

**Question 3**: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray the challenges of growing up.

Candidates explored the various challenges that are evident in the texts. For Assessment Objectives 1 and 2 a discussion of the epistolary nature of ***The Color Purple*** and narrative voice in ***Great Expectations*** (Pip's reflective, adult narrator) often yielded interesting and pertinent material. Candidates who explored the psychological challenges that Masie and Celie face, as well as the physical challenges in the case of Celie, were also highly rewarded.

**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 had the fewest number of responses across both questions although all three texts were considered.

**Question 4:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts build narrative tension.

There were no responses to this question.

**Question 5:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present conflict.

There were 3 responses to this question.

**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***.

This theme was by far the most popular with the majority of candidates in this section responding to Question 6. There was an even distribution between the text choices for this theme.

**Question 6:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present the treatment of women.

This was the most popular question on the paper. The usurpation of motherhood – of clones created without a mother in ***Never Let Me Go***, of the Creature made by man in ***Frankenstein*** and Handmaids used to provide children for the Wives and Commanders in ***The Handmaid's Tale*** was one particularly successful area of investigation noted by examiners. The presentation of power imbalances between men and women was also explored by many candidates and provided a wealth of contextual material (Reagan's America; contemporary debates in science about personhood etc.) that was often integrated very well into responses. Discussions of Justine's treatment was also a common thread. Examiners did note, however, in relation to Assessment Objective 2 that candidates sometimes used concentrated too much on the use of the possessive pronoun 'my' by Frankenstein to label his relationship with Elizabeth, and that a wider discussion of stylistic technique would have been more beneficial.

**Question 7:** Compare the ways in which the titles of your two chosen texts are made significant by the writers.

Fewer candidates responded to this question but it still produced a range of answers and approaches. Candidates who explored the addition of ***'the Modern Prometheus'*** in the title of ***Frankenstein*** were able to apply Assessment Objective 3 well. In response to ***Never Let Me Go***, candidates discussed the symbolism of the titular song as well as the wider symbolism of 'never letting go'.

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

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

The most popular texts were ***Wuthering Heights*** and ***Beloved***. There were fewer responses on ***Mrs Dalloway*** and comment is limited to the most popular novels.

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

There were 3 responses to this question.

**Question 9:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore the choices that women make.

For candidates who had studied ***Wuthering Heights*** and ***Mrs Dalloway***, the romantic choices faced by women was a popular avenue of exploration. Candidates examined not only Cathy's love for Heathcliff and marriage to Edgar Linton and Clarissa Dalloway's marriage but also explored Rezia's relationship with Septimus and Isabella Linton's marriage to Heathcliff to good effect. In ***The Color Purple***, Sethe's choice to commit infanticide rather than see her children go back into slavery was also handled deftly by candidates.

**Paper Summary**

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and there have been many marks awarded in the top two levels. Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates so well.

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

• address the assessment objectives and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching

• for Section A, encourage candidates to spend time planning their response before writing. This will ensure that points are covered in enough detail and link together to form a considered, perceptive argument. **Ensure that enough time is given to this section of paper**

• for Section B, in order to meet the demands of Assessment Objective 4 students must consider links between their two studied texts. Comparison can be found in a variety of ways – contextual, thematic, stylistic and so on

• enjoy sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm for the novels studied with the examiner.

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