

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

International GCSE English Language  
(4EA0) Paper 2

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## **Introduction**

There are two sections in the examination paper, which are equally weighted.

In Section A, students answer a question on a prose piece or poem from the *International GCSE and Certificate Anthology*; this year the piece was *A Hero* by R. K. Narayan. The story was reprinted in the examination paper. This section assesses the students' reading and understanding.

For Section B, there are three writing questions and students have to choose one of these. The students had to argue about a health issue, describe a special place or write a short story. The most popular choice was the argumentative piece of writing, followed by the short story. This section assesses the students' writing.

This was felt to be a very fair and accessible paper, which enabled a wide range of students of differing abilities to demonstrate their skills and understanding. The story appealed to and was enjoyed by students, while the writing questions offered a good range of choices for students to write about what was best suited to them. A full range of marks was awarded. There did not appear to be many rubric infringements.

There was a significant increase in the number of entries for the paper this year.

## Q1

Q1 asked students to analyse the ways in which R. K. Narayan's story was made interesting. It was suggested that students comment on (a) Swami's relationships; (b) the child's perspective and (c) the writer's use of language in order to form a successful response. The guidance for the question was extremely helpful and most students made a bold, and in many cases, assured attempt at the question.

The best responses were perceptive and married the contradictions of the stern but well-meaning father and distracted yet loving mother. Equally, perceptive responses sometimes noted the parallels between the opening narrative of the tiger and the protagonist's own thrilling adventure as well as observing the humour in the tale. As is typical, many students were more confident addressing the first two points than talking about language effects in detail.

Unfortunately, some students limited themselves to 'sound' or 'some' in the marking criteria after falling into the trap of listing all the language devices they could find and failing to explain the potential impact on the reader in detail.

Weaker students would have benefited from using sentence starters such as: 'The writer has used the technique of...'; 'This is shown when...'; 'This engages the reader because...'. Similarly, some students relied too heavily on generic statements such as, 'it causes tension' and, most commonly, 'this interests the reader'. While this ensured that there was a focus on the question, greater variety would have produced more perceptive answers in these cases. It was noted that some students used bullet points rather than prose to respond to this question. Although the question is not marked for writing skills, these students tended to do less well as they provided less detailed, cohesive responses. Overall, this was a well-received question which offered students a chance to demonstrate their full understanding and analytical skills. Many did so and top marks could often be awarded.

The vast majority of responses showed engagement with the text. The best answers effortlessly incorporated precise examples from the text to support their points, whilst engaging on a personal level in a subtle and perceptive way. The technical language used to describe techniques was outstanding in some responses, showing the depth of study and willingness to explore the text in detail. The weaker responses failed to answer the question directly and also relied heavily on retelling the text in their own words, or even in the words of the text itself. Most students responded to the question as a whole, although the main emphasis was on the relationships with Swami's family.

References to the language used were often rushed towards the end, missing out on potential marks as close analysis of language is referred to throughout the mark scheme.

Overall, students engaged successfully with the text, commenting on the use of irony, humour and language techniques. Top students excelled, showing they understood the subtlety of Narayan's depiction of the family dynamic as well as the humour of the story. Some good teaching was in evidence here. Some students took the opportunity to make cultural references, which largely worked well. Most students approached the question using the bullet points to guide their responses. The more confident used quotations to support comments and ideas and many of these incorporated comments on the language in the responses rather than leaving them until the end of their responses. Many of the more confident responses looked at the importance of dialogue in the text; others noted the way the atmosphere was built up in the father's office. Some noted the irony of the title.

## Q2(a)

Q2(a) asked students to argue for or against the topic of whether or not teenagers lead a healthy lifestyle. This proved to be the most popular writing choice, with students doubtlessly finding the topic choice accessible. However, in some ways this was the more difficult question as there was a clear audience and purpose. Whilst students were not penalised for arguing both sides of the statement, many students went astray during the task, beginning by addressing students, then changing to parents, and in many cases, extolling the benefits of healthy eating itself rather than remaining focused on the debate.

A range of persuasive devices were used well, with students introducing convincing statistics and jargon. More impressive responses included a range of arguments in support of their view, including the rise in obesity, the caveats of a technological age and increasing mental health issues. Some students employed emotive language and short sentences to very good effect here.

In general, students had a good level of knowledge about health issues and the best students were able to use rhetorical skills impressively to showcase that. The less able tended to forget that they were writing for an audience and just commented on health issues. Issues were usually about junk food, the internet, alcohol and drugs. The question elicited some interesting responses, with most students agreeing with the statement provided. Many of them approached the topic by focusing on food and exercise.

There were some good speech tactics employed, such as the use of repetition, rhetorical questions and varying punctuation to show dramatic pauses or emotional statements, although sometimes these became formulaic. Most students responded to this question using the specific techniques required to deliver an effective speech. Even the less confident responses were well argued, although not developed.

It was noted that a range of students lost the idea of a speech during their response, even if they started the response appropriately; these students were hampered by not maintaining a clear sense of audience and purpose throughout. On the whole, Q2(a) was completed well and forced students to use effective and sophisticated vocabulary, as well as creating a formal voice and arguing clearly.

Throughout the writing questions it was noted that some students started off well with a range of punctuation devices, but then they seemed to forget to use this full range. Generally on Q2 spelling seemed better than 2012, but sentence structure often needed rather more work. Problems with organising ideas into sentences and paragraphs were noted.

## Q2(b)

This question seemed to be the least popular choice on this paper, yet those students who opted for this question generally did well, with many including skilful and imaginative detail. The question title gave rise to some sophisticated travel writing.

The best responses were those that combined subtle imagery with reflection, perhaps commenting on the country's people, the significance of history or their own personal growth as a result of the experience. Students engaged well with this question and in the majority of answers they conveyed a real sense of enthusiasm and used language, techniques and structure effectively to communicate this.

The strongest responses showed flair in describing their chosen places, choosing to highlight specific scenes and memories, often with a subtle use of humour. Weaker responses lacked a sense of purpose, audience and depth.

There were some very good responses to this question, including a student's visit to Japan, a student's love of his/her grandmother's house and a very dedicated student's visit to his/her much-loved school. Many students seemed to have been well prepared for this question. Some students wrote the 'article' in columns, making it quite difficult to read; teachers should remind pupils that this is unnecessary.

Some students had excellent ideas and the content was good, but the clarity and expression meant that best fit approaches were employed most of the time. The question itself was effective because it allowed students to describe, which often enables them to gain more marks because students actively use language devices and powerful vocabulary.



## Q2(c)

The short story option again proved popular, with many students producing a thriller style narrative. Having a crafted, dramatic ending seemed to inspire students to mimic this tight sentence control; these stories saw many students using short sentences, hyphens and ellipsis well in order to build tension.

Many students performed well on this question as the genre was familiar, which allowed them to create developed and gripping narratives. The best responses often deviated from the thriller style, showing more subtle and perceptive relationships and scenarios. Some of the short stories were highly creative, and in the best cases, mesmerising; indeed, some were a joy to read.

More able students appreciated that the top band requires a sensitive, subtle response as well as a high standard of technical accuracy; students needed to marry the two for full marks, with many slipping to the bottom of band 5 or the top of band 4 for lapses in punctuation. The majority of responses were imaginative, had a clear sense of development and conclusion and were engaging for the reader. The strongest responses demonstrated originality, superb structure and precise use of grammar to enhance the experience.

Some responses lacked technical accuracy, despite showing a real sense of purpose. This affected students with English as a second language in particular. Whilst many stories showed engagement and enjoyment of the topic, some students seemed to get carried away with the story, to the detriment of technique.

On the whole, some of the answers to Q2(c) were outstanding with really interesting stories, often with twists at the end, filled with a variety of sentences and interesting language choices. The specific topics that the students chose to write about ranged from the ending of relationships to horror stories, with the haunted house scenario being particularly popular. Students really seemed to enjoy this task, although some wrote at too great a length to be as effective as they might have been.

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