

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language A (4EA0)
Paper 01

Edexcel Certificate in English
Language A (KEA0)
Paper 01

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Introduction

The paper is organised into three sections. Section A tests only reading and is based upon an unseen passage. The passage studied in Section A in June 2014 was adapted from *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank and gave candidates two diary entries that focused upon Anne's relationships with the adults, particularly her mother. Section B tests both reading and writing by asking candidates to respond to one of the non-fiction passages from the Anthology, in this case, *Taking on the World* by Ellen MacArthur. Section C is a single writing task that is not connected to either of the reading activities already undertaken on the paper. The paper was well received with most candidates finding it very accessible.

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-3

The passage chosen proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Question 1 tested the skill of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to select three words or phrases used in the passage that depict the way the adults behave as being strange. There were 3 marks available for this question and therefore there were a number of correct responses, such as they quarrel "so easily" or "so often". Those who did not gain full marks did so because they did not choose 3 distinct words or phrases or those chosen did not answer the question, such as Anne writing that they, "criticise everything about me." Question 2 asked candidates to explain how Anne describes her relationship with her mother. As a 5 mark question there were many possible responses to this question and the mark scheme lists twelve possible responses. Many achieved full or nearly full marks and were able to explain the differing ways that Anne and her mother clash, including the silent episode, which many interpreted as emotional and psychological punishment on the part of the mother. Where candidates did not score full marks some wrote about the broader historical context of the diary and the persecution of the Jews whilst others simply failed to give sufficient detail for full marks. Centres should make clear to candidates that this part of the paper is a test of reading and that all of the answers to the questions are to be found in the passage as printed. Question 3 was the higher mark tariff question with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how Anne revealed her own character in the passage and provided bullet points for additional support and structure. There are clearly differing interpretations of Anne's character, with some seeing her as the victim of a tyrannical mother, trapped in a lonely existence, whilst others saw her as a "typical" teenager: self-obsessed and overly dramatic. At the standardising meeting all markers were made aware of a range of possible interpretations and that they should credit any that were clearly founded in the text. In the published mark scheme examiners are told that they, "must reward all valid points that show an engagement with the text and an appreciation of the writer's technique rather than have a set agenda of items that they are looking for." Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as Anne's sense of injustice. Many candidates were able to take this injustice and explore it in more depth with better answers able to see the irony in her depiction of adults as children at the same time as they

clearly saw her behaviour as childish. Better answers explored the shaping of the text as a whole, beginning with the narrative hook of something Anne is “dying to tell” the reader, which we are then made to wait for as she expounds on adults and their strange behaviour. The two entries are linked by their focus on “rage” which ensures that the emotional intensity is maintained across them and the final line ends on a sigh which adds a wistful quality after the intensity of emotion, “Oh, if only I could.” Many commented on Anne’s powerful language with weaker answers able to select a number of word-level instances of this whilst better answers explored her use of compound sentences, lists and the use of extended metaphor. Less able candidates often neglected the fact that the text uses a diary form and did not comment at all on Kitty as a literary device. The most able recognise a range of features and use the text with discrimination to craft an explanation that focuses upon character and relationship, using textual references, which are apt and carefully chosen. Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrate higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer’s techniques and do so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. As has been said before in these reports, linked text and paraphrase does not constitute an explanation. It was a feature of better answers that they were more able to distance themselves a little from Anne and her feelings so as to be able to comment upon her more objectively. For example, some focused upon Anne’s loneliness; tellingly she confides her thoughts and feelings to a fictitious diary persona rather than to any of the people she is with. From that they were able to recognise the strength of Anne’s feelings and the blunt and powerful way she expresses them whilst also seeing a vulnerability and unwitting pathos in how she writes.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 4

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *Taking on the Word*, and focused upon what we learn about Ellen MacArthur. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Weaker responses were often quasi-narratives that did not focus upon the question and simply described the different things that Ellen MacArthur did as she repaired the mast. Stronger responses were those that were able to define a range of characteristics such as tenacity, good humour, physical and mental strength and were then able to evidence those from the text and to explain in detail how they are created.

Question 5

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write about a time when they achieved something that was important to them. The title was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Many wrote about GCSE or examination achievements whilst many others wrote about sporting triumphs, such as scoring winning goals or winning medals and prizes. Centres should consider the relative difficulty of writing about sporting events in a way that is comprehensible and engaging for a non-specialist reader. The weakest responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, often focusing solely upon the action involved in the achievement. Better

responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to help the reader understand the real nature of the achievement at an emotional and psychological level as well as describing what actually occurred.

Section C: Writing

Question 6

Candidates were asked to write a letter to a friend explaining what activities are available for young people in your area. This proved to be accessible to most candidates. Once again, it is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final, 20 mark question, are sometimes not answered at all by some candidates. It is vital that students time their responses carefully and take note of the mark tariff, giving section C one third of the time available to them. This question produced a variety of responses. Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often listing places to go without any real explanation or thought for the reader who does not know the area. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which will keep them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. There was a band of mid-level responses that also saw the writing task as one of listing all that was available and were able to do so with a degree of accuracy and with some explanation, but which produced writing that was often lacking in variety or interest. More able responses wrote with imagination and communicated passion and interest in what they were describing and created a genuine sense of a relationship with their reader. The best writing was noted for its variety and sophistication, its accuracy and control, which was sharply focused upon the needs of the reader.

Conclusion

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Centres are strongly encouraged to practise responding to unseen passages in timed conditions. This will support students in focusing their answers on what the question has asked for and in using their understanding of literary effects as a means of addressing the question rather than being seen as an end in their own right. The same principle applies with regard to studying the Anthology texts. The best practice in writing involves time management so as to respond appropriately to the mark tariff and the time available. Candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through effective paragraphing and structuring their writing. At all times have the intended reader in mind and make word level, sentence level and text level choices with a clear understanding of the intended effect. Writing should be seen as a crafted artefact and students should be taught the skills of writing with this in mind whatever the task may be.

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