

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

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

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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 American edition of the *Boy Scouts Handbook*, The First Edition, 1911 and this section is taken from the opening entitled *A Message from the Chief Scout*, Ernest Thompson Seton. This gives a personal account of the need for the scouting movement and what it had to offer. 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, *A Passage to Africa* by George Alagiah. 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 name two things about nature from the passage that made the writer feel happy and one that made him feel sad. There were 3 marks available for this question and therefore there were a number of correct responses, such as “the trees” and “the live things that leave tracks” whilst for sadness there was “the sense of loss when the bird flies away.” Those who did not gain full marks did so because they did not give three separate pieces of information or those chosen did not answer the question. Question 2 asked candidates to describe how a boy scout would develop both physically and mentally. As a 5 mark question there were many possible responses to this question and examiners were instructed to look for the quality of explanation rather than merely counting the number of features identified. An answer that listed features but without any description would not score above half marks on this question. It is important that candidates read the question carefully and respond appropriately. Many achieved full or nearly full marks and were able to explain the balance of physical and mental qualities and were able to describe how a strong swimmer will fear no waters and how the mental qualities will lead to success in life. Where candidates did not score full marks this was sometimes because they failed to give sufficient detail for full marks or did not include both physical and mental qualities. Question 3 was the higher mark tariff question with its greater focus on the writer’s technique. This asked candidates how the writer explores his personal experiences and ideas about scouting in the passage and it provided bullet points for additional support and structure. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, mainly the first bullet point: what his experience of nature was. Better answers explored the shaping of the text as a whole, recognising that the passage begins with a fairytale-style opening sentence, using third person before transforming into first person part way through. The use of archaic language such as, “he has neither book nor friend,” add to the fairytale, or morality tale style. Many commented on his use of powerful and emotive language, such as “wild with the love.” The most able recognised a range of features and used 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 able to recognise the manner in which the writer tends to universalise his experience whilst writing about his own individual experience and also commented upon tone, the manner in which the writer has a voice of an older and wiser guide, rather than a youth in the midst of the emotional turmoil he describes.

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, *A Passage to Africa* by George Alagiah. The question focused upon how the writer presents his thoughts and feelings in the passage. 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 people that George Alagiah met and the conditions he found. Stronger responses were those that were able to define a range of thoughts and feelings and recognised the use of extended metaphor and sentence variety as two of the many techniques used by the writer.

Question 5

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write for an internet competition with their views on the statement: "It's wonderful to be a young person now!" The title was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Many wrote about the influence of technology and the internet with many candidates firmly in agreement with the statement. Others approaches saw candidates writing about the effects of adolescence or teenage bullying and the pressures upon young people to conform in a modern society. Examiners were instructed to reward the quality of the writing rather than having any predetermined idea about the sort of writing that may be presented. The weakest responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to help the reader understand their thoughts and feelings about the statement producing writing that was marked for its impact as well as its control and accuracy.

Section C: Writing

Question 6

Candidates were asked to explain their views on young people being educated in single-sex groupings. 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, sometimes misinterpreting the question as one focused upon the merits of sex education in schools. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. More able responses wrote with imagination and explained their views with clarity and conviction, creating a real sense of interest and engagement for the reader. Some chose to see the relative benefits of both types of education whilst some presented a single point of view, cogently explained. The best writing was noted for its variety and sophistication, its accuracy and control, which was sharply focused upon the task and 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 its 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. In writing, candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through effectively paragraphing and structuring their writing. At all times they should 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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