

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language A (4EA0)
Paper 02

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Overview

IGCSE 4EA0 Paper 2 is a paper lasting one hour and thirty minutes. Question 1 is a reading question based on the Edexcel Anthology and in June 2014 candidates had to respond to the extract from the novel *Charlotte Gray*, “The Last Night”. Question 2 is a writing question and candidates have to complete one written piece from a choice of three. The choices for June 2014 were an article for a teenage audience on volunteering, a letter nominating someone for a special award and a creative piece entitled “Shadows”. This was thought to be a very fair paper, which any candidate who had covered the syllabus should have been able to tackle confidently. A handful of candidates seemed to be surprised by the choice of text, which perhaps indicated that they had not prepared for the examination by reading the relevant texts in the anthology.

Reading

Question 1

The extract was accessible to many candidates, who often handled the material well. Most candidates were able to pick out relevant examples of how Faulks brings out feelings of fear. There was a tendency in weaker students to provide a narrative response or even simply copy out passages from the text. More successful answers were able to deduce how fear was presented and could link examples to the writer’s techniques. Most responses focused on the points as presented on the mark scheme with varying degrees of success, but it was noted that the passage seemed to encourage very sincere and personal responses rather than repetitive answers. Some attempted to refer their answers back to the presentation of fear, others simply presented any knowledge of the text that they had acquired, relevant or otherwise. There were examples of the complete range of responses and therefore marks. The passage itself also helped candidates to respond in any way they could and to select accordingly. Most candidates did not allow themselves to get caught up in the emotion and generally produced quite objective pieces in terms of discussing the qualities of the text. They were particularly aware, in most cases, of how readers would be positioned in various ways. Some markers were impressed by the sincerity of the responses whilst avoiding purely emotional responses, the latter of which might be expected with a text like this. There were also very few examples of candidates moving away from the text to discuss the context and issues, although there were a few of these. Conversely, there were a few examples of candidates writing purely about features and techniques rather than about the content, although there were not too many of these either. There were also very few examples of simple lists of features and quotations. Overall, the extract was successful in the sense that it allowed candidates of different abilities to respond appropriately and it allowed for considerable variety in terms of responses, chosen quotations and identified features and techniques. The piece therefore allowed for very different levels of ability and most of the candidates wrote in good detail. There was a good sense of engagement with the text on each level, too. Furthermore, there were very few examples of candidates misunderstanding the text, or aspects of the texts or of writing vaguely. Of course, there were still some of these but only a tiny minority, along with another tiny group that merely repeated the extract with a few of their own words added. The question and bullet points helped them to organise their

answers well and also helped them to access the text appropriately. Most candidates were able to find good contrasts between the behaviour of adults and children and, on the whole, these were well explained. The parts that sometimes got left out were the final two bullet points in the question, although candidates who did not address these directly still often managed to address them anyway, albeit indirectly, through the other areas being written about. Examiners saw the full range of candidate responses from 0-15, with the majority of candidates making effective use of the bullet points. Students' responses to Faulks' story were often strong; the best responses used discriminating quotations and blended specific linguistic and structural analysis with an overarching sense of what the writer was trying to achieve. Whilst most candidates were able to identify such language devices as personification and a corresponding quotation, some failed to elaborate on the effect of these devices. More able candidates went beyond simply noting the use of personification of the buses to observe how the fate of the pencils darkly foreshadowed the few survivors of the concentration camps and equally explored the auditory impact of alliteration and onomatopoeia. More able candidates also looked at the form of the narrative, observing that the third person style lent a cold and clinical air that matched the dispassionate gendarmes, whilst also realising that a close-up on the two named boys was emotive. It was pleasing to see candidates in all bands attempting to use shorter, embedded quotations. In a few instances, candidates produced a less successful response when they lost sight of the titular theme of 'Fear'.

Writing

Question 2a

This question proved the least popular of the writing responses. In some instances, candidates failed to write about volunteering and instead produced a diatribe about on the poor habits of youth today. Weaker candidates did not take into account that they were being asked to write an article for a youth magazine and others misread the question and simply wrote general essays about the youth of today. These candidates tended to focus on the title of the magazine "Youth Today" and not their views on young people volunteering. More successful responses adopted a lively air, used effective anecdotes and cited relevant organisations to give their piece more credibility. The exploratory nature of the task was taxing for some candidates. Some students took time to divide the page into borders, which is not necessary, as heading and register are enough to cement the article genre; some candidates, though, who included layout and suggestions for photographs and other images within their article, were successful. On the whole, the question was generally answered well, with students recognising that the tone could be informal as it was for a supposed youth readership. Many used this voice well and added personal anecdotes to illustrate their points. Articles were often well structured and carefully composed. Some candidates managed to do everything well: writing about youth, providing specific volunteering projects that they were familiar with and adapting the style to suit their magazine.

Question 2b

This task was often answered well and elicited some interesting responses, the best of which were rather touching and often well written. Candidates tended to do better when writing about people they knew rather than fictional figures. Many, whilst writing formally, broke with convention in the sense that they nominated imperfect figures, giving clever and convincing reasons for their choices. Vocabulary was often emotive and many candidates showed a clear sense of purpose and audience, as well as showcasing a range of persuasive features. More able candidates were able to develop responses fully, whilst some less able candidates grew slightly repetitive as their answer endured. Many were good structurally and most handled the letter form well and chose an appropriate tone. Some candidates seemed to be using a prepared piece based on a sportsman, a politician or a leader, but some of these were well written and achieved high marks. The weakest candidates misread the question and wrote a short piece on what you had to do to be nominated. Most candidates who chose this question did very well on it probably because they could choose anyone to be their Very Special Person ranging from their mother to any celebrity, dead or alive. There were some very persuasive scripts. Many of the pieces were about actual and specific people that the candidates generally knew on a personal level; they tended to be more sincere and detailed than the more general pieces in Question 2a. Where they wrote about a celebrity, they often tended to be as good as the personal ones. There were also many responses about teachers, local activists and local politicians and some of these were really good, allowing candidates to get involved in discussion about extra-curricular activity, buildings and facilities, school ethos, public issues, politics and all sorts of interesting things that lifted their discussions. There was even a response in which a candidate suggested that the examiner marking his script deserved an award! Most coped with the challenge of writing a letter much better than the writing for a magazine in 2a.

Question 2c

This task seemed to be the most popular choice, with many candidates drawing on horror conventions, re-creating successful if rather clichéd short stories. The use of short sentences and expanded noun phrases was particularly good in this section. More able candidates interpreted the concept of 'shadows' in a more metaphorical sense and produced more creative and original pieces. It was thought that the story writing was of a higher standard this year. Technical accuracy seemed better with fewer lapses in punctuation at the top end. Weaker scripts tended to totally ignore the title "Shadows" and simply wrote a story of their choice but the more successful ones came up with engaging stories of shadows chasing them, mostly in the dead of night. Most answers did incorporate the given title. The most effective responses were more ambitious linguistically, producing well-crafted pieces that were gripping. Some pieces did not know when to stop and could have been more concise and effective. Those who went beyond the horror and supernatural genre wrote pieces that were more unusual, interesting and better handled. There were some really enigmatic and intriguing pieces. What tended to happen at times was that some focused on their openings really well but then lost the initial impact as they moved on, giving the sense that they did not really have an idea about how their stories would end, as long as they got the beginning right. Much more successful were

answers which centred on simple but odd happenings set in the context of the candidate's own home or school, often with only one character, the narrator. Such ideas provided their own cohesion and structure. The title clearly suggested that setting and description were needed in order to evoke atmosphere. Weaker answers merely recounted characters' actions, so that problems arose with the endings when candidates realised they had forgotten to mention 'Shadows'. Nevertheless, it is pleasing to report that punctuation, spelling and paragraphing in these tales were mostly well-controlled. On the whole, though, this was a successful question which elicited responses from across the mark range. Candidates seemed to enjoy writing their stories, which were often entertaining.

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