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Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2016

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

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January 2016
Publications Code UG043209

Overview

International GCSE 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 January 2016 candidates had to respond to the story, "Veronica". Question 2 is a writing question and candidates have to complete one written piece from a choice of three. The choices for January 2016 were the text of a speech on "My Ideal Job", a magazine article on "What makes a Good Teacher" and a short story with the title, "The Picture".

This was thought to be a very fair paper which enabled candidates of varying abilities to demonstrate their reading and writing skills. Candidates of a range of abilities were able to gain access to the short story and the question on it. A variety of abilities was also represented by the responses to the writing questions.

Reading

Question 1.

This question received mixed responses. Whilst many candidates were able to respond to surface details on how sympathy was created for Veronica, many candidates struggled to evaluate language and structural technique. Other candidates paraphrased and moved chronologically through the text. However, the bullet points were well chosen and helped candidates structure their answer more effectively and with purpose. The best answers explored language convincingly and recognized the significance of structural symmetry within the text. This seemed to be a well understood question with the majority of candidates able to convey some parts of the text that made the reader feel sympathy. The majority of pieces fell in band 2 and 3. In previous years' papers, examiners have seen more candidates just re-telling the story and this year the majority managed to go beyond this and provide some reasons for sympathy. Some of the more advanced pieces showed real insight into the gender divide in the story and the way that increased our sympathy for Veronica. Over most responses seen, the level of engagement with the task requirement was high and fairly strong. A large number of candidates showed that they were focused on the actual question and were able to successfully explore and explain the use of language. Middle to upper level responses went far beyond reflecting on the plot sequencing and attempted in some cases a discussion of wider themes or had a sense of characterisation through the contrasts made between the protagonists. A significant amount of lower scripts at times did not engage beyond a surface-level consideration of language and in some cases clung too closely to the structure of the bullet points to frame their answers. Some responded simply as a narrative retelling, with a few comments on language points, or contrasts. An overuse of quotation, or overly-long quotation use, was sometimes an indicator of insecurity in reacting to the needs of the question, though this seemed to be apparent to a much less extent than previous series.

On the whole, this was a very accessible question with scope for answers of varying quality. The text itself is engaging and relatively easy to

understand. The fact that it is prose and is therefore quite long could potentially hinder candidates unlikely to read it to the end but they should be very familiar with it anyway, as it is from the Anthology. There is a plenty of dialogue and this makes it even more accessible. Candidates generally showed a sound understanding of the set text and the way Veronica is portrayed. The majority chose to structure their answers around the bullet points, with the most able evaluating language throughout their answers. It was pleasing to note that very few answers fell into Level 1 by simply re-telling the passage. Sensibly, most candidates followed the chronological sequence of the short story; the less able confused the sequential description of the village, and did not comment on the way the passage shows Veronica's life becoming increasingly difficult. Many thought that the different cultural expectations for women and men were responsible for Veronica's fate. Some however felt that it was her own 'stoicism and fatalism' which prevented her from making the same choices as the author. The grasp of themes and ideas and how these are presented were commendable in higher range answers.

Writing

The writing questions showed that most candidates had a good grasp of structure, spelling and punctuation. The accuracy of spelling and range of vocabulary were often impressive. However, control of English grammar was less successful. Errors usually occurred in the construction of verb phrases, tense, number and use of prepositions. The general impression is that candidates often neglected the full range of punctuation with apostrophes, colons, semi-colons and hyphens all offering areas for development and further study.

Question 2a.

This question was generally well developed. The best answers adopted a lively tone showing a clear understanding of their target audience. It was encouraging to see many candidates adopt a suitable form for a speech, even if that was limited to a 'Good morning class' at the start; the majority went beyond this. The higher candidates wrote compelling descriptions of their ideal job and used persuasive features in their writing, adapted for a speech. More limited pieces focused on a much more basic description of why they liked their ideal job with no real sense of purpose or audience. Generally, this question was answered well, with all candidates able to come up with some reasons for why it was their ideal job. A significant number of responses for this question approached the task with zeal. The more secure scripts displayed a willingness to reflect their abilities in engaging with the imagined/intended audience, and in doing so gave vent to a range of agendas. Some successful as well as less successful responses took the format of a 'career day' speech or as a way to engage the audience through challenging what they might consider to be an ideal job against what may be the coming reality. Although second language was an issue at times, responses were understandable for the most part with candidates able to communicate their views. Answers were mostly clustered within the middle range. A particular problem with this question was that some candidates were of working age and wrote about the jobs/professions they were in;

while this gave them experience and knowledge of working life, explaining why these were 'ideal' was obviously difficult for some of them.

Question 2b.

This seemed to be the most popular question. This question was also accessible to students but tended to invite responses with limited sentence structures; many candidates adopted a repetitive: 'A good teacher should…' format throughout the response. Better responses included anecdotes, effective jargon and some insightful reflection. Some candidates spent a lot of times writing addresses and leaving little time for the actual piece. There were some excellent pieces on this question, but there were also many which listed characteristics but did not elaborate on these. However, a large degree of scripts made reasonable, or by turns passionate or challenging, attempts to vary their argument through structured and varying methods. Some responses were written in the correct style of a formal letter with some adopting a more colloquial tone. Most addressed their audience in a generally appropriate way. Responses were able to discuss 'what makes a good teacher' at length and generally had plenty of advice, which was often sensible and thoughtful. They were able to use plenty of examples and most had a strong sense of what skills are needed to succeed as a teacher. It was refreshing to see candidates expressing strong views, again with varying degrees of clarity and success. The breadth of vocabulary was often commendable.

Question 2c.

Whilst the short story structure tends to be the most popular choice, this was not so this year. Those candidates that elected this question tended to do well as they were more familiar with the conventions of the short story genre. The best responses offered an innovative take on 'The Picture' title and showed a full range of punctuation and sentence structures. Some examiners were really impressed with this question, as there was an impressive range of stories relating to the picture. Candidates engaged well with the central idea of a picture, many using it to write a memory-based story inspired by looking at a familiar picture. There was also a significant number that used the picture to write a ghostly story, generally effectively. Most examiners felt the majority of the candidates managed to go beyond a simple blow by blow account of a chase, journey et cetera and create something more interesting and effective. Most candidates were able to come up with an engaging story; some examiners felt this was because the idea of a picture captivated candidates and encouraged them to think creatively. Although seemingly less popular than in recent series, successful responses to this question settled into their story with some ease, and developed, in some cases toyed with, stylistics in their language use. Lower marks were awarded when candidates seemed to lack focus beyond a cursory nod towards the prompt contained in the question. There were still some who seemed to have brought a prepared story into the exam with them, and in some cases made very little attempt to remould it around the title prompt. However, examiners reported that most students seemed to like this title as there were lots of directions in which they chose to take their story. Most were able to write in a relatively coherent way and

some interesting pieces were produced. It was noted that this question elicited the greatest range of answers. The least able wrote implausible stories which lacked basic logic in their 'sci-fi' events, or were simple sequences about seeing a picture in a shop. The most able students crafted genuinely interesting pieces, which had sophisticated introductions and 'twist in the tale' endings. To construct successful stories, candidates would do well to avoid slipping into fantastical scenarios; too often well-written introductions became unbelievable conclusions. Nevertheless, stories were generally soundly structured and clearly paragraphed.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx

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