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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English Language (4EA0) Paper 2

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Paper 2 of International GCSE English Language 4EA0 lasts ninety minutes and is equally divided between reading and writing. Question 1 is a reading question, based on a text drawn from the Edexcel Anthology. Candidates would have seen the text previously. This year the text was a short story, Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace". For Question 2, candidates have a choice of three writing questions, of which they choose one. Question 2a was a talk to a group of teenagers about a person who had made life better for others, Question 2b was to write a magazine article called "Where I Live" and Question 2c was a story entitled "Memories".

Reading

Question 1

The chosen Anthology text gave candidates many opportunities to find material relevant to character and the use of language. The majority focused comments on the three characters, with the middle range therefore tending to offer brief analyses of language, and consequently achieving Level 3 rather than Level 4.

However, even low level answers showed that the basic events of the story were understood; even answers meriting 4 marks at best often attempted to point to the lesson or moral the author was trying to convey. It was pleasing to note that few answers lacked reference to the whole text, Candidates worked steadily through the story, with the most able picking up the change in Madame Loisel's character and the irony that she loses even her much-despised initial status to fall even lower, because of her discontent. Level 4 and Level 5 answers were distinguished by their understanding of ideas, the themes of the status of women and class and their appreciation of the way events or luck changed the characters' fortunes. Some candidates noted that Madame Loisel was a Cinderella figure as she slipped back into her old coat after the ball. More appreciation of the story as morality tale and fable might have been expected. Level 2 answers relied on generalised judgements of the couple and their rich friend, which although relevantly supported, were not developed. These often described the couple wrongly as living 'in poverty', or took the description of Monsieur Loisel as a 'poor, simple man' out of context.

Comments on language and the writer's technique mainly focused on the use of contrast, triplets, listing and dialogue, with the middle range showing a good understanding of the effects of these techniques. Surprisingly, few candidates noted that the husband's comment about the stew might be 'sarcastic' as much as appreciative. Similarly, only a small number observed that the author showed Madame Forestier's own sense of status in the phrase "addressed ... by a common woman". Nonetheless, on the whole candidates appeared to have enjoyed engaging with this story and showed, at this level, a remarkable grasp of 19th-century mores.

Writing

Question 2a

Some candidates found difficulty in structuring content in their answers to this, the least popular writing option. Paragraphs usually followed events in the life of the chosen person, thus running the risk of becoming predictable. On the whole, though, responses demonstrated the full range of ability. Well-known people included Martin Luther King and other political leaders, with international students sometimes choosing politicians and other important figures from their home countries, such as people involved in local charities. Other candidates chose to write about people closer to home, such as relatives or teachers, and these responses worked equally well.

Question 2b

Some examiners noted that answers to this option were by far the most effective, with an interesting range of locations described. Unlike Q2(a), where the purpose (a talk) was sometimes forgotten by candidates, the need to write a magazine article was kept well in mind in responses to this writing choice. In addition, the selection of material was generally thoughtful. At the lower end of the mark range, aspects were simply listed without development; at the upper end of the range, the writing was often amusing and engaging, balancing information and opinion in a fluent whole. Examiners felt that the question was very successful, both in terms of interesting candidates and in eliciting responses across the mark range.

Question 2c

Although this was a popular option, this question was not always well-answered. The title allowed for a broad narrative interpretation, in some cases it was used as a spring-board for accounts lacking credibility, some of which were felt to be derivative by examiners. The problem for some candidates in the middle range, when relying on ideas of horror or fantasy, is that they sometimes do not always exercise full control over vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. This can hamper the accessibility of their accounts. To counterbalance this, however, there was a significant number of solid or very engaging responses to the question which merited marks in Level 4 and Level 5. These creative responses were often reflective, evocative, atmospheric and genuinely entertaining.

Generally, some answers to the writing questions achieved less highly than those to Q1. This was largely accounted for by the lack of grammatical control of expression. However, many candidates produced written responses in which paragraphing, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation were generally of a very sound quality. Handwriting, moreover, was often commendably fluent across the whole mark range.

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