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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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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 2018 was adapted from *Miracle in them: 72 Days on the Mountain and My Long Trek Home* by Nando Parrado and Vince Rause, and told the true story of the survivors of an aeroplane crash high in the Andes Mountains. 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, *Climate Change: The Facts* from The Guardian newspaper. 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 1-4

The passage chosen proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Question 1 is intended to be a gentle way into the paper and tests the skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify the colour of the daylight in the opening lines of the passage. This is a single mark question and almost all candidates were able to determine that it was grey with some adding additional wording, 'a thin grey smear'. Question 2 asked candidates to select three words or phrases that the writer used to show the difficulties that Nando had in speaking. The mark scheme identifies six possible responses and many candidates gained full marks; those who did not gain full marks often did not choose words or phrases from the selected lines or did not directly answer the question. Question 3 asked candidates to explain what we learn about Roberto Canessa. As a four-mark question there were many possible responses to this question. Many achieved full or nearly full marks and were able to explain how caring Canessa was and how persistent he was in his insistence on Nando waking up and pulling through. Where candidates did not score full marks some failed to give sufficient detail for full marks and others listed features, sometimes about his appearance, without offering any explanation. It is possible to score full marks on this question without finding four distinct points, as the quality of explanation is a key part of the response. Centres should know that the mark scheme explicitly instructs markers to reward the quality of explanation rather than simply counting the number of features that have been identified and they should bear this in mind when preparing candidates for this type of question. Question 4 was the higher mark tariff question in Section A with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how the writer tries to create interest in the passage and provided bullet points for additional support and structure. 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 the narrator's description of finally becoming conscious, though often providing little or no development. Many candidates were able to provide a more detailed understanding of how the writer unfolds the story from the initial confusion of Nando in his semi-conscious state to

the final realisation of the bitter cold, the extent of his injuries and the seriousness of their situation. Better answers showed a perceptive and well-developed response to the text with extended comments about the use of imagery to represent his consciousness as being like 'twilight' and 'pools of light and shadow.' Some answers showed a subtle and perceptive understanding of the text, recognising the difficulties of a first person narrator who is not fully conscious and does not know what has happened to him. It is this gradual and growing realisation that enables the writer to create pathos and empathy, to develop the character of Roberto Cansessa and to build a growing sense of fear and trepidation as the reader comes to realise just how close Nando came to death and how precarious his chances of survival are. Many commented on the powerful imagery used throughout the passage, such as the graphic description of the damage to the plane and of Nando's injuries, such as 'torn flaps of insulation hung like filthy rags from holes in the battered walls. The floor around me was strewn with chunks of shattered plastic, twisted scraps of metal, and other loose debris'; this indicates to the reader the catastrophic nature of what has occurred. Weaker answers were often able to select a small number of features to comment upon, such as the extensive use of direct speech but were not able to recognise that some of this internal monologue is being used to portray Nando's genuine confusion and incomprehension. Not all candidates were aware of the chronological nature of the narrative and its journey from being entirely internal to a stark connection with the realities of the outside world. However, most did recognise that Nando is waking up and that his friend Roberto Canessa plays a significant role in his survival. Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrated higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and did 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 recognise the change in emotions felt by the writer and created for the reader throughout the passage. They appreciated the shaping of the passage as a whole and saw how the passage has a definite structure: from darkness into light, from confusion to awareness.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 5

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *Climate Change: The Facts*, and contained an article and diagram intended to inform the reader about the issue of global warming and climate change. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Many candidates were able to comment on the article and how it tries to put its point across whereas comment about the diagram was significantly less well developed, often amounting to little more than a recognition of colour symbolism. Many candidates commented upon the use of expert testimony and upon the FAQ structure. Weaker answers often paraphrased the argument put forward by the writer. Stronger responses were those that focused on the intended impact on the reader and were able to recognise the appeal to a non-specialist reader that they were then able to explain and support with reference to the text.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write the text of their speech about the proposal that science is the most important subject taught in school. The title was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Many wrote about the centrality of science to our modern lives, many making direct reference to the hardware and software that is required to maintain our social networking infrastructure. Weaker responses tended to agree with the proposal and then offered a list of things that have been made out of plastic and questioning whether we are doing as much as we should to address this problem. This type of writing tended to neglect the needs of the reader or the context of the task that was set, making little use of any language techniques. Other weak responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, often presenting a very limited view of what science has to offer the world. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to engage the reader, creating empathy by focusing upon real live people and their encounters with science. The importance of planning was evident in those better responses which had a clear sense of structure and textual cohesion.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were asked to give choose someone who they regard as being remarkable, and explain why that is the case. This proved to be accessible to most candidates, with a wide range of individual being represented. Centres should note 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. Candidates were free to choose their individual with many choosing mothers and grandparents, others choosing sportspeople and musicians.

Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often repeating a narrow range of views. These answers were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. Mid-level responses often used a reasonable vocabulary and a developing control of sentence punctuation though sometimes lacking in a wider vocabulary selection or in making use of other features to create textual shape or cohesion. More able responses wrote with imagination and flair and were able to identify a wide range of characteristics of their chosen person, some practical, others emotional. The best writing showed subtlety and maturity and a control of a wide range of techniques to produce writing that connected strongly with its reader. They were often able to express complex ideas with clarity in a manner that connected strongly with the intended reader.

Conclusion

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Centres are strongly encourages 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 planning, 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.