

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Literature (4ET0)
Paper 02

Edexcel Certificate in English
Literature (KET0)
Paper 02

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Introduction

This series has been very successful, with a large number of additional entries.

There are two sections in the exam paper, equally weighted. In Section A, candidates have a choice between the unseen poem and the unseen prose extract. In Section B, they can choose Question 3, which has two named poems or Question 4, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem to discuss with it.

In both sections a full range of marks were awarded. Responses varied from the very brief and basic to the fully developed assured and perceptive. Overall, the quality of responses across the paper was good, with some noticeably outstanding answers. Responses for Section A often seemed to be stronger than the taught poems in Section B, with several candidates continuing on extra paper.

Section A

For this series, there were more responses to the unseen poem than there were to the unseen extract, but each question was awarded a full range of marks.

Careful close reading of the unseen poem or extract is essential in this part of the paper. Some candidates had not read the materials closely enough or had not supported their ideas with relevant examples from the chosen text.

Question 1

The unseen poem was *Fantasy of an African Boy* by James Berry

Question: *How does the writer convey the significance of money ...?*

The key idea in the poem was the paradox about money - that it cannot in itself feed anyone, or heal anyone, or educate anyone, but it is nonetheless needed for food, medicine and education. Many students did grasp this, though some thought the poet was saying how happy African people are without money. A small number wrote that the poet was addressing the African boy, but most recognised that the boy was the voice of the poem, and a few were able to link this to language choice.

The poem was clearly accessible to all and a full range of responses were seen. Some of the responses were a simple retelling of the context and content of the poem and not analysis. Weaker responses simply demonstrated the ability to follow the narrative and make some comment on the Boy's dreams and ideas about money without any close language, structure and form analysis. Many candidates treated the persona of the African boy as a real individual with a strong moral message – this proved to be a clear discriminator, as the more able candidate was able to move beyond this when demonstrating greater insight and analysis. These responses provided detailed analysis, demonstrating a depth of understanding of the poem.

The limitations of poverty was commented upon as was the 'unfairness' of the distribution of money - 'walled-round gentlemen...minding money'. Some suggested on the fact that this poem could be a critique of charities and how the wealthier nations were not keen to help.

There were a number of candidates who had only considered a small part of the poem and centres should remind their students to try and cover all of the unseen poem (or prose extract), not just concentrate on a small area of the poem.

Most candidates responded quite thoughtfully on the effects of repetition and alliteration and some explicitly commented on language choice in terms of similes, metaphor and juxtaposition - with the more able candidates recognising and commenting effectively on the way the poet had structured the poem to reflect the different strands. Some suggested that the simple language was the effect of the African Boy being uneducated and that money would be able to remedy that and the straightforward language made the poem all the more effective. Many noted the powerful image of 'flesh melt(ing) from our bones' and were able to interpret it as the effects of starvation.

Some candidates used specific linguistic terminology with confidence and used this knowledge to explain how, why and to what effect particular techniques had been used.

Some responses followed a rather formulaic approach and tended to come across as rather forced. On the other hand, those who wrote entirely empathic responses without commenting on techniques used or exploring language in greater detail, did have some difficulty in gaining marks in the higher levels. The most successful responses were the ones that did not follow a formula, but started with an intuitive response and then looked for techniques which would bear out the comments. As ever, structure was a problem: though many counted up lines and stanzas, it was unusual if anything meaningful emerged thereafter. Students do find it very difficult to relate structure and content convincingly.

Question 2

The unseen prose extract was taken from *The Rainbow* by D.H. Lawrence

Question: *How does the writer present Ursula's feelings in this extract?*

The prose extract produced some very strong responses and, again, a full range of marks were awarded. Almost all the candidates responding to this question recognised that the main protagonist, Ursula, was uncomfortable in her role as teacher and the more able were perceptive enough to realise that it was her perspective that coloured the view taken of her class.

Some candidates simply described the situation, which was not always fully grasped and included just a few comments about Ursula herself. Better answers considered the patterns of language in the extract, particularly of images, with many writing on Ursula's feelings of being trapped and suffocated, as well as images of hunting and warfare. Some fixed on to the glossed words making excessive capital out of these, perhaps because they stood out. Many made good use of the contrast to Mr Blunt, picking on the ideas of being inhuman and mechanistic. There were sound comments on structure. It did seem that the prose extract was more accessible for candidates when they discussed structure, perhaps because there is a time scale they can connect to.

Most were able to identify appropriate examples from the lexical fields and draw attention to the imagery used in the passage. The more able candidate really delved thoroughly into the concept of conflict presented through Lawrence's use of militaristic language and imagery. There were many responses discussing the imagery of pain and fright: 'torture over a fire of faces'.

Although there were fewer responses to this question, these often appeared to be more secure than the poetry ones. As noted for Question 1, there were quite a number of formulaic responses and again, those that started off with intuitive comments and then supported these with textual references were those that hit the criteria required of the higher levels.

A few less able candidates were distracted into a personal response about Ursula's fitness to be a teacher and some were thrown by the clearly early 20th century nature of the text finding references to 'old money' a stumbling block.

Many candidates referred to the extract as a poem and considered each paragraph as a stanza.

Overall, this question seemed to be tackled with enthusiasm and 'gusto'.

Section B

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 3 was the more popular, but not always the most successful option for candidates. Some candidates struggled with the understanding of the poems other than at face value which, at times, was not always accurate.

Although there is no requirement to compare and contrast the poems, a considerable majority of candidates did so. Centres are reminded that the two poems do not have to be compared, but there should be some balance in the treatment of the two.

It was certainly not unusual to find candidates had coped in a more accomplished manner with the unseen poem or extract than they did with the taught Poetry Anthology. As these were poems that candidates should have previously studied, it became evident that in some instances not enough time had been spent studying them in preparation for the examination. Some candidates made a genuine attempt to answer a Section B question, but responses suggested that some poems had not been studied and were being attempted as unseen texts; however, it was refreshing to find fewer 'nil returns' this series and almost all candidates attempted a response.

There were a number of candidates who had not crossed the question number box on the examination paper. There were 808 'unidentified' unseen Section A responses and 2260 Section B, Anthology responses. Centres are asked to remind their candidates to ensure that they tick which question they have answered.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to consider how the poets convey hopes and fears in *If* and *Prayer Before Birth*.

For Section B, this was by far the more popular question and a full range of responses were seen. There was an imbalance in many answers with too much time spent on one poem at the expense of the other, though the favoured poem varied. Almost all candidates managed to explore the themes of hopes and fears presented with more able candidates focusing not only on links in subject and imagery between the poems, but also on the way structure influences our understanding of the dynamics of the texts.

There were plenty of excellent interpretations of the poems, with most logically analysed and solidly evidenced. It was clear that a large number of candidates enjoyed working with these poems. In some responses, the understanding of both poems was sometimes limited, though there was sound comment on structure in the MacNeice poem. There is quite a lot of content in these two poems, and it is important to bear this in mind - candidates cannot write about everything in the time available, and judicious selection is key.

Although comparison is not required, some candidates approached this question as a comparative one. 'If' appeared to present little problems with interpretation and most candidates recognised the fact that this was a poem from a father to

his son. Some lost a little focus by writing about Kipling's son Jack, who was lost in WWI. 'Prayer Before Birth' proved a little more problematic. There were comments of abortion, that it was the mother fearing the actual birth of the child or that the child had been abandoned by God. Occasionally, the context of the poem was considered and some points were made about WWII. More able candidates noted that the first poem was perhaps the more optimistic, whilst the second dealt with the evils of our world.

There were a large number of responses which dealt with only one poem, though this did not seem to be because of time constraints, since the candidates could write at length about the one poem. Perhaps they genuinely misunderstood the requirements of the question, rather than choosing to omit one poem. It is a pity when this happens because at times they wrote quite well on their single poem, but if there is a rubric infringement, the mark has to be reduced accordingly. Candidates need to be made more aware of the need to cover two poems in their answers.

Question 4

For this question, candidates were asked to explore how the writers of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* one other poem from the collection tell stories which engage.

Many students were able to comment in some significant detail on the concept of engaging the interest of the reader, which is encouraging. They found many aspects to write about including the initial situation, the setting, the description of the Belle Dame, the point of view of the Knight, the narrative methods, the 'otherworldly' and eerie atmosphere. Structure and form arose more naturally here because of the ballad layout, the numbered verses and the circularity of the tale. What they chose to accompany it with was perhaps a discriminator. The most obvious, and generally the best choices for a second poem, was 'My Last Duchess', which did work well from the point of view of an intriguing narrative. Those who wrote about 'My Last Duchess' did not try to argue that the late Duchess was 'flirty' and even adulterous, but recognised that Browning was revealing to us the character of an immensely vain and even psychopathic man via the Duke's own words; however, comments relating to structure and form were not always convincing, as some students referred to this poem as written in blank verse or free verse, yet it is written in rhyming couplets.

There were quite a few alternatives offered, which held the reader's interest. 'My Last Duchess', 'A Mother in a Refugee Camp', 'Hide and Seek' being the more popular and the more successful. The responses which looked at poems with a firm narrative fared much better than those which did not. For example, many who offered 'Sonnet 116' or 'Do not go Gentle into that good night' did not really relate to the requirements of the question.

Conclusion

Where candidates were less successful, literary devices had either been identified without explanation or were simply listed. Greater success would be achieved if candidates analysed specific areas of the text and developed their ideas, supporting them with relevant examples. 'Feature-spotting' is no substitute for detailed analysis. The ability to examine the writer's methods and to connect

these with the ideas and feelings in the poems were often the most successful responses. More comment relating to the effect on the reader would have benefited some candidates' responses.

The handling of form and structure was often disappointing in that there was mention of stanza, rhyming schemes, caesura and enjambment, but comment was often minimal as to how these contributed to the thoughts and feelings in the text.

Candidates should be reminded that they must write about two poems in Section B and, for each poem, they should consider the language, structure and form when answering the question.

Centres are advised to make greater use of past papers and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs), available on-line, in order to make candidates more aware of question format and structure.

In some cases, more time needs to be given to the teaching of the *Anthology* poems in order to allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available. There was evidence of accomplished work produced during the examination and many centres should be congratulated on the thorough preparation of their candidates.

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