

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

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

Edexcel Certificate in English
Literature (KET0)
Paper 02R

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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 some candidates continuing on extra paper.

Section A

For this series, there was a fair balance between the unseen poem and the unseen extract. Responses to both questions were 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

Unseen Poem: A Blessing by James Wright

Question: Explain how the writer presents his thoughts and feelings about the ponies.

This poem proved to be engaging and, at times, challenging for some candidates, but it proved to be a very interesting one and a number of very thoughtful and mature responses were presented. A full range of marks were awarded.

Some of the weaknesses seen perhaps reflect the teacher's desire to equip their students with knowledge of literary criticism which can lead to 'empty' answers. Literary devices were duly spotted but not the effect, impact or meaning explored. Some of these candidates also wrote in a very mature and fluent style, but there was not much development or explanation included in their responses. Ideally, candidates should try to explain the effect of the technique on the reader and say why a particular technique has been used.

The best responses took great note of the final lines and discussed what they might mean. These candidates were able to see that the meeting of the poet and the ponies went far beyond a literal occasion and represented the state of mind of the poet. They also reflected on the slightly surreal, mystical nature of the encounter although very few candidates considered the companion mentioned in the poem.

There were a few who decided on very concrete meanings and had the poet depressed, lonely, thwarted in love, even abused as a child. Others looking for 'symbolism' in the poem, considered the 'black' and 'white' imagery and saw in this a range of possible explanations: racial disharmony; good and evil; the ponies were 'ying and yang'.

The most frequent area of weakness was the inability to discuss the use of 'structure and form'. 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 and commented upon the techniques, structure and form, which would bear out the comments.

Question 2

Extract from: The Child-Who-Was-Tired by Katherine Mansfield

Question: How does the writer create sympathy for *The Child-Who- Was-Tired*...?

Again, a full range of marks were awarded for this question. On the surface, it may have appeared slightly easier than Question 1, but the extract contained many areas for candidates to consider. The danger for many candidates was to simply list the examples of bad treatment.

Those who reached the higher levels, Level 4 and Level 5, were able to recognise the 'oddness' of the dream and offer some explanation (of varying success), such as it being a 'beautiful escape from reality'. Candidates could see there was more to the child than first appearances which, given the short story it was taken from, showed great perceptiveness! Should they ever come across it they will no doubt be surprised and perhaps less sympathetic! Also they noted the use of colour imagery and contrasted the 'pink shawl' to the 'black world' of the child.

The prose extract elicited genuine engagement from the candidates, many of whom seemed outraged that a child should be treated like this. This was a typical response: 'It saddens the mood and our heart quietly weep (sic) for the girl.'

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

Overall, this question seemed to be tackled with confidence.

Section B

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 3 was the more popular and often 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 and centres are asked to remind their candidates to ensure that they tick which question they have answered.

Question 3

How do the poets explore the ways people treat others in *A Mother in a Refugee Camp* and *My Last Duchess*?

A Mother in a Refugee Camp

There were some excellent responses and many of the better answers not only discussed the way the mother treated her child, but also saw how all those in the camp were being treated. As one examiner commented, 'I suspect that the teachers had shown some graphic images of these terrible places.' Many candidates demonstrated a personal response and were outraged by the horrific conditions.

There was evidence though of some rote learning of 'useful' quotes which were simply placed in the response without the candidate making any connections. Likewise listing of literary devices without meaningful discussion was evident.

My Last Duchess

Again, some excellent responses were seen, which showed knowledge and engagement. The Duke (often referred to as 'the Duck', 'the Dutch' and the 'Duch') was almost universally condemned as an egotistical and jealous man - some got a bit carried away and he became a 'psychotic killer'. A few however got it completely wrong - they thought that he was missing his Duchess and was suffering for his love of her. There seemed to be a misreading by some, which indicates that they did not expect to have to write about this poem and had not studied it. Others spent much of their essay discussing how the Duchess treated others (equally divided between those who saw her nice behaviour to all, and those who thought she cheated on the Duke justifying his actions) but neglected the Duke's treatment - skipping over or barely mentioning the fact that he had her killed.

Listing and not discussing the effect of literary devices is still a problem for many candidates.

Question 4

Question: Show how the poets convey their thoughts and feelings about power in *The Tyger* and one other...

This was not answered as successfully as Question 3, although students demonstrated good knowledge of the two poems; however, the notion of 'power' eluded many. Some chose an inappropriate poem which was self limiting (e.g. *Piano, Half- past Two, Sonnet 116, Telephone Conversation*), although they attempted to link them to the question the comparisons were forced. The best responses chose *Prayer Before Birth, Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *My Last Duchess*.

Many were able to discuss not only what 'power' can mean, but also the perplexity of divine power and the nature of man. However many went through and listed all the well practised phrases without much sense of genuine engagement – often apparent when they did add something of their own which revealed a lack of understanding. There was evidence of over simplification of meaning of things 'learnt' about the poem without relating this to the question. For example, some candidates suggested that Blake was writing just about the Industrial Revolution instead of seeing how this may have informed Blake's ideas.

There were also responses that were good, but too brief - which may reflect the use of exam time and candidates running out of time.

Again, trying to compare the poems throughout the response led many to a tangled mess - even worse when the poems were too disparate. As a result some unusual comparisons were made between the characters in *A Telephone Conversation* and *The Tyger* were made.

General

Overall this paper appears to have been successful, with many candidates gaining good marks. A full range of marks have been awarded.

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 and reminded of the need to cover two poems in their Section B answers.

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(s).

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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