

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Literature (4ET0)
Paper 03

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Introduction

For the coursework one assignment is required based on an in-depth study of 3 poems from the Anthology and reference to at least 3 further poems which may be drawn from outside the Anthology.

Assignment topics are chosen by the centre/candidates but must enable students to respond critically and sensitively to a range of poems and to show understanding of how meanings and ideas are conveyed through language, structure and form. Assignments should allow the students to make comparisons but this is not compulsory.

There is no prescribed length.

General Comments

Assignment topics concentrated on the main themes of the Anthology poems: love, death, memories, childhood etc. and these were all dealt with successfully by candidates at their various levels. Candidates who tried to tackle multiple themes struggled with the amount of material required for more than one theme across detailed study of three Anthology poems and three wider reading.

Occasionally candidates used a quotation to give a more precise focus to the task than a general theme and these tasks were always very well done. For example “ Love is 'an ever fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken'. How far is this idea presented in the chosen poems?” In this case, if the poems were carefully selected, all the major ideas of the set Anthology poems could be brought in, as the specification requires, as well as the wider reading poems, whether to support the quotation or disprove it.

There were a few candidates who did not choose poems relevant to their topic and they either strained to make the link or abandoned the topic entirely at some point. It is important that topics and selected poems are carefully matched before the writing starts.

The great majority of candidates met the specification requirement of exploring three Anthology poems and three wider reading but a few did not and it was not always evident that the marks awarded took account of this.

Rather more problems were caused by the balance between the attention paid to the Anthology poems and the wider reading. The specification requires in depth exploration of the Anthology poems which are after all the set text for this unit. An enthusiastic response to the chosen wider reading poems is to be welcomed but it must not be at the expense of the Anthology poems.

Similarly a comparative approach is admirable but it must ensure that important ideas from the Anthology poems are not missed, because they do not fit neatly in with the comparison. This can mean that the full picture of each poem is not given. There were many candidates who were successful in balancing the two but there were also a fair number who were not, missing out, for example, the escape into timelessness in 'Half-Past Two', the volta in 'Remember', large sections of 'Prayer Before Birth' and so on. Whether using a comparative

approach or not, there were some candidates who ignored important parts of the poems simply because they did not fit their argument. For example nearly every candidate who wrote about 'Prayer Before Birth' contrasted the threats from mankind with the comforts of nature but only one or two mentioned the more malign aspects of the images of nature two stanzas later.

Some candidates spent a long time describing the structure and rhyme scheme of their poems but unfortunately for too many this appeared to be an end in itself with no, or little attempt, to associate it with the message of the poem.

A strength of the coursework was the use of embedded quotation in writing about the poems and many candidates used this to lead in to some precise analysis. There was, however, a fairly common tendency to let the quotations speak for themselves or simply label them with the relevant technical term without any analysis. Where quotations were used to support a point, there were a few candidates whose quotations finished before the point was made or had been subtly altered, without acknowledgement, to fit the sentence. Now and again the quotation was the totally wrong choice as it didn't support the point at all. Most common was the naming of the figure of speech with an explanation of the meaning of the quotation but no analysis of the precise effects of the choice of words.

For example, in the following, the candidate obviously appreciates the language using a technical term but there is no precise analysis of the link, if there is one, between choice of the language and the effect: "When Achebe writes 'a broken comb and combed/ The rust-coloured hair left on his skull' it is another use of graphic imagery showing the mother is trying to preserve what little time they have left together". This is typical of the response of work in the 15-18 band. However this sort of comment is often ticked and labelled analysis by the marker. Other candidates completed points with even vaguer phrases e.g. 'paints a vivid picture'; 'makes it flow', again labelled analysis by the marker.

In contrast this candidate supports his conclusions with detailed analysis and references to other parts of the poem: "The mother 'combed/ The rust-coloured hair' left on her son's head. The mother may have done this to provide what sense of normalcy she could for her son in the refugee camp, or she may have been trying to dignify her son's death in any way she could. I think she did so for both reasons because Achebe describes the act as something she may have done in a 'former life' that was now reminiscent of 'putting flowers on a tiny grave'. This simile reinforces the immanency of the son's death, and also reminds the reader that when this child dies there will be no proper grave for him, no rituals will surround his death so she tries to dress him for death in the only way she is able to. 'Other mothers there/ Had long ceased to care' but this mother's love for her son led her to care for him even when she knew she could not save his life."

This analysis reaches the standard of the top band and there is obviously a range of levels of analysis between the two but there was a tendency for markers to over-reward at the 18/19 and 22/23 borderlines.

With regard to administration, moderators do have to check the candidates' names, numbers and marks against the mark sheets so it is essential that the

folder cover sheet is fastened on the very top of the folder not underneath the CAS. It is also helpful if the moderators have in front of them copies of the non-Anthology poems, however well-known.

In conclusion once again it was rewarding to see the strong personal involvement of the candidates with the poems, almost without exception.

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