

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Literature (4ET0)
Paper 01

Edexcel Certificate in English
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Paper 01

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General comments

This series saw candidates working at all abilities on a range of texts. The usual favourites of 'Of Mice and Men', 'An Inspector Calls', 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'View from the Bridge' remained popular with centres, however there was a solid turnout for 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and 'Pride and Prejudice'. The majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the themes and characters in texts used. Sometimes, points used were inappropriately selected or overtly narrative; this led to degrees of irrelevance in answers. More frequent use of quotation was seen this series. Where this was used well, it genuinely enhanced the consideration of writer's craft, leading to positive outcomes at all levels of ability. Where it was less discriminating, or broad guesswork, the effect was less clear. Answers were seen at all levels of ability with Level 2 answers tending to restrict themselves through lack of development and/or a general approach to questions. Level 3 answers were sound and well-produced. At the lower end of this range, a tendency to narrate was sometimes evident, although interspersed with clear discussion. Some very poised Level 5 answers were seen with candidates presenting sophisticated and discriminating answers. These are a pleasure to read and reflect excellent knowledge and understanding combined with a strong ability to focus on the terms of the question.

'A View from the Bridge' (Questions 1a and 1b)

In terms of the 1a) question, most candidates showed knowledge and understanding of Eddie and Catherine as well as their relationship, though a number spent more time writing about Beatrice. Some very astute answers used specific and focused textual detail to build perceptive and assured arguments. The most successful responses considered nuances of stagecraft and direction choices. 1b was considerably less popular than 1a and required an exploration of home and home life in this play. A good range of responses emerged from this question. Candidates described the relationships within the Carbone home, noted the impact of the arrival of the 'submarines' and the subsequent change in dynamic. Candidates wrote about home in terms of family, considering both Beatrice's house proud ways and Eddie's patriarchal position. Others considered the idea of Red Hook as the adopted home of Italian immigrants and spread the scope of their arguments into ideas of loyalty and belonging. Both questions catered for candidates across the ability range.

'An Inspector Calls' (Questions 2a and 2b)

2a) was by far the most popular of the questions on this text. Although eliciting views on the female characters, accurate comments on the role of women within the context of the drama and discussion of the individual characters, the question of 'in what ways' eluded many candidates. Candidates contrasted characters and discussed how they could be seen to represent 'types'. Good knowledge of key characters such as Sheila, Mrs Birling and Eva Smith allowed most candidates to make accurate and supported comments about the characters and their roles in the drama.

Some had difficulty in articulating more complex ideas, such as the notion that women were actually stronger despite the inequality and social view of the time. This sometimes led to complicated expression that was a sign that the candidate was struggling to explain their own view alongside an explanation of society's expectations and how Priestley revealed the issue.

Comparisons between 'types' (younger/older, open minded/prejudiced, self-righteous/humble, socialist/capitalist, powerful/without influence) and individuals were successful in comparing and contrasting how the characters were presented. Less able candidates resorted to narration, as has been the case in previous series, or listed characters with no real sense of understanding or use of the question.

2b) was usually only attempted by more able candidates. The concept of 'appearance and reality' was not fully understood by some candidates. The question was ideal for candidates who were capable of discussing the idea in the context of 'appearance' (how people and situations seem to be) as how they 'appear' or are revealed to the audience. Occasionally there were concrete and literal interpretations of 'appearance and reality' where the candidate discussed how we first see the Inspector (how he appears/arrives at the Birling's front door) followed by a discussion of the 'reality' of the inspector; who or what he might really be and how he is revealed to the audience. Some candidates related this to Eva Smith and Daisy Renton by discussing how they looked (appeared) and who they were/she was. Some candidates fell back on their knowledge of the character of Sheila and described what she looked like and how she changed as the play progressed. Whilst interesting and worthwhile, these approaches led to partial relevant responses.

'Henry V' (Questions 3a and 3b)

The answers on 3a required discussion of the importance of Henry's relationship with Catherine. A small number of responses were seen with particularly effective examples including matters of both personal and political significance in their arguments. 3b invited discussion on the theme of war attracting some effective consideration of historical context. Use of quotation was almost always focused and precise in answers on this play.

'Much Ado About Nothing' (Questions 4a and 4b)

No answers to 4a) were seen, although there were several answers to 4b) on the theme of marriage. This was considered as an institution and expression of love through the relationships of Beatrice and Benedick and Hero and Claudio, but there were also some adept references to Don Pedro's lack of a suitable marriage partner at the end of the play.

'Romeo and Juliet' (Questions 5a and 5b)

5a) was a very popular question with answers ranging from simple one or two line descriptions to thematic and perceptive discussions of character motivation and presentation. Candidates were able to choose characters and offer relevant examples to show why each was responsible. Logical reasoning and effective quotation reflected familiarity with the text. Although understood as a text in performance, there were instances where candidates over-relied on film versions which seem to have been their main or only experience of the play. Where this was the case, candidates were at a disadvantage as they were unable to discuss the language of the text and gave themselves away by mentioning guns and fish tanks.

A surprising number of candidates seemed to have prepared to discuss Tybalt in depth, arguing with fixed determination that Tybalt is the character most responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Others tended to focus on the involvement of the Nurse and Friar Lawrence with a fair smattering of Lord and Lady Capulet. A number blamed Romeo and Juliet themselves with varying success.

5b) was a less popular question than 5a with a range of answers from the full ability range. 'Hope' sometimes led to confused responses where some candidates argued themselves into a corner by asserting that hope is central as a theme, giving examples from the text and concluding that, in fact, a lack of hope is the main meaning of the play. This was not unsuccessful as a strategy as some candidates argued that hope for the future was implied and, as Romeo and Juliet hope for something as yet unseen – peace between their families – it is this hope that drives the play. Insightful responses explored the subtle ways in which the audience is tantalised by the dream of a better outcome for the families whilst knowing that there is a tragic ending for both protagonists and they have 'no hope' of surviving the circumstances of their 'death marked' love.

'The Importance of Being Earnest' (Questions 6a and 6b)

Question 6a) required candidates to explore the character of Lady Bracknell and one other female character. Cecily or Gwendolyn predictably featured alongside Lady Bracknell, with some more able candidates successfully attempting a comparative analysis of the two. Quality of support and detail were once again discriminating factors in the quality of these answers. 6b) answers focused on the expectations of society; this tended to be dealt with through manners and matters of context with some reference to Wilde's own views included by a few candidates.

'Our Town' (Questions 7a and 7b)

Insufficient answers were seen to 7a) or 7b) to form a view of performance in response to these questions.

'Pride and Prejudice' (Questions 8a and 8b)

Answers to 8a) tended to be sound in approach and really tried to argue their views on Elizabeth Bennet as a 'perfect heroine'. Some successful discussions considered how she changes throughout the novel, suggesting that she becomes the 'perfect heroine' by the end, but is far from this at the beginning because of her own prejudice.

Answers to 8b) looked at the Bennets and Gardiners as examples of families in the novel.

'To Kill a Mockingbird' (Questions 9a and 9b)

9a) responses offered some real engagement with the novel that demonstrated enjoyment of the text by a large number of candidates. Candidates were, on the whole, able to relate the relationship between Jem and Scout with the wider concerns of the novel. In some answers there was a tendency to 'walk through the novel', which showed a degree of knowledge and understanding of both characters and plot. Some responses did not address 'how' with the full attention it deserved. Generally the question was answered well, quotation was effectively used and insightful comments on the changes in Scout and Jem's relationship reflected sustained engagement with the novel.

9b) was rather less popular than 9a) but did attract some very strong responses. Candidates often responded very well to this question. Although some stayed within the well-worn territory of who Tom Robinson is and how he is falsely presented through cynical lies, others explored the lies around Boo Radley and the fictions created by Dill. One candidate offered Atticus's economy with the whole truth of Mrs Dubose's morphine addiction as an example of how telling the truth was done sincerely rather than with cynicism. The quote was a challenging one that provoked thought about truth and lies but was not fully engaged with in all of its' complexity in any of the responses. In many instances, this question produced some of the most original and compelling answers across the paper.

'The English Teacher' (Questions 10a and 10b)

10a) attracted several answers to the question of Leela's relationship with her parents, most of which were of at least sound quality. This was because candidates tended to have solid and accurate knowledge of the novel. It is clear that candidates who study this text know it in detail; although it may seem obvious, knowing the texts is crucial in a closed text exam such as this one.

10b) answers tended to focus on the relationship between Krishna and the Headmaster as the main example of friendship in the novel.

'Of Mice and Men' (Questions 11a and 11b)

11a) was by the far the most popular prose question with candidates of all levels of ability answering on Crooks and one other character that engenders sympathy in the reader. Popular choices for the other character included Curley's wife and Candy, with one or two looking at Lennie. Naming Crooks allowed candidates to anchor their response effectively. Candidates leaned on knowledge of the character and showed understanding of the inherent racism evident in his treatment by others on the ranch. The question evoked a range of personal responses. For example: 'We can sympathise with Crooks as humans re social creatures and need friends'. Candidates addressed the more obvious points of racial discrimination and prejudice against his disability. Many went beyond these points to show how Crooks is disadvantaged but does not fully hold our sympathy when Steinbeck shows his attitude towards Lennie in the chapter where he goads Lennie about George's absence. The choice of one other character allowed candidates to select a combination that could reveal their knowledge of the text and sustain a discussion. The best candidates analysed how Steinbeck's craft as a writer ensured that the reader sympathised.

11b) was also a very popular question, with candidates considering a range of different types of power in their answers. Crooks's powerlessness frequently featured alongside reference to Curley's abuse of his power and Slim's genuine power as the respected 'jerkline skinner'. Lennie's physical power also proved a popular and valid talking point. A good proportion of responses considered the absence of power as well as where characters have power. A small number of candidates commented on the power Steinbeck has over the characters and cited the opening description of the water snake and the heron as evidence of the author's intention to show Lennie and George as powerless victims.

'Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry' (Questions 12a and 12b)

12a) and 12b) both attracted a few responses. 12a) required candidates to consider Big Ma and Mama as the true heroes of the novel. While most respondents tended to agree with the statement, a few bravely sought to contest it with some degree of success. Many looked at Cassie or Pa as the true heroes with one answer arguing for Uncle Hammer. Most answers demonstrated a sound and clear understanding of the novel and its characters. 12b) responses largely focused on the importance of family keeping the land safe and sticking up for one another. Different generations within the family formed a significant talking point for one or two answers.

'Nineteenth Century Short Stories' (Questions 13a and 13b)

There were few answers to Questions 13a) and b). One answer seen on 13a) was securely focused on strong female characters, choosing 'News of the Engagement' as the other choice alongside Dorothea from 'The Unexpected.'

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