

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

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 full range of marks awarded. 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 using all of the answer space.

## Section A

For this series, the unseen poem was more popular than the unseen extract, but 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

The unseen Poem was *For Heidi With Blue Hair* by Fleur Adcock.

Question: *How does the writer present people as individuals in this poem?*

This was a question which allowed candidates to fully explore meaning within the poem without being too prescriptive. The notion of 'individuality' allowed candidates to see the wider scope of the poet's ideas which represented ideas about society and authority. It was also a poem with which they could relate to on a personal level, having empathy or even (in some cases) shared experiences. It was not too lengthy a poem which allowed time for careful and multiple readings.

Examiners' comments:

- Some candidates are a little 'over-schooled' in writing literary criticism, and their responses were crowded with literary terms and detailed paragraphs about commas, hyphens, line lengths, etc., but failed to actually say what the poem was about. Quite a few interpreted the use of 'you' as meaning the reader (apart from Heidi) and wrote at least two paragraphs which did not lead to any understanding of the poem. Confident and relevant discussion of language, structure and form remain the biggest hurdle for many candidates
- Some candidates used some very impressive vocabulary in order to create an effect, but this did not always lead to demonstrating an understanding of the poem

- There was an alarming list of literary terms they felt they had to refer to, sometimes correctly, sometimes just as a tick list
- The best responses started with a clear and often lively comment on the essence of the poem and what they saw as the poet's intentions. They followed this with a detailed discussion of how the poet achieved this with meaningful reference to language, structure and form. Some had either been advised or of their own volition to start their essay in a less formulaic and predictable way which was refreshing to read
- Some decided that the reference to 'her black friend' was racist in some way, not that this was backed up in any discussion. Others saw her as being in competition instead of an ally to Heidi. One or two others had the father 'crying in the kitchen' so advice would be to read the poem at least twice before starting the response
- Some of the responses at the top end wrote superbly, five or six pages of confident and interesting analysis; there was not one aspect of the poem which was missed. It was hard to believe that these candidates were responding to an unseen poem
- An amusing quote from the responses was 'the repetitive agony which is school'.

## Question 2

The unseen prose extract was taken from: *Mister Pip* by Lloyd Jones.

Question: *Explain how the writer creates a sense of escape from reality in this extract.*

The prose extract produced some very strong responses and a full range of marks were awarded. This question was a little more prescriptive and for some candidates therefore more confusing in that they could not decide exactly 'who' was escaping, Matilda or the reader or both. While many were able to successfully see that there were two strands that could be interpreted, quite a few got tangled. The emphasis on 'escape' perhaps did not give candidates the same scope as the poem to freely interpret the extract. It led some to over exaggerate the 'fantasy land' they thought Matilda (and/or the reader) had escaped to. The content was less familiar territory than the poem, but many empathised with the idea of getting lost in books and the sheer pleasure of a good story well-told and read. There were an equal percentage of candidates being awarded Level 4 and 5 in Q1 and Q2.

Examiners' comments:

- The weakest responses were constrained by the need to show every punctuation, word, phrase and sentence as being evidence of 'escape' without giving a general overview. This is the failure of some to see 'language, structure and form' as helpful to their analysis but rather as something other than the text they are actually writing about (a sort of mathematical approach)
- Some candidates tried to impress with their range of vocabulary rather than analysing the vocabulary in the extract
- Some wrote two pages before even mentioning Matilda or Mr Watts (and some never did)

- 'Escape' was seen by many to mean a wonderful, magical place (a few mentioned Disney!), which is in contrast to the facts given about the marshes and Pip's encounter with Magwitch, which is a reflection of some candidates reading into a text with preconceived ideas. Some read 'tropics' and ignored the terrible reality of what was happening. So advice again is to read the text a couple of times before starting a response if at all possible
- There were some superb responses which often began with a lively and confident overview of the whole passage. Some of these candidates had read *Great Expectations*, which probably allowed an extra insight, although not necessary to reach a score of 20. Some noted that the place which Matilda and her fellow classmates had escaped to was just as fearful as the reality of the civil war, but the crucial difference was that it was a safe experience precisely because it was a story
- A number made comparisons of the textual imagery to the state of dreaming which was successfully backed up with well-chosen references
- Many concluded with a personal response, which was nice to see as it demonstrated an engagement with the text.

## 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. Some centres have sought clarification during the year and therefore this serves as a reminder for all centres. The two poems **do not** have to be compared, but there should be some balance in the treatment of the two. It seems that in some cases, candidates were constrained by trying to find comparatives when they did not need to do this. I should like to draw all centres' attention to the third bullet in each of the marking levels. The bullet states that either *Limited, Some, Sound, Sustained or Perceptive connections are made between particular techniques used by the writer and presentation of ideas, themes and settings*'. It is important to note that this refers to each individual 'writer' and the 'connections' means that the candidate understands how the writer uses techniques to convey his or her ideas for each separate poem. 'Connections' is not an alternative for 'compare'.

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.

Centres are reminded that candidates should discuss the language, structure and form in both of the poems. Often, candidates will consider how the ideas are conveyed through language, but do not consider the structure and form. If candidates do not consider the structure and form, a mark lower in the level is applied. It is advised that centres look carefully at the mark grids and the wording in each bullet. The second bullet in each mark band is assessing the candidate's knowledge of the language, structure and form.

### Question 3

The question: *How are views of life presented in 'Once Upon a Time' and 'Prayer Before Birth'?*

Of Section B, this was the more popular question and offered mixed responses. Although comparison is not strictly required many candidates approached this question as a comparative one, which at times hindered progression, as the candidate could not find enough comparisons between the two poems.

The question was very open and allowed the candidates to analyse the poems without channelling responses in a prescriptive way. As a pair of poems they were well-chosen to allow comparison. These poems had obviously been well-taught and the level of understanding was high. Even the weakest candidates were able to offer informed and interesting responses. Many had been advised (seemingly) to write an introduction and conclusion, unfortunately in most cases these were redundant as they simply reworded the question. Most responses were longer than Q1 and 2, many reaching six pages.

Examiners' comments:

- There were some 'memorised-style' responses which were reflected in a lack of personal engagement
- Generally, discussion of language, structure and form was better handled than the unseen texts which is to be expected. Many saw 'blood sucking bats' etc. as 'childish fears'
- There were very few examples of misconceptions of the meanings of the poems – the weakest simply did not analyse the entire poem and only covered a small area of each – whereas others wrote very detailed comments, but again not covering all the poems
- There was a mix of responses which used contextual knowledge of the poems to support their ideas and those who read them at face value. It was possible to attain Level 5 either way; however, the very best did take into account the context and knowledge of the poets which enhanced their responses.
- Quite a few got the gender of the poets wrong
- Many ended their response with a personal preference which again reinforced the engagement with the poems and was pleasing to read.
- There were some outstanding responses which reflected individual, sometimes 'quirky' and often very intelligent essays where the candidate showed detailed knowledge of the poems and also the issues expressed in them. The level of maturity was amazing.

## Question 4

The question: *Show how the poets convey their thoughts and feelings about childhood in 'Half-past Two' and one other poem from the Anthology.*

This was an open question which allowed candidates to analyse the poems without prescribing their response. All candidates chose an appropriate poem from the Anthology. *Hide and Seek* was the most popular, followed by *Piano*. Evidence of good teaching was apparent in the responses; the spread of levels was reasonably even between Question 3 and Question 4 with a slightly higher attainment for Q3.

Examiners' comments:

- Some memorised responses, which spoil the level of personal engagement with the poems
- A few candidates failed to discuss the escape into the 'timeless' land in *Half Past Two*, which is, to a degree, the point of the poem
- Surprisingly there was almost an even verdict on whether the experience of the child left in the classroom was positive or negative. The best responses suggested that, as an adult looking back, this was a precious moment free from the tyranny of time into which the child was 'slotted'
- Many seemed disgusted with the teacher and showed no empathy for what may have been a busy primary teacher who 'forgot' the child. This compares with their verdict on the Headmistress in *Heidi With the Blue Hair*. A few acknowledged that he may have been 'naughty' but as an adult looking back can't even remember what misdeeds he committed.
- Some really lovely responses for *Hide and Seek* – again there was a mix of candidates who took into account Scannell's war experiences and those who simply saw the end of the poem as symbolising the end of childhood and/or innocence.
- Some slightly less successful responses were seen for *Piano*, with only a few acknowledging the poet's reluctance to dwell on his childhood because of his present unhappiness
- In contrast, there were some lovely responses to *Piano*, describing how safe and content the child felt at his mother's feet, contrasting the coldness outside and the warmth of the cosy parlour.

## 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.



## **Grade Boundaries**

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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