



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2020

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English Literature (4ET1)
Paper 1: Poetry and Modern Prose

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Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel as their International GCSE English Literature provider. We hope that both our candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

Introduction

Again, we are pleased to report that this has been a very successful series. There were no errors in the papers (4ET1 01 and 4ET1 01R) or erratum notices and no enquiries from centres following the examinations. Centres should be congratulated for preparing their candidates so well. A full range of marks has been awarded for all questions and many candidates have gained a Grade 4 or above.

There are three sections in this examination paper. In Section A, candidates are presented with an unseen poem and answer a question based on it (20 marks). In Section B, Anthology Poetry, candidates can choose either Question 2, which has two named poems or Question 3, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem to discuss with it (30 marks). For Section C, Modern Prose, candidates choose to respond to one of two questions based on the prose text that they have studied (40 marks). The total marks for this paper is 90.

This report will provide feedback on the most popular questions for the main 4ET1 01 paper. Due to the very small entry of regional candidates (4ET1 01R), this is a combined report. Key points are relevant to both papers.

Section A: Unseen Poetry

4ET1 01

Question 1 Unseen Poem: *The Concerned Adolescent* by Wendy Cope.

Question: Explore how the writer presents concerns for planet Earth in this poem.

On the whole, the responses demonstrated enthusiasm for the topic of the poem and it seemed relevant to many candidates particularly with recent environmental activists, such as Greta Thunberg, featuring in the media. A full range of marks was awarded with most placed in Level 3 or Level 4.

In a small number of responses, there was evidence of confusion about who the speaker of the poem is, but most identified that the speaker is the 'concerned adolescent' in the title who is describing planet Earth and considering what 'beings' from 'far away', living 'On another planet', would say about the future of both planet Earth and its inhabitants.

There were some interesting and sustained responses where candidates considered the use of 'worrying vocabulary' and the repetition of 'doomed'. There were points about the poet's use of positive imagery and how this contrasted with the 'gravity of the writer's concerns'. Most candidates commented on the use of capitalisation, adjectives, alliteration and repeated phrases. Some candidates tended to paraphrase the poem and then offer some language analysis and others did not develop the points that were made, such as the following example: "Shining against the dark black sky' is comparing the jewel to be shining against the

dark black sky". Unfortunately, the candidate did not develop the point and continued with similar points throughout the essay.

There were some vague comments such as 'Capital letters in HUMAN BEINGS is used to show the significance in these words' and some candidates referred to the 'music' of the poem, rather than commenting on tone or rhythm and its effect on the reader.

More comment about how or why particular techniques are used would have benefited some responses.

The theme of the poems for both the main and R papers was very similar.

4ET1 01R

Question 1 Unseen Poem: *Careful With That, You Might break It* by John Rice.

Question: Explore how the writer presents an alien's view of planet Earth in this poem.

Candidates appear to have enjoyed this poem and responded positively. A range of marks was awarded. On the whole, candidates understood the poem and commented on the use of colour imagery, such as: 'big blue bits', 'the green bits', 'the brown areas' and 'the little white thing'. Very few commented on the sense of ambiguity ('a bit hazy') and questioning created in the poem through the use of polysyndeton: 'some protective coating or gas or something', 'a force or influence or balance perhaps', but some included the example of the use of exclamation, 'you'll be really amazed!'

Most candidates made some brief comment about the structure of the poem and the use of questions and answers to create a conversational effect: 'Can you see the big blue bits?', 'What do you suppose the green bits are?', 'Have you spotted the brown areas?', 'Its name?'

One the whole, the most common problems were: the lack of examples from or not enough coverage of the poem; the lack of development of ideas; some overly long quotations where, perhaps, two or three points could have been made; a minority of candidates simply rephrasing or paraphrasing the poem without any close analysis of specific words or phrases.

The following advice has been offered in past series and is still relevant for future examinations:

Candidates should avoid paraphrasing the given poem or simply responding with a summary of each stanza. These responses rarely progress beyond Level 2.

In summary, when responding to the Unseen Poetry, Section A, candidates should try to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of the poem
- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure and try to suggest why this may have been used
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- comment on all areas of the poem, not just the first few lines
- use short quotations and avoid copying large areas of the poem.

Section B: Anthology Poetry

Both Anthology questions assess Assessment Objective 2 (AO2: Analyse the Language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects) and Assessment Objective 3 (AO3: Explore links and connections between texts).

It was good to see almost equal balance of response to the Anthology poetry Questions 2 and 3 on both papers.

The comments that follow give examples from the main paper; however, the points made are relevant to the R paper.

4ET1 01

Question 2: Compare the ways the writers present people giving advice to others in *If-* and *Do not go gentle into that good night*.

On the whole, responses to *If-* were stronger than to *Do not go gentle...*

Many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of *If-*, commenting on how the poem is motivational and gives advice to a young person on how to live their life. There were comments about the use of contrasts, the personification of 'Triumph' and 'Disaster' and the use of 'my son' at the end of the poem to provide a personal message of advice.

There seemed to be some fragmented responses covering much of the content of the poems, but each example had not been covered in enough detail. There were a number that simply mentioned a term, gave an example and then followed this with a very brief comment. Again, a number of candidates spoke about the 'musicality' of the poems, but comment was vague and points underdeveloped.

When exploring *Do not go gentle...*, candidates rarely explored the different types of men referred to in the poem and some candidates thought it was written by Agard.

In a number of responses there were not enough comparisons made and many candidates dealt with each poem separately, only offering some basic comparison in the introduction and conclusion. It is recommended that candidates try to include more comparisons in their essays.

Question 3: Compare how the writers present sadness in *Remember* and one other poem from the anthology.

A good range of poems were selected to compare *Remember* with, including: *Do not go gentle into that good night*, *Poem at Thirty-nine*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *War Photographer* and *Prayer Before Birth*. The majority of candidates produced some interesting responses and wrote a fair amount in the recommended 40 minutes.

Again, there were similar issues as mentioned for Question 2, but in addition there were many referring to whether the titles of the poems being either 'relevant' or 'irrelevant', for example: '*Poem at Thirty-nine* is a relevant title' without any further comment or explanation. Again,

there were the references to music: 'adds to the sad music of the poem', but the lack of development or explanation left these comments too vague.

Sometimes there was not enough reference to the question or some imbalance of coverage. A small number of candidates misinterpreted *Remember* and chose the question in order to write about a poem they knew more about.

4ET1 01R

Question 2: Compare how the writers present childhood in *Half-past Two* and *Hide and Seek*.

This was a popular option for candidates, particularly as *Half-past Two* appears to be a favourite poem in the collection. Candidates tended to write more about this poem than *Hide and Seek*. Often there was not enough coverage and responses would have benefited from more coverage and comparisons.

Question 3: Compare the ways the writers present a woman in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and one other poem from the anthology.

The most popular poems selected to compare how a woman is presented were *Poem at Thirty-nine*, *My Last Duchess* and *Piano*. A couple of candidates compared *La Belle* with *Remember*, but coverage was not always detailed.

When writing about *La Belle*, candidates did not always consider the whole poem and only provided a small number of examples and, at times, sharper focus on the question would have benefited the responses.

For both papers, a full range of responses was seen; however, the majority of candidates gained marks in Level 3 or above. Some candidates could have had even more successful if a wider range of examples and greater close analysis of language had been included. Sometimes, ideas were not fully developed following a valid example.

There was just one rubric infringement (where the rule for the question is not followed) where a candidate wrote about just one poem, which was not named in either Question 2 or 3, and did not link this back to the question.

As suggested in previous series, making comparisons can be an issue for some students. Ideally, comparisons are integrated throughout the response; however, some candidates feel more comfortable dealing with each poem separately. The problem with this method is that it often leads to a lack of comparison at the end of the response, which will inevitably result in a lower mark. If dealing with poems separately, it is best to advise candidates to deal with each focus point separately. For example, begin with explaining what the poems are about and comparing the ideas in the two poems. Then move on to the next area, such as the use of language. Candidates could write about the use of language in the first poem, the use of language in the second poem and then compare these before moving on to structure or another area. By doing this, if they do run out of time, some comparative points will have been made earlier in the response.

In summary, when responding to Section B, candidates should try to:

- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- provide a balanced response – giving each poem equal treatment
- compare meanings and examples of language and structure.

Please do remember that context is *not* assessed in this part of the paper but may be included if it is relevant to the question and supports the point being made.

Section C: Modern Prose

Candidates responded well to their chosen question. The most popular text was *Of Mice and Men* and the second most popular was *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There were very few responses to the other three texts, but those seen were often very successful, particularly the responses to *Things Fall Apart*. There were some thoughtful, insightful and perceptive responses produced for most questions and, once again, a full range of marks was awarded.

There were some weaker responses to *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, often due to the brevity of the response or not including enough examples from the novel.

The very small number of candidates who responded to Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* were mostly very successful when applying both AO3 (knowledge and understanding of the text) and AO4 (context). The answers produced for these novels often resulted in some very perceptive and skilful responses supported with a range of quotations.

Text: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee

The questions on the main paper were:

Question 4: Discuss the relationship between Scout and Jem in the novel.

Question 5: Explore the theme of justice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 4: Explore the theme of childhood innocence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Question 5: 'In the novel, neither Atticus Finch nor Bob Ewell is a perfect father.' How far do you agree with this view?

The most popular option for this novel on the main paper was Question 4. The responses to this question were often very successful. Candidates incorporated relevant contextual points and provided a range of examples.

Some candidates gained full marks and points included: how Scout and Jem played together and their friendship with Dill; when the children built the snowman out of soil; their minor disagreements; their fascination with Boo; how they invented stories; the effects of the trial;

the 'roly-poly' incident; Jem protecting Scout; their enduring bond and, to cite one candidate, 'the wholesome goodness of Jem and Scout's relationship'.

There were some brief responses to the justice question, but generally a sound understanding of the novel was demonstrated.

On the R paper, candidates responding to Question 5 provided some excellent responses arguing for Atticus's virtues and some even seemed rather offended with this suggestion that Atticus was not perfect. These responses were lively and a joy to read, particularly when candidates were able to express their outrage so earnestly.

Text: *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck

On the main paper, the questions were:

Question 6: In what ways is prejudice significant in *Of Mice and Men*?

Question 7: Discuss the role of Candy in the novel.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 6: In what ways is Crooks important in *Of Mice and Men*?

Question 7: Explore the theme of friendship in the novel.

This remains the most popular text option.

When exploring prejudice, most candidates considered Crooks and Curley's wife. Many seemed to have been prepared for this type of question and successfully explored prejudice through racism, sexism and ageism.

There were some frequent grey areas, such as exploration of how bosses were often 'predators' preying on their labourers and actively selling the American Dream to their employees in order for them to work hard for little pay. A number of candidates also made reference to how Crooks was provided with liniment from the boss in order to ease his back pain; however, there is no evidence of this in the novel, as it simply says that Crooks used the horses' liniment. Another not entirely inaccurate point that was made was that Curley's wife threatened to tell everyone that Crooks raped her. Although this could be a possible reason for Curley's wife to demand that Crooks should be 'hung from a tree', it is not stated. Due to these frequent 'grey areas', it is a possibility these have been ideas developed and remembered through class discussions.

A small number of candidates tried to analyse language, which is not assessed in this part of the paper.

When writing about Candy, finer details of what the character says and does were often omitted and there was some generalisation. There were also some candidates who lost focus on the question and explored other characters when developing ideas about Candy's loneliness.

On the R paper, Crooks was a popular choice for candidates to respond to. Many focused on events in section 4 of the novel and discussed Crooks' possessions with varying success. There was some good use of evidence from the text and some well-remembered quotations. The

more successful responses considered finer details, such as when Crooks was allowed in the bunkhouse at Christmas or how his father used to own a chicken farm.

Also on the R paper, candidates who answered the question about friendship tended to focus on the friendship between George and Lennie. Some went on to consider the friendships between Candy and his dog; Candy with George and Lennie and George and Slim. One candidate even considered how Crooks had friends when he was younger.

A good full range of responses were seen. Even with some inaccuracies, it was clear that candidates had fully engaged with the questions and worked very hard when writing their responses. Some enthusiasm for the novel was evident.

Questions 8 and 9: *The Whale Rider*, Witi Ihimaera

There were a very small number of responses for this novel with candidates gaining marks in Level 3 or above. Candidates tend to engage fully with this novel and responses are always a pleasure to read.

One candidate who responded to Question 9 (the significance of the legend of the whale rider) provided a very interesting and sustained response to the question. The candidate demonstrated a thorough understanding of the novel and some very good points were made about narrative and structure (omniscient narrative, parallel plots, magical concepts or realism), even though AO2 is not assessed in this part of the paper. Some ideas were repeated and it was surprising to see that the candidate had not considered the whales at all in the response; however, many valid points were made, such as Koro being blind to the similarities between Kahu and the legendary whale rider and how it could be argued that the whale rider made Kahu (when he planted the spear) and gave her a destiny. The sustained and thoughtful response gained a mark at the top of Level 4.

Questions 10 and 11: *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan

There were very few responses to this novel. One response (Q10, conflict) was successful and detailed with the candidate providing an assured response to a difficult novel. The essay was crammed with examples of conflict. A range of conflicts were considered in the families and nationalities, including: the conflicts in China and why the mothers fled; family conflicts in China – and how without these Chinese conflicts the mothers would not have emigrated to America; the American daughters' arguments with their mothers; the conflict and competitiveness between Waverly and Jing-mei; conflicts arising from differences in culture; Jing-mei's inner conflict trying to find her cultural identity and more. Contextual points were naturally embedded within and throughout the essay. Although some points could have been developed just a little more, this was worthy of a mark in the top level.

Questions 12 and 13: *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe

Responses to this novel are always a joy to read. There were a small number of responses for Question 12 (beliefs) and all received marks in the top two levels. One exemplar script gained full marks. The candidate began with an assured comment in relation to context and how beliefs are central to Ibo tradition and how these are challenged by the arrival of the

Christians. An assured understanding was demonstrated when the candidate explored the beliefs of Mr Brown with his 'relative peace' compared with Mr Kiagu and his ignorance of Igbo beliefs. A perceptive point was made about how the Igbo tribes are more open-minded to Christian and others' beliefs. Further points were made in relation to Nwoye's conversion, Okonkwo losing power of him, Igbo beliefs crushed by Christians and being 'beaten into submission' and more. Ideas were maturely expressed and the candidate maintained a sharp focus on the question and some perceptive points were made.

In summary, when responding to Section C, candidates should:

- focus on the question
- avoid narrative retelling of the events in the novel
- provide a range of examples from their chosen text – remember that as this is a closed book examination, examples need not be quotations but examples of events or episodes within the novel
- prove to the examiner their knowledge of the text – do not assume the examiner knows everything
- comment on contextual points and try to relate these to the points being made
- avoid dealing with context separately. Do not write a page of historical background, but link all contextual points with an example from the novel and in relation to the question being answered
- when using film versions, which are most valuable teaching aids, remind candidates that not all scenes in a film appear in the novel that they are studying and that their responses must be based on the novel and not the film version.

Conclusion

This paper is always a pleasure to mark and the responses have, once again, been very enjoyable to read. Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates for the examination and we very much hope that you will continue to deliver this specification and that you and your students are delighted with results.

For those candidates looking to continue their English Literature studies, the Pearson Edexcel International AS and A Level (Specification references: YET01 and XET01) is an ideal option. This qualification is becoming very popular and successful and has received positive feedback from centres. Full details are available on our website.

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Thank you.

Chief / Principal Examiner

International GCSE English Literature

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