



Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2021

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 very much hope that both our candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

## **Introduction**

The November 2021 series was successful and performed well. The paper was very similar in performance to previous series. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination.

Centres are once again congratulated on preparing their candidates so well, especially during another very challenging year.

For the 2021 November paper, it was decided to remove the Anthology Poetry section due to the unprecedented circumstances related to the pandemic. The removal of one section of the paper enabled candidates and centres to access the paper with more confidence, especially after lost teaching and learning hours.

For this series, there were just two sections. In Section A, candidates were presented with an unseen poem and answered a question based on it (20 marks). For Section B, Modern Prose, candidates responded to one of two questions based on the prose text that they had studied (40 marks). The total mark for this paper was 60.

As expected, the number of entries was much lower than in previous series, as we are also offering the opportunity of students being entered for the January 2022 examination. The full range of marks was awarded with most candidates gaining marks in Level 3 or above. There were some extremely good responses and a number of candidates gained full marks for their prose response. All responses were marked by the Principal Examiner and one Senior examiner.

## **Section A Unseen Poem**

### **Q1. *Slow Reader* by Vicki Feaver**

**Question: Explore how the writer presents a child who is slow at learning to read in this poem.**

A full range of responses was seen for this poem. There were the brief responses demonstrating 'some' understanding through to the assured and perceptive.

Most candidates attempted to explore the language, form and structure and were able to identify the list of skills the child in the poem has. There were some candidates who did not include enough examples from the poem and others who did not explore specific words or phrases. Many candidates fully engaged with the poem and offered some personal and thoughtful comment and were sympathetic with the child.

The Senior Examiner commented that: 'The poem was understood on various levels by the vast majority of candidates. Only a small number seemed to confuse the old man with the child or considered these some kind of reminiscences by the writer of when they were young. Stanza 2 could be considered the discriminator. Many of the

more confident responses discussed the implications of a formal 'traditional' education and its limiting effects on the 'artistic freedom' of the child. One or two of the top ranging responses questioned the child's willingness to learn to read as it interfered with the boy's true self and expression. Many candidates recognised the importance of the 'bit' and linked it to the limiting effect education could have on the child. Some candidates used this as an opportunity to criticise 'traditional' education.'

Textual analysis was varied. Some candidates feature spotted with little explanation as to the effect figures of speech had on the reader or to the content and tone of the poem. Zoomorphism was a popular term referring to the second stanza. The free verse was commented upon, usually quite pertinently, and the effect it had on the overall reading and understanding of the poem. Most candidates commented on the two-stanza structure of the poem. The confident responses noted the difference in tone – a relatively simple descriptive one in stanza one, describing the boy's talents and achievements and contrasting them against his inability to read quickly, and a more thoughtful note in stanza two on how education can be a bind and inhibit talent. The metaphors on 'gristly meat', a fish and a 'white-eyed colt' were noted. There was some confusion among less confident candidates about the image of the old man, sometimes linking him to being the child in the poem.

Tone was commented upon with most as being thoughtful or a little sad, but there was also an element of pride in the boy's achievements. Suitable quotations were chosen to support these comments.

On the whole the responses were thoughtful and it had been a pleasure to read through them.

When comparing with previous series, the level of demand was similar. Key areas to consider for future series remain the same.

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 poems, was removed for this series due to the current unprecedented circumstances. The Prose section was relabelled as Section B.**

### **SECTION B Modern Prose**

The most popular prose text was *Of Mice and Men*, but there was at least one response for all novels, including the least popular options: *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Whale Rider*.

#### **Q2 To Kill a Mockingbird: Kindness**

There were a few responses to this question, but often they were rather brief and lacked a range of specific examples from the novel to support the points made.

Examiner comments include:

There was only a small number of responses, so it is difficult to make any overall comment about the standard. The responses mostly listed the characters who showed kindness towards one another. All showed a sound knowledge of the text and context.

#### **Q3 To Kill a Mockingbird: Scout**

This was a popular option for those writing in response to this novel and there were a number of candidates gaining full marks. Most candidates demonstrated an enthusiasm for the novel and explored a wide range of points about Scout and key episodes within the novel.

There was a smaller number of responses than normal; however, some were very confident and mature, discussing how Scout developed into a fully rounded character as the novel progressed. Many candidates noted how the child Scout appeared to represent Harper Lee and on the autobiographical nature of the novel. All candidates displayed a knowledge of the text and context was on the whole incorporated into the body of the responses. This was the more popular choice.

#### **Q4 Of Mice and Men: Memories**

The full range of marks was awarded for this question. Many candidates focussed on George and Lennie's memories and how George reminisces with Slim about the way he treated Lennie in the past.

This was the less popular option. However, there were some very confident and assured responses. In these, candidates discussed not only recent memories such as Weed, but also memories which Crooks had of his childhood and how these made him consider for a moment joining George and Lennie in their scheme to live off the 'fatta the land'. George's reminiscing to Slim was noted and how this led to his being in charge of Lennie. Curley's wife's dreams were noted and how they led to her bitterness, confiding in Lennie and ultimately resulting in her death. A few candidates commented on Candy's old sheepdog and the memories he had of it.

A number of candidates seemed to confuse the idea of memories with that of dreams and wrote about Lennie's and George's plans for a better life.

Most candidates were able to refer to some kind of context about the hardships the characters experienced. On the whole the responses seemed to divide into two

categories – the confident and assured ones and those within the lower band ranges.

#### **Q5 Of Mice and Men: the happiest character**

The majority of candidates chose to write about Lennie or Slim when choosing the character they felt was happiest. Some explored a range of characters, suggesting reasons why they could be deemed as happy and then deciding on which one is happiest. There was one candidate who even considered Carlson as the happiest character because he is so detached and shows no emotion in the novel.

There was evidence of some confusion about characters, such as getting Slim and Candy muddled or writing about one character and providing examples relevant to another.

The Senior Examiner commented:

'This was the more popular option and hence revealed a more diverse set of responses. Many noted that there were no really happy characters in the novel. One of the most popular choices was probably Slim, because of his self- assurance, kindness and wisdom. Many candidates noted that he appeared content with his life and this reflected in his calm and 'happy exterior'. The other character many candidates wrote about was Lennie. Most noted that this was because of his disabilities (perhaps centres could discourage such vocabulary as 'stupid') and hence his lack of perception as to how cruel and unfair society was. Most noted his innocence and lack of spite and anger. Many of the more confident noted how Lennie died happy, as he was at that moment thinking of the farm and his rabbits.'

A few candidates failed to read the question and task in hand, and wrote about more than one character. In fact, these were simply a recount of the major characters and their levels of happiness. Possibly there may have been a sentence at the end noting, for example: of all the characters I think Lennie is the happiest. As a result, there was no in-depth analysis of one character.

Most candidates were able to include context in their responses. The more confident incorporated the ideas of the dream, the realities of the depression and the overall atmosphere on the ranch into the body of their responses.

#### **Q6 (locations) and Q7 (Kahu) in *The Whale Rider***

The responses to this novel were mostly very successful. Most opted to answer Question 7, the ways in which Kahu is significant in the novel, and demonstrated an assured understanding of the novel by including references to specific small details when covering a wide variety of points, including gender, equality, hope and survival.

#### **Q8 (Jing-mei Woo) and Q9 (language barriers) in *The Joy Luck Club***

Very few responses were seen for either of these questions; however, those who did respond provided detailed and often sustained or assured responses.

In some responses, the lack of specific details hindered progress. For example, when referring to specific examples not including the characters' names – such as a comment about a 'mother grieving the loss of her child' and the father who wants his wife's words translating. Here the candidate was referring to Ying-ying and Clifford,

but the lack of finer detail hindered progress. There were some generalised points and some responses not explicitly dealing with the question.

### **Q10 *Things Fall Apart*: one interesting character**

This was the more popular option. Although there were few responses. Most candidates opted for Okonkwo or his son, Nwoye. Candidates discussed the warrior-like aspect of the main character and then his downfall, and analysed the reasons for this. Candidates who wrote about Nwoye discussed his relationship with his father and his subsequent rebellion and the reasons for it.

Context was, on the whole, successfully included in the responses. Candidates discussed the masculine and feminine aspects of Okonkwo's character, his desire to be different from his father whom he considered to be a wastrel, and why his death was so abominable in the eyes of society. The effects of the introduction of Christianity were noted and how these affected the characters.

### **Q11 *Things Fall Apart*: Death**

There were very few responses to this question; however, responses were often thoughtful and detailed, demonstrating a thorough or assured knowledge of the novel. Points included: the death of Umuofia and other villages, the deaths of various clansmen and other villagers; the murder of Ikemefuna; the accidental death of Ezeudu's son; the death of the white man riding his bicycle and, finally, some detailed coverage of Okonkwo's death at the end of the novel.

In comparison with previous series, the Prose (Novels) questions performed in a similar way. The full range of marks was awarded, particularly for the most popular texts. The questions followed a similar style and there were no new phrases or alternative wording to the questions.

In summary, and as mentioned in previous series, when responding to Modern Prose, candidates should remember to:

- 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**

Once again, the responses are always a pleasure to mark and have, once again, been very enjoyable to read.

Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates for the examination. As always, we very much hope that you will continue to deliver this specification and that you and your students are delighted with results.

Do look at our website for more details about the Summer 2022 examinations and for the latest COVID-19 updates.

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