

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
in English Literature (4ET0)  
Paper 02

Edexcel Certificate  
in English Literature (KET0)  
Paper 02

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## **Introduction**

This series has, once again, been very successful, with a record number of entries this January. We should like to thank all centres for their hard work in preparing their candidates for the examination.

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.

## **Section A**

The majority of the feedback received has been very positive. Across Section A and Section B a full range of marks has been awarded, although there were fewer examples of full Level 5 achievement. Responses varied from very brief and basic to developed, assured and perceptive. Overall, some examiners reported that the quality of responses across the paper did not seem as good as previous series, with some noticeably weaker answers. In some instances, the responses to the taught poems in Section B tended to be stronger than Section A. Examiners offered positive feedback about the paper and the choice of unseen materials. Compared with the previous series it was evident that students had studied the *Anthology* in some detail, but for Question 4 they sometimes struggled to find a second poem linked to the focus on children.

For this series, there were considerably more responses to the unseen poem than there were to the unseen extract, and while the examining team attempted to award the full range of marks, the higher end of Level 5 were not seen, often due to the lack of close analysis and supporting examples, particularly at word level. Students appear to be more confident when applying what they have been taught to the unseen poetry question. Some students had not read the materials closely enough and had misunderstood the ideas in the texts, or had not supported their ideas with relevant examples. Some responses only dealt with a couple of examples from the poem and had not explored the full poem in enough detail. This was also the case for the prose extract.

Some students again in this series confused their terms and considered the extract as a poem, and thought that the friends in the extract were children. Students did struggle to comment on structure and form in the prose extract, but some referred to timescale; narrative form; syntax and use of repetition in order to address this bullet in the question.

**Question 1 Unseen Poem: *The Wild Swans at Coole* by W.B. Yeats**  
***How does the poet convey his feelings about the swans in this poem?***

The unseen poetry responses were very varied and, in some cases, not as well approached as previous series. Marks awarded tended to be in Levels 1-4, with fewer marks awarded in Level 5. A lot of the answers focused solely on the fact that the writer 'loves' the swans and there were many responses where the same examples were used from the poem, for example 'brilliant creatures', 'Mysterious, beautiful' and 'clamorous wings'. Those achieving marks in the higher levels provided some close analysis of language and demonstrated some depth of understanding about a connection to relationships. Some students focussed only on examples of description of the swans and thus left the rest of the poem. Some students included a detailed exploration of poetic devices and explained how and why they had been used, for example alliteration, metaphor, use of adjectives. There was some confusion about terminology, for example 'mirrors a still sky' identified as an example of personification. It was good to see 'the effect on the reader' commented upon in order to establish connections, although sometimes in a general sense, for example 'to show the poet's thoughts and feelings'. Students gaining marks in the higher levels were able to demonstrate mainly effective responses which demonstrated focus and engagement with the text, although the potential underlying meaning was not explored in great detail. Likewise the students who gained marks in Level 2 could illustrate that they understood something about the ideas and language techniques and were able to show some engagement. Where responses were not so strong, they lacked supporting evidence or had only discussed selected parts of the poem. In the lower levels students were talking about the form and structure only at the level of length of stanzas and rhyme scheme and did not consider *how* or *why* this may have been used.

The vast majority of students had managed to read the whole poem, seen in comments on the final section, and the use of a rhetorical question. All students appeared to respond to the description of the swans, but only some were aware of the ideas of relationships. Most responded to the images of the 'brilliant creatures', 'their clamorous wings', 'Mysterious, beautiful', 'the bell-beat of their wings'. Some students explored the contrast between the peaceful setting of 'autumn beauty' and the noisy movement of the swans. Students were aware of structure in poetry, commenting on stanzas, rhyme, rhyming couplets, rhetorical question, but few students developed points in terms of the question. For example, at lower levels students were commenting that a rhyme scheme shows peace, organisation, structure or that short stanzas show the size of the swans. Specific points include:

- the use of contrast in 'still sky' and the scattering of the swans
- 'clamorous wings' image
- the use of adjectives like 'brilliant', 'Mysterious, beautiful'
- the change between the first count and now
- image of the writer's heart 'my heart is sore'
- the image of how the swans 'Delight men's eyes'.

Areas not commented on particularly were: 'scatter wheeling in great broken rings', 'Trode with a lighter tread' and the ideas in stanza 4.

Other comments from examiner reports:

"Most candidates were able to pick out Yeats' admiration or love of the swans and backed this up with quotations, apart from those working at Level 1. Most noticed how often he came to Coole. More able candidates picked out the swans' mystery as well and made something of their white colour - some even linking this to angels or heavenly bodies. Most could identify with 'sore' and at least make a point on his sadness which often gained marks in the higher levels. Most could also make links to human relationships inferring that he had loved and lost, linking this to 'their hearts have not grown old.'"

"At the lower levels, candidates were able to pick out and respond to key images or experiences and were able to connect the poem and the subject of the question."

"It was good to see a structured approach to writing about the poem in most cases. Less able candidates found it harder to comment well on language or structure, but seemed aware that this was something they should do."

"At the higher levels - candidates had plenty to discuss and found opportunities to use terminology when identifying the poet's craft."

"At all levels few candidates saw this as simply a descriptive or narrative poem and they usually offered interpretations. Quite a number had looked for a change of attitude or feeling in the poem."

**Question: 2 Unseen Prose: *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome**  
***Explain how the writer presents the friends' experiences of the evening and their meeting with the fishermen in this extract.***

The prose extract did not produce many very strong responses. There were mostly marks being awarded across Levels 1 to 3 with a few in the higher levels. This question was not as popular as Question 1 and in many cases not as successful. Most students understood the events of the passage and the change before and after the collision, but did not pick up the humour and irony. Many students responded to the description of the 'mystic light' and many commented on the simile of the men 'like knights of some old legend'. In most cases students were able to comment on some language features, for example:

- imagery to describe the setting before the collision; 'mystic light', 'golden glory', 'deep enchantment'
- alliteration in 'golden glory'
- the personification of the twilight 'wrapping the world in rainbow shadows'
- the use of adverbs, for example 'slowly', 'painfully', 'carefully-thought-out'

- the descriptions of the reactions of the old men 'vexed and discontented', 'they cursed us'.

There was limited comment on form and structure with some making reference to it starting before the collision and ending after it. There were some references to short sentences like 'I was steering' but not much on structure highlighted. Form was often limited to first person narrative. Many students did not understand the 'comprehensive curses' given to the three men by the old men they had collided with, or the contrast between the language before they hit the boat and the language after it, 'we went slap into that punt'.

Other comments from examiners' reports:

"Most responses used the question which helped guide them through the extract so something was said about the boys, mainly on the river alone, the setting and then meeting with the old men. It was a pity at the lower levels that students could paraphrase their way through the extract showing some understanding and some personal response but did not use a single quotation!"

"Most could pick out something to say about the scene, lots felt it had a fairy tale atmosphere which was a nice summing up. Most had the idea of boys on an adventure; better answers had the idea of a quest and even better reverie. Others looked at the sense of isolation. Again many used 'red sunset'; some just said this shows danger or passion with no exploration. Others explored the danger and linked it to the crash, but even better was the foreshadowing of the crash. This is a good example of just linking a technique with a language point without labouring it. Likewise the personification of 'behind them crept the night' suggests a hint of the danger to come. Another lovely embedded technique "almost oxymoronic rainbow shadows" and linked to the mystic atmosphere. I loved the idea that the three men appear almost like ghosts in the magical land and mystical things must not be believed as all sunsets draw to night."

"I didn't come across any answers which discussed the humour. Some got a bit bogged down in the curses and how this was not a good example to the boys and that the men shouldn't have done it. Many used the 'I was steering' as an example of structure with varying degrees of success. Some said this showed he was to blame, better was this hinted at what was to come."

### **Section B Poetry Anthology**

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 3 was more popular. This could have been due to the fact that students did not have to decide on another poem to comment on.

### **Question 3:**

#### ***Show how memories are conveyed in Piano and My Last Duchess.***

Of Section B these were by far the more popular and mixed responses. The comments on memories in *Piano* were more successful than on *My Last Duchess*. There were some specific comments on language but in many cases, as in previous series, students often failed to comment on structure and form and this seemed odd since they were prepared for these poems. Possibly a deeper understanding of the language and themes almost distracted them from remembering to comment on the structure and form. The choice of the poem *Piano* was sound as all students could link this poem to memories. Responses here were very varied. Stronger responses focussed on the mood created by words or phrases. Many students able to discuss some of the features of sound in the poem like 'boom of the tingling strings'. Weaker students missed the idea that the woman singing is not the poet's mother. There were some interesting ideas of 'insidious' meaning something supernatural or evil and many students commented on 'the vista of years' linking to memory. There were very few comments on the final section of the poem other than how he weeps 'like a child for the past'. Although many students commented generally about enjambement, a large number of students failed to read the poem according to its syntax rather than its line break.

Comments on *My Last Duchess* were not as strong as those on *Piano*. Responses here were less technically focussed – looking at the poem more holistically in terms of memories, with some students struggling to link the poem to the question. Many students were able to engage with the image of the duchess 'Looking as if she were alive' as a positive memory, but in the main comments on the rich language of the poem were limited to particular sections. For example, 'She thanked men, — good!' and '...The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)'. Comment on structure tended to be limited to 'it is all one long stanza' or that one was 'a long poem' and the other was 'short'. In most cases this was not linked back to the question.

There were far fewer rubric infringements seen than in previous series and years, although where they appeared it was more that students had not commented on *My Last Duchess* or had very limited comment on it. Different approaches had been employed, either by analysing the poems separately or by comparison (which is not a requirement). In some cases the comparison inhibited more specific comment on language, structure and form, although connections were made.

Other comments from examiners' reports:

"Lots of responses were showing some understanding or better, even those limited to a mark in Level 1 were there because of only writing about one poem, no quotations or just a line on each but even here they demonstrated they had heard of the poems! There were fewer one poem only answers this time round."

"Virtually all students could say something on the music [*Piano*] taking him back to his childhood and that he loved his mum. Much was made of 'my

manhood is cast down' and crying. More able candidates saw the memories as bitter sweet. A lot saw the nostalgia or poignancy in the poem. I noticed quotes were quite long e.g. 'in spite of....weeps' (in full) and then the explanation was brief 'shows he has been taken back to his childhood'. Very, very few chose key words within the quote to explore, even most able students - I was shouting out for them to look at 'betrays' and 'insidious'! Likewise some pointed out the rhyme of clamour/glamour but did nothing with them. A lot chose 'flood of remembrance' and said this shows how much he was crying as floods have lots of water, but others did point out the rush of memories and best that he had no control over the memories."

"Structure was handled better here with most spotting enjambement and saying something on effect. I liked 'lines flow like the melody on the piano'. Most used onomatopoeia and could see the contrast between 'boom' and 'tingling'. I liked the reference to 'tingling' with the music 'tingling' his skin, giving him goose bumps. Some unusual interpretations were seen - some students commented that the lines looking like piano keys and even a heart rate monitor."

"My Last Duchess - The students all got the idea of the Duke looking back and so it was his memories of her. Better answers used the dramatic monologue here to emphasise the one sided nature of it. Most chose a couple of points plus quotes to show his feelings and so could access the higher levels. Most focused on her smiling at other men, taking gifts and equating them with his and his giving commands equalled killing her (they liked that!). More sustained answers picked up on jealousy and possessiveness with apt quotation. The better responses picked up everything such as: narrative switches between present and memory suggesting the memory is a story. Also, I think one centre had obviously looked at the historical content and this crept in, some just touching on it, which is fine, but one did half a page which I couldn't really reward and would have taken up time detracting from analysis. The personal response in the best responses was given as they went along. "

#### **Question 4**

#### ***How are children presented in Hide and Seek and one other poem from the Anthology?***

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 4 was not as popular. This could have been due to the fact that students had to choose another poem to comment on.

There was overall some understanding of both content and the techniques used in *Hide and Seek* and the link to children. Strong responses analysed the change in mood, and the importance of the game to a child. Some responses had completely misunderstood the poem. There were some interesting responses where students thought the poem was a metaphor for a soldier in hiding and made links to the poet's own wartime experiences, whereas others understood the poem as a metaphor for life and the change from being a child to being an adult.

As with Question 3, the handling of form and structure was often disappointing in that there was some mention of stanzas and the presence or otherwise of rhyming patterns, but comment was often minimal as to how these contributed to the thoughts and feelings in the text. There was a lot of comment on how the structure of the verses was linked to the meaning of the poem. Best answers suggested the change of structure and loss of rhyme at the end of *Hide and Seek* reflect the surprise and disappointment when the child emerges. The most disappointing aspect was the formulaic phrasing in students' answers and the literal point, evidence, explain interpretations. For example, 'When he said "long time since he went away. Your legs are stiff" this tells the reader that he has been hiding for a very long time and his legs are stiff'.

What worked well for this question is the choice for students to demonstrate their knowledge of the Anthology poems and the choice of their own poem. However, for this question the poem selected required a link to the presentation of children. The choices of poem to comment on alongside *Hide and Seek* were quite broad, for example *If*, *Prayer Before Birth*, *Poem at Thirty-Nine*, *Once Upon a Time*, *Mother in a Refugee Camp* and *Piano*. The most popular second poem was *Half-past Two*. This worked well for the responses seen and offered the most evidence to link to the question. Some other poems selected were not helpful in making the link to the question, for example *Poem at Thirty-Nine*, *Once Upon a Time* and *If*.

One of the typical downfalls present in Section B is the lack of explicit structure and form commentary. Students are very good at language skills, but are not commenting meaningfully on structure and form, which is an important area to demonstrate in the examination. It appeared that this question was generally not as well done as Question 3 because responses could be lengthy but not always relevant, for example students were distracted into talking about the context of the poems and what the stories behind the poems were about rather than their structure, technique or language use, or anything related to the actual question.

There was much description of what is happening in *Hide and Seek* and *Half-past Two*. Where students were less successful, literary devices had either been identified without explanation or were simply listed. The ability to examine the writer's methods and to connect these with the question and with the ideas and feelings in the poems were often the most successful responses. It was good to see some candidate's referring to the effect on the reader, as this enables students to engage more with the effect of the language, structure and form.

Students 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. As with Question 3, different approaches had been employed, either by analysing the poems separately or by comparison (which is not a requirement). In some cases the comparison inhibited more specific comment on language, structure and form, although connections were made.

Again, there were few rubric infringements, although where they appeared it was more that too much time had been spent on *Hide and Seek*.

Other comments from examiners' reports:

"What a variety of answers! A wide variety of second poems were seen. Teamed with *If-*, *Once upon a time*, *Prayer Before Birth*, *A Mother in a Refugee Camp*, *Poem at 39*, *Remember-* seduced by the clue in the title, and in one unusual case, *Tyger*. *Hide and Seek* was often the most successful choice and it allowed candidates to show understanding on many levels. They all picked out his wanting to win and back this up with apt evidence; most could track the difference in tone in beginning and end, picking up on the personification. Most could talk about his excitement with evidence."

"Better answers explored isolation, some used the change between the innocence of childhood and adulthood and others saw it of not taking opportunities in life when they came along, all backed up well. Some lovely personal response too: won the game but lost at life, seekers are those who live life to the full, hollow victory, he may have won the battle but lost the war or his friends in this case and so on. Even references to free verse were usually backed up with some effect, such as follows his child- like train of thought."

"The vast majority chose an apt poem and followed the two or three quotations and explanation route. Most had a balanced response though there were a few with lots on *Hide and Seek* and maybe ran out of time for the second. I felt *If-* didn't work as well, as they struggled with the question but the others were fine. Those on *Half-past Two* got the compound words and fairy tale like speech; one even likened it to a nursery rhyme. Lots used the personification of the clock, enjambement and their effects."

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this has been a very successful paper and a full range of marks has been awarded across all questions, with many candidates gaining full marks. 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 enjambement, but comment was often minimal as to how these contributed to the thoughts and feelings in the text.

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.

Thank you.

## **Grade Boundaries**

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

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