

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

International GCSE English Literature
(4ET0) Paper 2

Level 1/Level 2 Edexcel Certificate in
English Literature (KET0) Paper 2

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Introduction

There are two sections in the exam paper, equally weighted. In Section A, students have a choice between the unseen poem and the unseen prose extract. In Section B, they can choose Q3 which has two named poems or Q4, in which one poem is named and the student 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 seemed to be stronger than the taught poems in Section B.

Section A

Careful close reading of the unseen poem or extract is essential in this part of the paper. Some students had not read the materials closely enough or had not supported their ideas with relevant examples from the text.

Q1

The unseen poem was *Island Man* by Grace Nichols. The question asked students to consider how the poet creates a sense of place in the poem. A range of responses were seen, but on the whole most students were able to show some understanding of the poem. The students gaining marks in the higher levels were able to demonstrate effectively, very perceptive responses which demonstrated clear focus and engagement with the text. Likewise for the students who were at the lower levels, they too could illustrate that they understood something and were able to show some engagement.

Weaker students struggled to identify the distinction between the dream world and reality. This resulted in some trying to treat the two locations as one (usually London). Hence the 'fishermen pushing out to sea' were London commuters and the phrase 'blue surf' meant that the man was living near the Thames. Other students began writing without having fully understood the meaning of the poem and then adapted their responses dramatically as realisation dawned.

There were some very perceptive responses to this poem. Where students clearly understood the content and topic – that someone has moved from home, and is dreaming of home while waking to London – clear analysis seemed to follow. There was generally a good level of response to the word 'Emerald', and its connotations when analysing language.

The layout of 'Groggily, groggily' and 'Another London day' were topics for a structural response, as was the contrast between 'emerald' and 'dull'. Where students did not score well, it was usually when there was a lack of understanding of the poem's content, which limited ability to write about how ideas are presented. A number of students identified that 'he always comes back groggily groggily' was the 'pivotal point' of the poem.

Some students were unable to understand that there are two different locations in the poem or that the first part is a dream, which was a good indicator of whether or not they achieved Level 3 or above. Very few, however, even among strong students, were alert to the idea that the island of which 'Island Man' dreams may in fact be his old home and that the poem deals with migration. A few were confused by the footnote and thought it to be part of the poem. Many students seem to be unaware of the tradition of dub poetry or any other poetry that dispenses with punctuation and made much of that as a feature, talking

about the poem being written in 'one sentence' when in fact there are clear syntactical breaks. Really good responses were able to read into the maritime metaphors in the description of London. Only a few students analysed the layout in an assured or perceptive way.

Q2

The unseen prose extract was taken from *The Kettle on the Boat* by Vanessa Gebbie.

Most examiners commented on some excellent responses seen for this extract. Students were able to show that they could engage with the text and relate to the techniques used to present suspense and tension. Students of differing abilities were able to illustrate understanding through the use of a variety of evidence.

In many respects this seemed to be the more successful of the two unseen questions in that there seemed to be something for all students to access. The vast majority of students achieved, at the very least, a basic understanding of the passage and thus were able to respond appropriately according to their abilities. Complete misreadings were rare.

Although this extract seemed to be superficially simple, it elicited some very strong responses, particularly when discussing how the child narrator's limited viewpoint helped to create tension as her knowledge is also ours. Students also picked up on the curt responses of the father and the evasion of the mother fairly consistently. There was, however, a noted tendency for students to mention that short sentences created tension, but without any analysis of how this technique created tension. On the whole, students fully understood the extract, which allowed them to then evaluate its techniques and their effect. Strong responses made use of the cracked window, the weather, the slip on the ladder or the 'hard, cold' hand of the unnamed woman as symbolism to aid their analysis.

A large proportion of the students, even those who produced Level 3 or 4 answers, did not understand what an 'extract' is. Many insisted on calling it a 'poem' and some even analysed it as such. Perhaps because of the words 'short story' in the italics, many thought that they were dealing with the entire text and analysed the ending of the extract as if it were the final part of a piece of flash fiction.

Section B

Of the two Anthology questions, Q3 was the more popular and was often the most successful option for students. Some students struggled with the understanding of the poems other than at face value which, at times, was not actually accurate.

The two poems do not have to be compared, but there should be some balance in the treatment of the two.

As these were poems that students should have previously studied, it became evident that they had not spent enough time studying them in preparation for the examination. Some students made a genuine attempt to answer a Section B question, but responses suggested that these poems had not been taught, and were being attempted as unseen texts.

Q3

This question asked students to consider how childhood is presented in *Half-past Two* and *Hide and Seek*.

It was certainly not unusual to find students who had coped in a more accomplished manner with the unseen passages than they did with the taught Poetry Anthology. Although there was no requirement to compare and contrast the poems, a considerable majority of students did so. Most students did demonstrate some understanding of the poems, but the depth and scope of the responses varied considerably.

Where students had studied these poems, there was consistent understanding of both content and the techniques used. Comments for *Half-past Two* tended to focus on the lack of spaces in the time phrases – that these revealed a child's understanding of time. More sophisticated answers were able to explore how the rigid structure created contrast with the freedoms of the 'clockless land of forever', and were representative of the artificial structure of time.

Hide and Seek responses were, on the whole, weaker. Stronger 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.

This was a much more popular question than Q4 presumably because the choice of poems was already presented. It was disappointing that with time to prepare, the quality of answers was overall probably lower than those encountered in Q1

and there were a number of basic misunderstandings. Many students were led astray explaining that the poems dealt with the theme of childhood, for example, 'I know that this is about childhood because it says "schooltime"' rather than how childhood is presented. The best responses were alert to the fact that Fantorpe romanticises the idea of 'escaping' time and often came up with an allegorical or symbolic interpretation of *Hide and Seek*, with suggestions that it represents growing up or loss of innocence. There was too much made of the structure of the verses somehow being integral to the meaning of the poem. Best answers suggested the regularity of the three-line stanzas in *Half-past Two* represent the regularity of time and the change of structure and loss of rhyme at the end of *Hide and Seek* reflect the surprise and disappointment when the boy emerges. However, most attempts to analyse 'structure' were much less convincing.

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' (sic).

Q4

For this question, students were asked to show how the poets convey their thoughts and feelings about memories in *Piano* and one other poem from the Anthology.

As with Q3 virtually all students chose effectively to write a critical comparison of *Piano* and their chosen poem. *Poem at Thirty-nine* was by far the most popular choice of a second poem, possibly because of ideas of bereavement. *Remember* and *Once Upon a Time* were also favoured by a significant number of students.

One examiner commented that "one student made a superb job of drawing parallels between *Piano* and *My Last Duchess*: A task which I mistakenly thought would prove insurmountable."

Generally there seemed to be more successful responses this time, particularly bearing in mind the time constraints; however, a few students struggled to cope in any meaningful fashion. Responses here were very varied. Stronger response focused on the mood created by words or phrases in *Piano* – especially the idea of protection from the winter outside. Many students seemed to understand Lawrence's poem as lyrical and were able to discuss some of the sound-features of the poem.

Weaker students missed the idea that the woman in the dusk singing is not Lawrence's mother. Very few students commented on the irony of the word 'glamour' to describe his childhood and the contrast between the homeliness of

his memory with the (past) tingling piano in the 'cosy parlour' and the grandness of the 'clamour' coming from the (present) 'great black piano appassionato'. Perhaps students are unaware that it was once normal for even ordinary families to have a piano at home. Although many students commented generally about 'enjambment', a large number of students failed to read the poem according to its syntax rather than its line break. This meant, for example, that many left Lawrence's manhood 'cast' rather than 'cast / down' and thus missed the meaning of the poem.

Some students thought that *Once Upon a Time* had no rhythm at all. In other selections, a few could see the differences as well as the similarities between Walker's character and that of her father's. Some thought that *Piano's* stanzas are of different lengths because of the run-over of the words 'strings' and 'sings' in the printing of the Anthology.

Conclusion

Where students were less successful, literary devices had either been identified without explanation or were simply listed. Greater success would be achieved if students 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 students' 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.

In many cases, more time needs to be given to the teaching of the Anthology poems in order to allow students the opportunity to access the full range of marks available.

There was evidence of accomplished work produced during the examination and some centres should be congratulated on the thorough preparation of their students.

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