

Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Literature (4ET0)
Paper 03

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Introduction

For the coursework one assignment is required, based on an in-depth study of three poems from the Anthology to at least three further poems which may be drawn from outside the Anthology.

Assignment topics are chosen by the centre/candidates but must enable candidates to respond critically and sensitively to a range of poems and to show understanding of how meanings and ideas are conveyed through language, structure and form. Assignments should allow the candidates to make comparisons but this is not compulsory.

There is no prescribed length.

General Comments

Assignment topics concentrated on the main themes of the Anthology poems: love, death, memories, childhood, adult children relationships, to name some, and these were all dealt with successfully by candidates at various levels. Candidates who tried to tackle multiple themes struggled with the amount of material required for more than one theme across detailed study on three Anthology poems and three wider reading poems.

Where responses were particularly focused was when the question itself had a clear focus. Some good examples of this type of task-setting would be: *How do the poets explore the themes of loss and suffering?*, or: *Several poems in the anthology present victims. Explore their presentation, referring to three poems in detail and to at least three other poems from your wider reading.*

Less successful responses were often as a result of an unfocused question. One centre just gave the title '*Manners*' as a base for discussion, whereas another had candidates trying to focus on two wide ranging topics: those of love and death. As a result, candidates struggled to produce focused responses. There were a few candidates who did not choose poems relevant to their topic and either strained to make links or abandoned the topic, at some point moving away from the requirements of the question. It is important that topics and selected poems are carefully matched.

The majority of candidates met the specification requirement of exploring three Anthology poems and three wider reading poems but a few did not and it was not always evident that the marks awarded took this omission into account. There was also some evidence that the wider reading poems were not chosen with suitable care and the choice and quality was poor. One centre included poems written by classmates and there was also evidence of poems randomly found on the internet.

Problems were caused by the balance between the attention paid to the Anthology poems and the wider reading. The specification requires in-depth exploration of the Anthology poems which are, after all, the set texts for this unit. An enthusiastic response to the chosen wider reading poems is to be welcomed, but not at the expense of the Anthology poems.

Similarly a comparative approach is admirable, but it must ensure that important ideas from the chosen Anthology poems are not missed, because they do not fit neatly in with the comparison. This can mean that the full picture of each poem is not given. There were many candidates who were successful in this approach, but there were also a fair number who were not.

Some candidates spent a long time describing the structure and rhyme scheme of their poems, but unfortunately for too many this appeared to be an end in itself with little or no attempt to associate it with the message of the poem. A holistic approach would ensure a deeper understanding of the themes. However, a totally empathic approach does not lend itself to deeper analysis either. There must be a balance.

A strength of the coursework was the use of quotation in writing about the poems and many candidates used this to lead into some precise analysis. There was, however, a tendency to let quotations speak for themselves or to simply label them with the relevant technical term without any analysis. For example, the following candidate noted when writing about *My Last Duchess* that the poem "(Is) in comparison to *Havisham* which is also a monologue but is much neater, and it put in to four stanzas. Neither poems are enthusiastic. Both use venomous language: "Just this and that in you disgusts me", " Wished him dead". This is quite a typical response in the 11-14 mark range. Other candidates will use comments such as 'paints a picture' or the 'makes it flow'.

Quite common also was the naming of a technique used in the structure and form of the poem with little or no reference to support the comments. The candidate whose work was awarded a mark of 19 discussed *Mother in a Refugee Camp*: "It is written in free verse, with no particular rhyme scheme. The stanza lengths vary. The first stanza is short compared to the other stanzas. There is enjambment used such as in the first stanza to produce the opening line of *Madonna and child*, emphasises the purity and love that the mother and child have and this makes the knowledge that the child is dying more poignant."

The same theme is presented by a candidate, whose work was awarded top marks, who does not resort to technical detail. "In the first line of the poem, 'No Madonna and Child could touch/ Her tenderness for a son', Achebe compares the relationship between the mother and her son to the religious epitome of the Madonna and her child, which emphasises the pure and unconditional love the woman has for her child, and how this ultimate relationship rivals the tenderness of Mary."

This analysis fulfils the criteria for the top band and there is obviously a range of responses between the two. However, there was a tendency to over-reward, and sometimes quite substantially at the 18/19 and 22/23 borderlines. There was also some reluctance on the part of some centres to award the highest grade when the work merited it, as if these centres were assuming that a highest grade must represent a 'perfect' answer – whereas the mark scheme does not require that.

With regard to administration, moderators do have to check the candidates' names, numbers and marks against the mark sheets, so it is essential that the folder cover sheet is fastened on the very top of the folder and not underneath

the CAS. It is also helpful if the moderators received copies of the non-Anthology poems, however well-known.

All the moderators without exception commented how rewarding it was to see the strong personal involvement of the candidates with the poems and how they enjoyed reading some of the interesting interpretations of the Anthology poetry.

Grade Boundaries

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