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Examiner Report

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In English Language and Literature (9EL03)
Unit 3: Investigating and Creating Texts

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Principal Moderator Report For GCE English Language And Literature Coursework 9ELO/03

General comments: There was much to enjoy in this year's submissions and it was encouraging to see that centres who were familiar with the legacy syllabus had used much good practice from that specification and that new centres had used the opportunity to give their candidates room to express themselves and follow their own interests and enthusiasms.

The best work was, as ever, of an exceptionally high standard and moderators were unanimous in their praise of some truly outstanding work. Candidates who had followed their own path in terms of setting themes and conducting extensive research and wider reading were rewarded with very good marks and it was clear that they were engaged by the whole process. Many candidates used their other A level subjects as the starting point for their explorations and Psychology topped the list of favourite subjects from which to draw ideas. History, Philosophy and Ethics, Theatre Studies and Music all provided some inspiration for a significant number of students. There was a small number of almost identical submissions from a few centres and these seemed hampered by lack of individuality and enthusiasm.

There was a clear correlation between the quality of research and wider reading and the overall success of submissions. Candidates who had a secure understanding of the requirements of genre, purpose and audience were able to produce convincing writing and comment on it in an analytical and reflective manner. Many candidates were able to produce high quality writing but were unable to match this with detailed commentaries. Centres should not regard the commentaries as the poor relation of the writing: moderators want to see a clear connection between the two parts of the folder and to be able to see how the candidate has arrived at their finished pieces.

Many candidates were less successful in the non-fiction section as they had not spent sufficient time considering the exact nature of their chosen genre or who might be reading their work, or why the work had been produced in the first place. This lack of generic understanding also directly affected the quality of many commentaries. All-purpose references to "articles", "broadsheet articles" or "editorials" often revealed a lack of any idea about what they were writing. However, there were many pieces which surpassed the number of marks available and had moderators clutching at superlatives.

Themes and core texts: Many centres used the original specification suggestions for themes but others (the majority) had encouraged candidates to develop their own themes, ranging from explorations of identity to society's attitudes towards a variety of issues such as gender and race.

The most popular core fiction text was probably "The Kite Runner," although "A Thousand Splendid Suns", "The Handmaid's Tale", "Frankenstein", "Dracula" and "Nineteen Eighty Four" were also used frequently. Some candidates had used other titles by the authors of their exam texts, so "Death of a Salesman" "Tender

is the Night" and a number of Shakespeare plays were featured. "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest," "The Collector" and "Regeneration" continued to be popular. Shirley Jackson's stories also provided an excellent stimulus.

There was a similar range of non-fiction texts, although some candidates seem to have read a few journalistic articles, rather than complete texts. (This approach was sometimes self-penalising as many candidates struggled to deal with the precise requirements of some non-fiction genres.) Popular choices included work by Michael Moore, Naomi Wolf and Naomi Klein. "Night" by Elie Wiesel, "The Motorcycle Diaries," "Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal?" and the anthology "Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs" all featured in many bibliographies.

Tasks:

FICTION: One of the most encouraging aspect of this year's submissions was the range of narrative approaches, with some interesting experiments in form, including multiple and unreliable narrators as well epistolary and fragmented forms. A few candidates submitted play and film scripts and the most successful of these were supported by detailed commentaries discussing the creation of voice, with plenty of lessons learned from 9ELO/01. In contrast, excessive dialogue in more traditional narratives was often a weakness. A few candidates submitted poems, although they struggled to discuss aspects of poetic form in their commentaries; as a rule, candidates should be discouraged from offering poems for this reason.

NON-FICTION: Just as many candidates were happy to experiment with unusual and original approaches to fiction, so too with non-fiction. The best work here showed a clear sense of generic conventions, precise awareness of purpose and an ability to shape work to meet the requirements of often multiple audiences. The range of work included heart-felt polemics about attitudes to mental health issues and disability, as well as some excellent work inspired by family histories. Humour was often successfully deployed, inspired by writers such as Charlie Brooker, although it is worth pointing out that these approaches are often harder than they first appear, and a number of candidates who tried to imitate Bill Bryson and Caitlin Moran did nothing of the sort. However, the best work was able to find an appropriate tone.

There was, inevitably, some variation in the interpretation of what constitutes non-fiction. Candidates who offer travelogues are advised to clarify in their commentaries the nature of the journey undertaken as it was often not clear whether the candidate had undertaken the journey or had simply read widely and imitated style models. Some candidates are still offering non-fiction articles such as editorials and stories from the First World War or the 1930s, although

there has been copious advice on this in previous moderator reports. If in doubt, centres should consult the Coursework Advisory Service for clarification.

Many candidates offered broadsheet articles and editorials but these were often nothing more than essays, with little sense of genre and audience or even an understanding of what a broadsheet is, or that different papers have different readerships. However, it is worth pointing out that the best work in this style was very successful and often achieved full marks.

It was pleasing to see many candidates submitting work based on personal interviews and research and these were often highly successful.

Commentaries: The best work in this section was reflective, evaluative and analytical and centres had often used the extra word limit to develop discussion of context and the influence of stimulus texts and, also, to provide a clear rationale for the thematic and stylistic choices made. Candidates should avoid lengthy analysis of core texts, but should use examples to illustrate their own shaping of texts. Weak commentaries often described the content of work or quoted at length without developed analysis at either word, sentence or whole text level. Conclusions about particular choices were often limited to superficial references about making the work easy to relate or making the reader want to read on.

The best discussions were aware of linguistic nuances and the ways that specific language choices might subtly affect a reader's response.

Bibliographies: These should follow the style model in the board's coursework guidance. The Harvard method is a very good way to ensure consistency. Candidates should include references to films, plays and articles, as well as the traditional fiction and non-fiction examples.

Presentation of work: Overall, there was a high standard of presentation, although it is still surprising to receive what can only be described as scruffy work, which seems to have been rushed and carelessly produced.

Candidates should use appropriate fonts (Times New Roman, Calibri or Arial) or font sizes (12 is recommended.) The work should also be spaced, preferably at 1.5.

Work should be printed single-sided and held together with a treasury tag. There is no need to staple work together.

There is no need to set out articles in columns although generic features of film and play scripts are needed. As a rule, candidates should present the work as it would initially be submitted rather than the final presentation.

ASSESSMENT: Comments from moderators suggest that most centres were able to award marks according to the level descriptors. There was sometimes a tendency to over-reward observational commentaries, which simply listed many linguistic or literary features, and carelessly proofread folders were sometimes treated generously in terms of AO1. Most folders kept to the recommended word counts and candidates should be reminded that self-editing and drafting are essential requirements across the assessment objectives.

There was much evidence of rigorous internal moderation and centres should annotate the work as thoroughly as possible and use this process as a means of clarifying decisions about the marking process. Many centres provided their own additional front sheets and these were very helpful for moderators.

EXEMPLARS

The following examples are intended to illustrate best practice and to illustrate what can realistically be achieved.

EXAMPLE A: This is an example of the opening of a dramatic monologue, clearly inspired by Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*.

A Modern Touch

JANET, AN ELDERLY WOMAN, ENTERS A FLAT LIVING ROOM. SIMPLE, TIDY FURNISHINGS HIGHLIGHT A FLAT-SCREEN TELEVISION. SHE PUTS DOWN HER HANDBAG AND SWITCHES ON A SHINY NEW KETTLE FROM AN OPEN PLAN KITCHEN. LATE AFTERNOON.

Quite the eventful few days. See, Karen, manages the local Oxfam, says to me, 'Janet,' she says, 'Don't you think it about time you took up a more interesting hobby, like crochet or oil painting?' I say, 'Why's that?' She says, 'Well, Janet, it's just that we have quite a few younger volunteers and, you know Janet, we need to give them the opportunity.' Of course I know exactly why she's saying this to me, it's because they got that new cash register machine, the one which doesn't have a keyboard; not like that huge box you needed to hit to make the drawer open, much flashier and more modern. She was talking about getting one for months, kept reminding me, so what I did was to get one of those new 'Apple' phones, just to prove to her I could operate a touchable screen. When I got it, Harold from two doors down said, 'Funny, I'n't it, how they keep naming these new things after fruit? Apples, blackberries, raspberries, pretty soon they'll have to star' going for things like mangoes and coconu's!' *(Laughs)* But it's awfully ritzy; I always make sure it just pokes out of my handbag when I go to the village hall WI meetings, and people always want to see, so I show it to them and they say, 'Well, Janet, giving yourself an update are you?' I'm pretty sure they're taking to the idea, Madge showed me her new Mo-to-ro-la last week. Never heard of that fruit...

HER PHONE TIMER GOES OFF, SIGNALLING HER TO REMOVE THE TEABAG.

Moderator's comments: This is a very good example of using a specific genre and creating a new text. The candidate has established the character's idiolect and constructed the text in a subtle and moving manner.

EXEMPLAR B: This is the opening of a narrative using diaries to structure the narrative.

Monday 25th October

Dear Diary,

Woke up 24 minutes early this morning so took the liberty of treating myself to a brisk morning jog. Got quite sweaty and felt gross for the whole day at work. Won't do that again. Successfully participated in meetings with three of my most important clients today. The briefs are complex yet attainable, completely within my reach. Made myself a vegetable stir fry for dinner. (Trying to be healthy). Sat designing in the evening whilst Tom read the paper. He finished the cryptic crossword in 4 minutes 36 seconds. Impressive. He's catching up with me. Watered the plants before bed.

- Note to self: practise cryptic crosswords
- Note to self: find out how often orchids need watering

Moderator's comments: Although this is less ambitious than the previous example, it does show that the candidate has attempted to create a specific narrative voice.

EXEMPLAR C: This is the end an extract from a prequel to *The Stepford Wives*.

The town of Stepford was an outwardly unremarkable one. Its buildings were old-fashioned; rows of white shop fronts framed the streets, a grocer, a butcher, and a boutique. Yet Charlotte Coba was fascinated by the town's architecture – it was a huge leap from Anaheim, California after all. The following Saturday, Charlotte set up her tripod on the library lawn, snapping black and white photos of the town's tranquil routine. She dreamed of selling her photographs for thousands of dollars and she hoped that in the future her work would change the world. Nevertheless, in the meantime, in Stepford, she'd have to settle for little more than images of housewives on their weekly grocery shop, aimlessly pushing their strollers towards the next store, hoping naively to find some excitement along the way. As Charlotte gazed around for something more eye-catching to shoot, her eyes fell on a solitary parked car in the alleyway down the

street. Mrs Coba sat in the driver's seat, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, staring vacantly ahead. All the life had left her eyes. It was as if the cogs in her head had stopped turning. Charlotte rushed over.

"Mother? Mother!" she called, and shook Mrs Coba fiercely. But there was no reaction. As she leaned in closer, the overwhelming stench of lavender perfume battered her senses, violently choking her. Mrs Coba smiled, baring her perfect pearly white teeth. Charlotte stumbled backwards in shock. Mrs Coba turned her head towards her.

"Hello, sweetie," she smiled. "Would you like me to drive you home?"

Moderator's comments: This is a controlled and assured piece of writing which has been carefully crafted, using a third person point of view.

EXEMPLAR D: This is an example of a non-fiction article which uses research and interviews to present the topic of female suppression.

Society's Shame: the problems faced by girls who are forced to marry has hardly changed in the last 70 years.

In the wake of the International Day of the Girl, ***** finds out about her own grandmother's fall from grace.

When my grandmother, *****, was very young, she was a lively girl who enjoyed staying with her relatives in Goa. However, when she returned to her parents' home in East Africa, she was soon forced to get married to a stranger; a man who was twice her age.

She was just 15 when she got married. Yet, she still considers herself lucky; she knew girls much younger than she was, who got married to men much older than her husband.

Every two seconds a girl becomes a child bride.

1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married before 18; 1 in 9 are married before the age of 15.

It was only when gathering research that I discovered my grandmother's story. It was a tacit rule in our household that we never spoke about my grandmother's first marriage, but I always knew about it; we knew that it was a time in her life that she wanted to forget. However, whilst discussing the editorial I was writing, my Grandmother felt that it was finally time that I found

out the truth about what had happened to her so that I could understand how little had changed for girls in her lifetime.

Girls living in poor households are almost twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls in higher income households.

***** speaks in a factual tone about her wedding day: 'It was a large celebration, with lots of family and friends', but she also explains how she was, 'too nervous and too scared' about meeting her groom to enjoy her wedding. Her fears only increased when she saw him and realised she was marrying someone twice her age.

***** gave her father the equivalent of £100 in East African shillings. She was sold to him. She became his property. She was shocked that 'all that mattered to (her) father was the money.' She hoped he would be kind; but she would soon learn how cruel he was. A study conducted by ICRW found that girls who were married before 18 were twice as likely to report being threatened by their husbands than girls who married later on. It seems that little has changed since my grandmother got married when she was just 15.

***** explained how her wedding night was one of many painful nights spent in fear. ***** was an angry and violent character who 'did not need an excuse to be angry with (*****)''. Any friends of ***** were told to keep away. She was never allowed visitors and if someone visited unexpectedly, he would beat her as soon as they left.

He was clever, however; he only hit her in places that would not show.

Moderator's comments: This is a superb example of what the specification aims to achieve. The candidate has shaped the material in a sophisticated manner, using their own research and wider reading but always with an eye on genre, purpose and audience.

EXEMPLAR E: This is an example of different parts of a commentary.

- a) I have produced two pieces that enable me to explore generational identity issues: the pressures that power institutions place on students to conform, and how elderly people's identities are affected by technological advancement. My non-fiction piece is an article for the Guardian website, using Charlie Brooker's "I Can make You Hate" as my style stimulus, capturing his comedic verbosity and wit. It is written to reveal the pressures put on youth in education and suggests their helplessness under the government; it is intended for students, parents, and readers of left-of-centre papers, its purpose being to express my persona's bitter aversion to the educational system, and to be provocatively entertaining.

- b) While Janet provides a literal description of the events around her through reported speech, the article uses more figurative language; – “hurling (coursework) Trunchbull-like over the school gates” creates an absurd image.....The persona retains a level of self-deprecation – “Feel free to call me bitter...Sorry.” – which builds the article up to a farcical but profound point – “I would opt to live as a hermit” – and drily suggests that ignorance is bliss, highlighting his desire to escape the current political confusion.

Moderator’s comments: These extracts are perfect examples of concise, integrated comments in which there is balance between whole-text discussion, context and specific linguistic analysis.

EXEMPLAR F: This another example of the opening of a commentary in which the candidate sets out their rationale.

I have chosen to write both of my pieces under the topic of mental health, specifically bipolar disorder and depression, as I believe it to be an interesting and relevant topic that must be discussed. Furthermore, I took inspiration from my stimulus text *The Bell Jar*. Because of this, I chose to construct a series of diary entries as part of a short story extract from a woman recording her descent into madness. This is aimed at an audience of adults/young adults that have specific interest or personal experiences with mental health disorders. To couple this, my non-fiction piece is inspired by a personal account of an anonymous writer who has rapid-cycling bipolar disorder. I was inspired by this online article for the British Journal of General Practice to write an informative journalistic piece for the same website. This is aimed at visitors to the website and those interested in the field, discussing the issues of mental health and how it may link to academia.

For my non-fiction piece I chose to write an online article with the aim of being informative to the target audience. I tried to achieve this with facts and statistics e.g. listening common symptoms of certain disorders. I focused heavily on existing scientific study and case studies such as to ensure I included only accurate and relevant information in my article. With fixed dates and titles of studies, such as there is increased support and evidence of the points I am making, improving my standing as the writer.

Moderator’s comments. This is a clear opening in which the candidate sets out their stall and guides the reader into the main body of the analysis.

EXEMPLAR G: This is an example of a sustained piece of analysis.

My fiction employs a cyclical structure to reinforce the sense of the grieving process. In the first paragraph, the idea of grief is quite impersonal. The piece contrasts the disposable idea of “washing chalk from the streets” with the permanent image of “carvings from the trees” to create a metaphor for the process of death and the sense that your legacy will stand the test of time in the wider world. The binary opposition in the metaphor is paralleled by the abstract image of “disguising the tears” and the more concrete “but not erasing the scars” in the final paragraph.

Moderator’s comments: The sophistication of the ideas here shows how to develop and synthesize comments.

CONCLUSIONS: This has been a very promising start to the new specification. Most centres have followed the requirements of the syllabus and, most importantly, encouraged students to produce creative work which is thoughtful, enjoyable and often provocative. The creativity has been supported by commentaries which probe into linguistic choices and reflect on the effects of some excellent writing.

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