



Examiner's Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE

In Japanese (9JA0)

Paper 2: Translation into Japanese and
written response to works

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Introduction

The trends noted in the 2024 exam season continued to hold true this year also: more learners wrote about キッチン and 窓ぎわのトットちゃん than was the case when this specification first started, and there was again far less ‘story telling’ (using the space on the exam paper to retell the plot rather than analyse how these incidents are relevant to the question).

Statistically, there was very little difference between the number of learners writing about each work (across the two choices) this year and the same figure last year. In Section B (literature), キッチン proved to be the most popular choice this year (but only by a narrow margin), whilst in Section C (films) 千と千尋の神隠し was once again the film chosen by most learners; the overall percentage of those choosing to write about this film remained at about a third of the total (compared to 2024), but there was a much more equal division between the two essay choices than in the previous year.

It is a shame that so few learners choose to study either ディア・ドクター or 誰も知らない as both films have something valuable to say about Japanese society; the few learners who choose to write about one of these films score as well as learners writing about any of the other works on the list.

As mentioned above, it was clear that learners have been trained to provide a brief story synopsis. It is heartening to find far fewer learners now whose relevant material in answer to the chosen question does not actually start until page 3! It is also helpful for weaker learners, who can take the short summary as an opportunity to include some advanced language patterns.

Q1: Translation

Since the translation is marked in ‘chunks’ of varying difficulty, it is possible for all learners at every level to gain marks, and teachers should make this clear to learners. Across all learners this year the average mark was 15, but even learners at the lower end of the ability range gained on average 10 marks for this task, showing that marks are accessible for all, even if there are errors or gaps.

Many learners were successful in identifying the grammatical patterns that the English text was trying to test (‘schools where...’, ‘trying to solve...’, ‘if we didn’t have...’, ‘probably have to..’ etc) and then translating these into Japanese. (It should be stressed that any equivalent pattern is accepted, as long as the intended meaning is conveyed.)

A few comments on the translation where needed, divided by sentence:

Sentence 1:

- It was surprising how many alternatives learners came up with to translate ‘coffee shop’, instead of simply using katakana.

Sentence 2:

- Translating this sentence as ‘There are even robots who teach English in primary schools’ was deemed perfectly acceptable, as it retained the target structure (noun modification).

Sentence 3:

- This was by far the most challenging sentence of the text, not only from a grammatical point of view, but also in terms of vocabulary. Firstly, the apparently simple word ‘worker’ is a challenge in Japanese, and a range of suggestions were accepted: 働き手、働く人、労働者、従業員 etc. Some learners cleverly used the causative to avoid the problem: ロボットを働かせて,...
- ‘a declining birth rate and an aging society’ is a difficult phrase too, but it was decided that these two issues were so relevant to present-day Japan that learners could be expected to be familiar with them in the context of their A level studies.

Sentence 5:

- The first half of this sentence was generally dealt with very well (most using the ~たら form, some the ~ば form), but many learners forgot to include the idea of ‘probably’ in the second half. Interestingly, many struggled to convey ‘clients’, although the common word お客様 would have been the most appropriate answer; it was simply the case that the word ‘customer’ (which might have steered learners to the right word) does not sound right here in English.

Sentence 6:

- Another long sentence, where the passive (‘are invitedto dance’) was the most difficult part to convey accurately. Some learners tried to make the sentence active (‘the robots ask....’); doing this is perfectly acceptable, but there was often then confusion over which particles should be used, thus potentially turning ‘inviter’ into ‘invitee’. The final noun phrase - old people’s home – was another word that learners were expected to be familiar with; many of the variations that learner came up with – 老人の家、老人家、老人院 – were felt not to have conveyed the right idea, even if literally they seem to say the right thing. For ‘manager’ also, the easiest answer would ironically have been マネジャー!

Q2-Q7: responses to literature and films

- There were several essay questions this year that asked learners to make an ‘agree/disagree’ decision about an issue. (For example, 5b: is Chihiro’s character development more due to helping others or being helped?) Many learners seemed determined to decide one way or the other, without considering that a better answer might be that both interpretations are possible.

- Please refer to the mark scheme (MS) for further examples of points that could have been included by learners.

Section B

Q2 どんどん読めるいろいろな話

- This option was answered by roughly twice as many learners as (b). Successful learners generally chose appropriate stories that shared elements of plot, setting or characterisation. (See MS for examples.) Any common points, no matter how obvious, were accepted here as valid. Unfortunately, too many answers were satisfied with analysing one or two stories without drawing any parallels between them.
- To answer this question, many learners drew on the stories that they had probably spent most time on, such as 鼻 or 注文の多い料理店. The better responses then talked, for example, about how being obsessed with one's appearance and caring too much about what others say about them is a trait that is heard about a lot nowadays. However, in too many cases, learners identified the emotions that the characters experience, but then failed to say much more than that the 21st century reader also has these feelings, without going into further detail.

Q3 キッチン

- This essay, asking learners to decide to what extent the lives of the main characters are 'normal', was one of the most popular on this year's paper, and was well-answered by the majority of those who attempted it. In order to provide evidence for their argument that the story includes many 'un-normal' elements, many learners rightly drew attention to facts such as Mikage having lost an unusually high number of close relatives for someone of her age, or Eriko having undergone a change of gender, something that, as many commented, would indeed have been very unusual at the time the work was written. Less successful learners argued that losing grandparents or parents is extremely unusual (surely not the case, even if the example here of Mikage is unusual), others not mentioning any of the ways in which the lives of the three main protagonists are 'normal'. This was one of the essays on this question paper where full marks were only awarded if there was some recognition of the fact that 'normal' activities such as cooking, cleaning, going to work or university are part of Mikage's and the Tanabes' lives.
- The best answers to this question referred firstly to the role that the kitchen plays in providing solace and comfort to Mikage in her grief, as well as being a 'meeting point' for her and the Tanabes as they steer a course through their new life together. Many also made reference to the fact that it is the kitchen that is the setting for Mikage and Yuichi's shared dream, underlining how much importance that space holds in the development

of their relationship. Whilst some answers pointed out that a kitchen becomes Mikage's workplace in the second section of the work (満月), there was no need to include such details to gain a good mark here.

Q4 窓ぎわのトットちゃん

- a. This was another example of a question that asked learners to 'decide whether....', in this case, whether knowing about the historical background of the work increased the reader's enjoyment of the story. Of the relatively few who chose this option, most were determined to show off their historical knowledge of Japan in the 1940s, without really considering the question properly. Surely for the general reader, it is of little importance when the book is set, as evidenced by the writer's relatively few references to 'real life' outside Tomoe's gates. Again, a balanced view of the question, with some recognition of the fact that enjoyment in reading does not totally depend on any background knowledge, was necessary to gain full marks.
- b. This was the literature essay that was chosen by the greatest number of learners. Among the events in this story that were most commonly quoted as showing the headteacher's opinions on how children should be educated – both intellectually and morally – were: Totto-chan's long talk with him, Sports Day, a lost purse, naked swimming in the pool, lunchtime food, music/dance lessons. It was essential for this question not only to describe the events, but also to say what they showed about Kobayashi's views on how children should be educated. Many learners managed to draw a balance between recounting incidents and analysing their relevance to the topic, but in some cases, although there was plenty of 'appropriately selected evidence', there was a lack of 'convincing interpretation'

Section C

Q5 千と千尋の神隠し

- a. There were some excellent answers to this particular essay, the best of which said that although there were (of course!) many elements of the film that are far from realistic, there are parts of the story, principally in the themes that are touched upon often quite subtly, that are recognisable by a modern audience, and make it very relevant to them. So, once again, the most convincing approach was to say 'yes, it's different, but not 全く different'. To achieve a top mark here, learners needed to recognise that a simple agree or disagree approach was not appropriate. To illustrate the 'unrealistic', many learners mentioned the strange characters working in the bathhouse, the train running through water, the pervasive use of magic. Learners who performed well in this essay found more 'realistic' elements in the bathhouse as an image of a workplace, controlled by Yubaba ('the boss') at (physically) the top of the chain; others mentioned the greed shown firstly by Chihiro's parents and then later

by the workers, desperate for Kaonashi's gold pieces, as well as the references made to environmental destruction in several places.

- c. Although, as stated previously, approximately the same number of learners chose this option as chose (a), it has to be said that those who chose (a) were more successful at addressing the question. Some learners began by saying that Chihiro was definitely helped by others more than she helped them (or the other way round), but then proceeded to give examples of both, thereby producing an argument that did not 'link together'. Some learners simply retold the story, highlighting whether each incident was an example of 'helping' or 'being helped', but without really coming to a conclusion. Again, the best essays stated it was really a case of both actions – helping others and being helped by others – contributing to Chihiro's growth through the film, rather than one being more relevant than the other.

Only a handful of learners wrote answers to the questions asked about the other two films, with essays about the (b) options in both cases being particularly low in number. For possible material to include in an answer to those, please refer to the Indicative Content in the mark scheme.

Q6 ディア・ドクター

- a. Although not many answered this question, those who did clearly had some knowledge of the situation in Japan's less populated areas and wrote convincingly about the issues shown in the film: the lack of medical staff, the lack of medical facilities, the numbers of young people moving to cities, the loneliness of the elderly parents left behind, etc.

Q7 誰も知らない

- a. Almost with exception, those who decided to write about who was the most 大人らしい character in the film chose Akira, often comparing him to the mother, who more or less hands over control of his siblings to him. Learners mentioned how Akira is not only responsible for feeding his siblings and ensuring utility bills are paid, but also taking on the parental role at times (like New Year) in order to convince his younger siblings that they have not been abandoned. Some learners argued convincingly that Kyoko also sometimes shows herself older than she actually is (she is in charge of laundry), silently disapproves when Akira turns up with his friends, hands over the money she is saving up.

A reminder of important points for learners to bear in mind when tackling these tasks:

- Please remember to mark clearly at the top of the page the correct option you have chosen for each essay.
- When deciding on an option for a particular book/film, consider which you have the most relevant evidence for. This is probably most important for どんどん読めるいろいろな話, as different stories provide appropriate evidence for different themes.

- Keep the task in mind as you write, referring back to it at the end of each paragraph so that the reader can see the relevance of what you are saying and how this adds to your overall argument.
- Decide on your approach (e.g. agree or disagree?) before you start, but be prepared to conclude that perhaps there are elements of both sides. It is fine to admit that not all the evidence supports your argument.
- Use paragraphs or other verbal signals (まず、次に、最後に...) to indicate to the reader the 'flow' of your argument. Using paragraphs shows the reader that you have a series of (previously considered) points to make and are not simply writing as each thought comes to you. An essay that is one long paragraph is very unlikely to gain a high mark, as it will lack a 'detailed, logical argument'.
- Do not start the paragraph after your introduction 一つ目, unless you have made it clear what you are making 'the first' of. If you have previously said これからどうしてそう思っているか、理由を三つあげたいと思います, then saying 'the first (one)' is appropriate.
- The mark grid for grammar and vocabulary makes reference in each band to 'terminology appropriate for literary and cinematic analysis'. This does not necessarily have to be difficult, but learners are expected to be able to write the names of main characters in kanji (where appropriate), as well as words such as 登場人物、主人公、台本. It would also be a good idea to think of ways of avoiding having to write out (often quite long) titles more than once.
- If there is a genuine need to continue answers on Additional Sheets (remembering that you are not expected to write more than the exam booklet allows for), please write on lined paper ACROSS the page from left to right, rather than use the paper as 原稿用紙. This is for technical reasons.

