

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language A (4EA0)
Paper 01R

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Publications Code 4EA0_01R_1606_ER

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Introduction

The paper is organised into three sections. Section A tests only reading and is based upon an unseen passage. The passage studied in Section A in June 2016 was adapted from *Farangi Girl: Growing up in Iran: a daughter's story* by Ashley Dartnell. Section B tests both reading and writing by asking candidates to respond to one of the non-fiction passages from the Anthology, in this case, *The Explorer's Daughter* from the Edexcel Anthology by Kari Herbert. Section C is a single writing task that is not connected to either of the reading activities already undertaken on the paper. The paper was well received with most candidates finding it very accessible.

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-4

The passage chosen proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. The subject matter of June 2016 was the childhood memories of Ashley Dartnell relating an incident when she travelled with her brother and father to collect her mother from Teheran airport. Question 1 was a single mark question that tested the skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify what fell out of the van. There was only one possible answer, watermelons, using the wording of the passage and the vast majority of candidates were successful on this question. Question 2 was also a selection and retrieve question asking candidates to give two words or phrases that show how the van driver reacted to the incident. There were two marks available for this question and the mark scheme contained six possible answers. Most candidates gained full marks but those who did not, did so because they did not choose two distinct words or phrases, selected words and phrases from outside the given line range or confused the van driver with the character of the father. Question 3 asked candidates to explain, in their own words, what we learn about the writer's father. This question looks to reward the quality of explanation rather than simply identifying relevant text, and therefore the instruction to candidates to use their own words is important. The mark scheme identified eleven distinct aspects of the writer's father that could feature in an answer up to a maximum of five marks. Many candidates achieved full, or nearly full, marks and were able to recognise the father's impatience and inability to control his anger; others commented on his disorganization and poor time management skills and could explain the reasons for their answer. Where candidates did not score full marks this was often due to candidates ignoring the focus of the question and writing about the children rather than the father; some other candidates simply presented quotations from the passage without any real explanation.

Question 4 was the higher mark tariff question with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how the writer tried to create interest in the passage. As is usual, candidates were provided with bullet points for additional support and to help them structure their answers. In the published mark scheme examiners are told that they, "must

reward all valid points that show an engagement with the text and an appreciation of the writer's technique rather than have a set agenda of items that they are looking for." To support this, at the standardising meeting all markers were made aware of a range of possible interpretations and were told that they should credit any interpretations that were clearly founded in the text. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points often focusing on the father, his bad temper and his dangerous driving. Many candidates wrote about the father's relationship with the mother and speculated upon reasons for its breakdown. Better answers recognised that this passage depicts a moment of realisation for the young girl as she begins by excusing and explaining the heroic efforts that daddy had made to get there on time, but comes to see how her father's disorganisation is symptomatic of his lack of care and consideration for his wife and how this must lie at the heart of their relationship. Most saw elements of the father's desperation and resourcefulness, allied to his intolerance and rudeness. Not all candidates commented on the use of imagery on the hillside, the "lorry skeletons and car carcasses" and the cars and lorries "like colourful beads." The arrival in Teheran provided ample opportunity for language comments and a recognition in the change in mood and atmosphere, but many candidates overlooked this focusing only upon the details of the journey itself. Better answers recognised the structure of the text, beginning with a light hearted incident, the writer reports that she and her brother were happy. This happiness and eager anticipation to see her mother again helps to shape our understanding of the writer as a young girl caught in the middle of her parents' marriage problems and struggling to understand. Although a child at times she is placed in a position of profound responsibility: she stays awake on the Chaloos Road as she does not trust her father's driving and in Teheran she crosses busy traffic to care for her younger brother whilst her father mends the car. In many ways this is a familiar structure of initial happiness which is threatened and finally resolved, a journey metaphor where the writer arrives at her destination but also arrives at a new place in her understanding and in maturity.

Candidates need to see good writers use a range of techniques such as these to create meaning, to add detail and to create interest for the reader. Less able candidates often failed to recognise many basic features, confusing the father and the van driver and other elements of the journey. In summary, the most able recognise a wide range of features and used the text with discrimination to craft an explanation that focused upon how the writer creates interest, using textual references, which are apt and carefully chosen. Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrate higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and do so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. Centres should continue to make clear to candidates that this part of the paper is a test of reading and that a close reading of the passage will yield all of the material that candidates need to answer the questions.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 5

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *The Explorer's Daughter*, and focused upon how the writer presents her experiences of living with the Inughuit people in Thule. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Weaker responses were often limited range and in their ability to focus upon the writer and the thrust of the question. Stronger responses were those that were able to recognise the dilemma that the writer feels, appreciating the beauty of the narwhal and also the bravery of the Inughuit people and the necessity to them of hunting the narwhal. Many candidates recognised some features of the narwhal and some were able to comment on the imagery used. Many could also recognise the role of the Inughuit people with the more able being able to comment upon the technical and functional language and the creation of tension in the description of the hunt. Stronger answers were able to evidence their points from the text and to explain in detail how these were used to present the writer's experiences for the reader.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write about a memorable experience they have had, exploring why it was important. The question was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Most responses were very personal in nature with sporting and academic success featuring highly. It is not easy to write engagingly about sporting events and candidates need to focus closely upon the wording of the question and recognise that it is not necessary to recreate every pass or shot in their sporting success story but rather to focus upon explaining why this particular experience was so important to them. The weakest responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, often focusing solely upon a very limited range of ideas. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to engage the reader in the emotion as well as the activity of their memorable moment.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were given two deliberately contentious statements about the internet: "The internet has improved the lives of everyone," and "The internet is dangerous and should be avoided." They were then simply asked to explain their views on the internet. This proved to be accessible to most candidates. Once again, it is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final, 20 mark question, are sometimes not answered at all by some candidates. It is vital that students time their responses carefully and take note of the mark tariff, giving section C one third of the time available to them. This question produced a variety of responses with a surprising number agreeing with the second statement about danger. Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often giving simple anecdotes about their experiences or those of others but without any real development at all. Weaker responses often took a very self-centred view and focused almost exclusively on the second bullet point about leisure and enjoyment, not appreciating wider dimensions of business, education or security. These answers were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. There was a band of mid-level responses that often had features of both level 2 and level 3, with some selection of vocabulary and control that was reasonably good. The best writing showed subtlety and maturity and a control of a wide range of techniques to produce writing that connected strongly with its reader. Although it was not a requirement to do so, many were often able to appreciate both statements and to handle contradictions inherent in the subject matter. On a language front such answers showed a sophistication in control of tense, sentence structure and a genuine understanding of how to create meaning and a real ability to control text structure.

Conclusion

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Centres are strongly encouraged to practise responding to unseen passages in timed conditions. This will support students in focusing their answers on what the question has asked for and in using their understanding of literary effects as a means of addressing the question rather than being seen as an end in their own right. The same principle applies with regard to studying the Anthology texts. The best practice in writing involves time management so as to respond appropriately to the mark tariff and the time available. Candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through effective paragraphing and structuring their writing. At all times have the intended reader in mind and make word level, sentence level and text level choices with a clear understanding of the intended effect. Writing should be seen as a crafted artefact and students should be taught the skills of writing with this in mind whatever the task may be.

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