

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2014

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language (4EA0) Paper 01
and
Pearson Edexcel Certificate
in English Language (KEA0) Paper 01

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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 January 2014 was adapted from *I'll Tell Me M : A Childhood Memoir* by Brian Keenan and described the experiences of the writer growing up in Belfast. In this extract he accompanies his friend Robert to the docks. 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, *Chinese Cinderella*. 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. Question 1 tested the skill of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify what the writer expected to find at the docks. There was only one correct answer and most candidates were able to identify it. Those who did not gain this mark did so because they gave material from other parts of the text. Question 2 asked candidates to give two words or phrases that the writer uses to describe the size of the shed. There were four possible correct answers to choose from. The majority were able to gain both marks but there was a full range of responses. For those who didn't score well on this answer they seemed not to have read the question carefully and gave phrases from other parts of the text such as the size of the horse, the harbour or the viciousness of the men. It was also noted that some candidates who gained full marks did not make best use of their time and wrote a detailed commentary for their choice of text, which is not what the question asked for. Question 3 asked candidates to describe the character of Robert. Out of the five marks available many achieved full marks and explained about the differences between the small and quiet boy who transforms into a brave, confident and outspoken boy when he is in the

docks. Where candidates did not score full marks they sometimes mixed up the writer with Robert and so gave the characteristics of the wrong character from the passage. Question 4 asked candidates about the ways that the writer tries to engage the reader in the passage and provided bullet points for additional support and structure. All centres should recognise that the key discriminator in Section A is this, the higher mark tariff question, and its focus on the writer's technique. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as viciousness of the men, to the exclusion of other points. Many candidates were able to comment on the comparisons between Hercules and the pigs in terms of size and behaviour, however many did not recognise the writer's fascination with the horse and focused upon the word "beast" as indicating that he was a wild animal who frightened the writer, which was not the case. Better answers explored the development of tension from the gentle opening, to the chaotic docks, with a dramatic pause created by the incident with the horse. This prepares the reader for the finale where the writer is genuinely terrified and in fear of losing his life as he comes eye to eye with a huge and wild creature. Many commented on the writer's appeal to senses, particularly those of smell and hearing to bring the experience of the docks to life, fewer commented on Hercules and the significance of his name. Some more able responses recognised that the passage was based upon a series of comparisons and developed this thesis with the quiet writer compared to the bold Robert and the thoughtful philosophic horse compared to the pigs who lack all form of individuality at all and are simply described as "pig flesh." The most successful candidates demonstrate higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and did so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. As in previous years, linked text and paraphrase does not constitute an explanation and candidates should be advised to be clear about the comments that they are making. Many answers were able to recognise some language features, particularly with regard to the horse's eye, but better answers used their understanding of the writer's use of language to explain their analysis of the text rather than simply feature-spotting as a response to the third bullet point.

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, *Chinese Cinderella*, and focused upon how the writer brings out her thoughts and feelings for her father. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of the text. Weaker responses were often largely narrative in approach and did not focus closely upon the question. Many answers were able to comment upon the "holy of holies" image and developed a reasonable response by depicting the father as wholly bad and the writer as being wary and frightened of him. More able candidates were able to appreciate the father's generous motivation in securing a good quality of education for his daughter and could see alternative interpretations of their relationship at certain points. Stronger responses were those that were able to develop an understanding of relationship based upon inferential reading

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write a speech about someone who has had a strong influence upon them. This title produced a wide range of responses with many writing about family members, particularly mothers, whilst others wrote about familiar hero figures such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. As a title it was accessible to almost all candidates. The weakest responses were often incomplete, communicating at a basic level that showed little awareness of the reader. Weaker candidate who wrote about family members often assumed family knowledge that was not shared with the reader, thereby limiting the effectiveness of the communication that took place. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to enable the reader to appreciate why the person in question had been so influential. In this way they often developed an emotive dimension rather than simply narrating incidents involving the chosen influential person.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were asked to write a magazine article explaining which time of year they liked best and why. This proved to be accessible to most candidates and generated strong responses. It is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final, 20 mark question, is sometimes not answered at all by 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 many heartfelt responses with many writing about times of religious or cultural celebration, with Christmas featuring strongly. Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often not making good use of the bullet pointed list intended to help candidates. The bullet points actually directed candidates to five possible areas to write about in response to this question and for some candidates would have been a very useful framework for them to use. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure that kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. In contrast, more able responses wrote with imagination and avoided the clichés associated with certain times of year. They were able to develop a sense of character, relationship and occasion that created an understanding of emotion as well as event and were noted for their variety and sophistication, accuracy and control, which were at all times sharply focused upon the needs of the reader.

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. They should pay particular attention to how they open and conclude their writing. At all times they should 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.

