

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

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

Edexcel Certificate
in English Language A (KEA0)
Paper 01

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Section A: Reading

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 2015 was adapted from *Harold Larwood* by Duncan Hamilton which tells about the writer meeting with the famous cricketer as an old man. 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, *Touching the Void* by Joe Simpson. 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.

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 skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify the time of day when the writer meets with Larwood. This was a single mark question with only one possible answer 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 to describe the young boys at the cricket ground. There were two marks available for this question and the mark scheme contained eleven possible answers. Most candidates gained full marks but those who did not, did so because they did not choose two distinct words or phrases or those that were chosen did not answer the question. Question 3 asked candidates to explain, in their own words, what we learn about Larwood's life as a coal miner in Nottingham. 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 seven distinct aspects of his experience that could feature in an answer and markers are instructed to be open to new and more original interpretations. Many candidates achieved full, or nearly full, marks and were able to explain the dreadful conditions he worked in and the pride in his working class roots and his acceptance by the other workers. Where candidates did not score full marks this was often due to candidates ignoring the focus of the question and writing about his life as a cricketer; other candidates simply presented quotations from the passage without any real explanation. This question saw many homophonic errors which did not affect the marks given, but candidates should be aware that Larwood was a "miner" and not a "minor".

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 present his thoughts and feelings about Larwood. 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 that they should credit

any interpretations that were clearly founded in the text. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as the harsh and gritty conditions of the coalmine. Many candidates wrote at length about his appearance and were able to recognise that Larwood had been a great sportsman in his earlier years. Better answers recognised the extent of the admiration felt for Larwood and also saw his fading greatness as he is casually ignored by the younger boys who do not know who he is. Some candidates recognised that the setting sun is symbolic of the coming end of Larwood's life with the "dark shadows" of age and they saw his climbing of the stairs and his final disappearance into the pavillion as an image of an ascent into an afterlife where his reputation as a great cricketer will live on. Candidates should be instructed to say precisely what they mean and to avoid the use of a more teenage colloquial style that makes use of the negative, such as, "The coal mine wasn't a great place to be." By adopting a sentence structure based upon the negative, inevitably these candidates tend not to answer the question set, or to write in sweeping generalities that show only a superficial understanding of the text. Better answers recognised the structure of the text, beginning with an extensive description of Larwood as an old man, before describing the events at the cricket ground. This is followed by the background to Larwood's earlier life as a miner and ending with the writer's final thoughts and feelings about almost meeting the great man. This structure allowed the writer to develop our response to Larwood before we see him interacting with the other man and the young boys, thereby creating some interesting contrasts to comment upon; it also allowed the creation of pathos and a recognition of an old fashioned respectable modesty that is slowly dying out. Many commented on the use of simile and symbolism in the opening description though there were a variety of interpretations here: more successful candidates used it to build up a picture of an old man who has lost his youthful physique but still takes pride in his appearance and has an upright physique, less successful candidates thought that he was mean because he wouldn't buy new clothes or he was very clever because he wore glasses. Candidates need to see how symbolism is just one technique that writers employ and that it can be used to support and add detail to the impression that the writer is trying to create. Less able candidates often failed to recognise the manner in which the boys ignore him and the differences between Larwood and the other old men. The most able recognise a range of features and used the text with discrimination to craft an explanation that focused upon the writer's thoughts and feelings, 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, *Touching the Void*, and focused upon how the writer brings out the thoughts and feelings of Simon and Joe in the passage. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have

knowledge of this text. Weaker responses sometimes simply copied parts of the passage but most recognised the injury to Joe even if they lacked an understanding of the range of techniques that the writer uses to present it. Stronger responses were those that moved beyond the simple contrasts between Joe and Simon and were able to define a wide range of features used such as the use of speech, the control of sentence variety and the use of powerful and emotive language. The best answers were able to explain in detail how the writer created a detailed understanding of the responses of the two men and allowed the reader to recognise the intense emotions involved.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write an article for a newspaper about a time when they have offered or received help. This title produced many lively and interesting responses with very few candidates not being able to write something. The weakest responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, sometimes directly copying elements of the passage from the Section B passage. Better responses often made use of the title given for the articles, "We all need help sometimes" and used this to relate interesting events that then encouraged the reader to reflect upon the ways in which people in society are interrelated and there is a strong desire to offer help to others. In doing so they showed a skilful command of the language and an ability to use a wide range of techniques to convey thoughts and feelings.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were asked to write about what respect means to them. This topic proved to be accessible to most and for many it seemed to strike a chord producing answers that were heartfelt but also impressive in their ability to shape meaning and reader response. Once again, it is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final mark question are sometimes not answered at all by all 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. Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often focusing upon very simple anecdotes in which they were treated without respect. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which will keep them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. More able responses responded to the title by considering self-respect, mutual respect, respect for those older than you and those in authority, to name but a few. These answers were often multi-faceted and sustained the interest of the reader. The best writing was noted for its variety and sophistication, its accuracy and control, which was 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 the effective paragraphing and structuring of their writing. At all times they should have the intended reader in mind and should make word level, sentence level and text level choices with a clear understanding of their intended effects. 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.

Grade Boundaries

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