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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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In English Language (4EA0) 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 2016 was adapted from *Paw Tracks: A Childhood Memoir* by Dennis O'Connor and told of the author as a young boy going to the railway station to see the soldiers departing for the Second World War. 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, *Your Guide to Beach Safety* by the RNLI. 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 is intended to be a gentle way into the paper and tests the skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify the time of day that the young boy in the passage leaves the house. There was only a single mark for this question and almost all candidates were able to determine that it was early in the morning, just as the sun is coming up. Question 2 asked candidates to select three words or phrases that showed it was very cold in the passage. The mark scheme identifies five possible responses and many candidates gained full marks but those who did not often did not choose words or phrases from the selected lines or did not directly answer the question. Question 3 asked candidates to explain what we learn about the writer. As a four-mark question there were many possible responses to this question. Many achieved full or nearly full marks and were able to explain about how young the writer is in the passage and how little he understands about what is happening and about his relationship with his mother and grandmother; many recognised that this is clearly an adult writing about his experiences as a child and so they comment upon his awareness of the atmosphere at the station or the imaginative manner in which he describes the events. Where candidates did not score full marks some failed to give sufficient detail for full marks and others listed features without offering any explanation. It is possible to score full marks on this question without finding four distinct points, as the quality of explanation is a key part of the response. Centres should know that the mark scheme explicitly instructs markers to reward the quality of explanation rather than simply counting the number of features that have been identified and they should bear this in mind when preparing

candidates for this type of question. Question 4 was the higher mark tariff question in Section A with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how the writer tries to create interest in the passage and provided bullet points for additional support and structure. At the standardising meeting all markers were made aware of a range of possible interpretations and that they should credit any that were clearly founded in the text. 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." Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as the narrator's description of the arrival of the steam train, though often providing little or no development. Many candidates were able to provide a more detailed understanding of how the writer unfolds the story from the initial confusion of the boy and the noise and bustle of the station, through the moment of emotional unity as the soldier sings and ends with the sad reflection as the crowd disperses. Better answers showed a perceptive and well-developed response to the text with extended comments about the use of imagery and the creation of pathos. Some answers showed a subtle and perceptive understanding as they recognised the dual nature of the text, the writer as an adult recalling his confusion and incomprehension but also able to show a sensitivity to the emotions of those involved and what the war might mean to some of them. Many commented on the powerful imagery used throughout the passage, such as the steam train which "groaned and hissed its way into the station" with a few also suggesting that the manner in which the "earth shook and the bridge trembled in protest" indicated how destructive and unnatural the train is and yet it has a power that even the earth itself cannot stand against. Weaker answers were often able to select a number of word-level features, such as the use of onomatopoeia in "hush", "roaring", "belched", "groaned" and "hissed" but were not able to comment on other features, such as the symbolism of the handkerchiefs or of the winter and the "grey light" which are symbolic of the death of the year and the possible fate of some of the soldiers. Not all candidates were aware that there was a change in atmosphere by the end of the passage and felt that the singing soldiers represented a feeling of happiness. However, most did recognise this change and the more able candidates were also able to contrast the earlier noise and bustle with the solemn quiet that replaced it and the change from being part of a unified crowd to being sad and lonely individuals. Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrated higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and did so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. As has been said before in these reports, linked text and paraphrase does not constitute an explanation. It was

a feature of better answers that they were more able to recognise the change in emotions felt by the writer and created for the reader throughout the passage. They appreciated the shaping of the passage as a whole and saw how the passage has a cyclical structure starting and ending with home, but one that has now been irrevocably changed by the departure of the soldiers.

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, *Your Guide to Beach Safety*, and contained information, advice and guidance given by the RNLI. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Many candidates were able to comment on the leaflet's use of colour however in weaker responses there was a tendency to focus heavily on the use of colour and to make general comments about it, such as, red representing danger, without linking these comments to specific examples within the text. Many candidates commented upon the use of images, such as the use of a photograph of the young boy and girl on the front cover to appeal directly to families, or the mother and son image in the true story section which emphasises the power of the sea as we see the physical size and strength of the boy who got into difficulties. Weaker answers often described the images rather than offering any comment upon them. Stronger responses were those that focused on the intended impact on the reader and were able to recognise the wide range of techniques being used in the leaflet and which were then able to explain and support with reference to the text.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write their contribution for a magazine on their holiday memories. The title was accessible to almost all candidates and produced a wide range of responses. Many wrote about the amazing places they had experienced or places they had visited whilst many others wrote about what they saw as holiday disasters such as lost luggage or delayed flights. Weaker responses tended to feel it was necessary to give a chronology of everything that took place on their holiday, starting with the drive to the airport and then cataloguing everything that happened until they returned home. This type of writing tended to neglect the needs of the reader or the context of the task that was set, making little use of any language techniques. Other weak responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, often presenting a very limited view of what had occurred. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language showing a strong ability to engage the reader, creating character and empathy by focusing upon more than what their holiday destination was and what happened there. The

importance of planning was evident in those better responses which had a clear sense of structure and textual cohesion.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were asked to give their views on the subject of keeping pets. To support them they were given two conflicting statements and a series of bullet points. This proved to be accessible to most candidates, no matter what their views were upon the subject. Centres should note 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. Candidates were free to give their views and many candidates took a balanced approach, looking at both the advantages and the disadvantages. A number of candidates devised examples to back up their views producing answers that were particularly convincing.

Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often repeating a narrow range of views. These answers were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which kept them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. Mid-level responses often used a reasonable vocabulary and a developing sense of text control though sometimes lacking in range and making use of slang in what was otherwise a formal piece of writing. More able responses wrote with imagination and flair and were prepared to consider a wide range of views balancing personal experiences with the national and international impact upon such things as illegal animal trafficking and animal cruelty. 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. They were often able to express complex ideas with clarity in a manner that connected strongly with the intended 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 planning, 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.

