

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2016

Edexcel Certificate
in English Language A (KEA0)
Paper 02

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Overview

The Certificate in English Paper 2 is a paper lasting one hour and thirty minutes. Question 1 is a reading question based on the Edexcel Anthology and in January 2016 candidates had to respond to the story, "Veronica". Questions 2a and 2b are writing questions and both are compulsory. The writing tasks for January 2016 were a magazine article asking for views on "What makes a Good Teacher" and a short story with the title, "The Picture".

This was felt to be a very fair paper, allowing candidates of varying abilities to demonstrate their skills in reading and writing well. The story worked well for the majority of candidates and the writing questions elicited some interesting responses.

Reading

Question 1.

Students engaged with the reading task and showed great empathy towards the character of Veronica. Stronger answers analysed in depth the metaphorical as well as the literal meaning of the text. In these answers the significance of the stream and the broken twig were compared to that of a broken friendship or woman. Understanding was also evident in the analysis of the social and historical context of the role of a woman in rural Africa compared to that of a man. The struggles that Veronica faced epitomised that of all women in her culture. Answers lower down the mark scheme tended to focus on the literal and the fact that Veronica's father was a 'brute', although it was also clear that students recognised the divide between men and women in Africa and commented on Veronica's happiness when she had been 'blessed' with a boy because he would have had a more advantageous life, like Okeke, than a girl. Most responses seemed to have been aided by the bullet points. Weaker responses failed to address them all, especially precise comments and analysis of the writer's language techniques. Stronger responses picked out specific details and were able to analyse them closely in relation to the bullet points. Most candidates approached Question 1 in an organised manner, with many choosing to include similar quotations to demonstrate the poor lifestyle of Veronica. Most candidates recognised the significance of Veronica's parents' actions. Some candidates were able to offer alternative interpretations of these commonly quoted extracts, recognising bias from the viewpoint of the first person narrator. A few candidates demonstrated significant misunderstanding of the text, perhaps having only read it for the first time in the exam. Generally pupils seemed to engage well with this question and were able to understand the passage. Many, however, did not develop their answers. Most were able to quote appropriate phrases from the text but in many cases these were not commented upon. Most responses, however, fell into at least Level 2. Responses at Level 5 were few, but few Level 1 responses were seen too, as most candidates were able to provide at least some narrative examples of why we might feel sorry for Veronica. There was some misunderstanding of her mother's weakness as malnutrition or of

Veronica being bitter or jealous of her friend in weaker responses. Better candidates were able to grapple with the metaphor of the stream as representative of their friendship and lives. Most seemed genuinely able to sympathise with Veronica and therefore could attempt to articulate the reasons behind this feeling. The question worked very well.

Writing

Students engaged well with the writing tasks and the content of both the letter and story were enjoyable to read. The tasks appeared to be accessible to both higher and lower achieving students. However, technical accuracy did prevent some answers reaching a Band 3. There was little misunderstanding of what was being asked for these tasks and the purpose, audience and format were evident.

Question 2a.

Most candidates were able to communicate their ideas fairly clearly. Weaker responses failed to write in the right genre or weren't appropriate to the purpose. Careful planning would remedy this. Stronger responses tended to synthesise a sophisticated vocabulary, humour, highly effective structuring and well explained points. Responses to this question were generally quite brief. The vast majority were appropriate in style and content. Some responses lacked organisation. Most candidates were able to use paragraphs but the use of full stops and capital letters concerned some examiners and in some cases spoiled what could have been an excellent response. A substantial number of candidates struggled with basic grammar and wrote as they spoke, e.g. "I seen". A few even wrote "a" for "I". The question as a whole produced a variety of opinions and enabled many candidates to demonstrate a passionate response, with some of these showing sophisticated techniques such as irony and subtle humour. This made the question enjoyable to mark. Additionally, candidates were keen to share anecdotal evidence to support their argument. Most candidates chose to respond either in letter or article form, most choosing a letter. Some candidates were confused by the question in that they began writing a letter, crossed it out, and started writing an article (or similar). The form offered some interesting structural opportunities and the opportunity to match tone and style to audience and purpose. Candidates were sometimes tempted to over-personalise the task, and some talked at length about how much they hated their teachers: while this could work well if used to exemplify broader points, unfortunately a point was not always extrapolated, and the pieces deteriorated into rants. This was not seen frequently though, and most candidates found the task accessible and made a good attempt, with very few Level 1 responses seen.

Question 2b.

Some candidates produced stories with tenuous links to the set focus of the piece: 'The Picture'. Weaker responses tended to be weak in both structure and narrative techniques. Some candidates seemed to adopt the same formulaic way of writing a story. They incorporated a flashback and the

first and last paragraph were more or less the same; in some cases this may have been detrimental to their grade as being able to pick and choose from a range of structural devices would have been more beneficial. The question on the whole produced a variety of stories, some of which were particularly mature and thoughtful. This question produced the highest number of short answers or responses which were not attempted at all, probably because it was the last question. There were quite a number of blank responses to this question. A number of candidates clearly struggled with time and ended their stories with everything being a dream. Many candidates were able to demonstrate control in structure. Spelling and punctuation errors were found often, even in the highest marked papers. Some examiners felt that Question 2a "was lovely to mark", with candidates able to take the tasks in an almost infinite number of directions. They were very impressed by some of the stories, which they felt were "super". Some responses were extremely personal, dealing with lost loved ones, but even in these cases writing was generally well controlled. As is always the case, some potentially better candidates were undone by their own scope, and advice should continue to be given to plan something that can be realistically approached in the time allowed.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

