

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Literature (4ET0)
Paper 02

Edexcel Certificate in English
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Paper 02

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Introduction

Once again, this has been a very successful series, with continued success for our candidates and an increase in entries for a January 2015 series.

There are two sections in the exam paper, equally weighted. In Section A, candidates have a choice between the unseen poem and the unseen prose extract. In Section B, they can choose Question 3, which has two named poems or Question 4, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem from the *Anthology* to discuss with it.

In both sections, a full range of marks were awarded. Responses varied from the very brief and basic to the fully developed assured and perceptive. Overall, the quality of responses across the paper was good, with some noticeably outstanding answers. Often, the responses to Section A seemed to be stronger than the taught poems in Section B, with some candidates continuing on extra paper.

There has been some very positive feedback about the paper and the choice of unseen materials. However, it was evident that a number of candidates had not studied the *Anthology* in enough detail, but they had attempted to provide a response.

Section A

For this series, there were more responses to the unseen poem than there were to the unseen extract, but each question was awarded a full range of marks. It seems that candidates appear to be more confident when applying what they have been taught to the unseen poetry question.

Careful close reading of the unseen poem or extract is essential in this part of the paper. Some candidates had not read the materials closely enough or had not supported their ideas with relevant examples from the chosen text. Some only dealt with one part of the poem and had not explored the poem in enough detail.

One very noticeable common error is that candidates tend to refer to the unseen prose extract as a poem and they try to look at structure and form in the same way, referring to stanzas or verses, rather than paragraphs. Structure and form is possibly more complicated for candidates to handle with a prose extract, but they can refer to: the time scale; the use of dialogue; narrative form; complex, compound or simple sentences; the use of repetition and other features in order to address this bullet in the question.

Question 1

Unseen poem: *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* by Carol Ann Duffy

Question: How does the writer convey childhood memories in this poem?

The unseen poetry question allowed most students to access the poem and make a response. The responses were very varied. A lot of the answers were a simple retelling of the context and content of the poem and not analysis; however, those achieving marks in the higher levels provided a close analysis of language and demonstrated a depth of understanding. Some candidates included a detailed exploration of poetic devices and explained how and why they had been used. It was good to see 'the effect on the reader' commented upon.

The vast majority of candidates had managed to read the whole poem, suggesting that the length was acceptable. All candidates appeared to respond to the memories of school and some were aware of the passage of time as well as the loss of innocence. Most responded to the images of the 'sweet shop' and 'coloured paper'. There were one or two rather unusual and incorrect comments about Mrs. Tilscher's relationship with the Moors Murderers, but those were few and far between. There were those whose responses consisted of dissecting technical terms and figures of speech rather than looking at the poem holistically and dealing with the question.

One examiner commented: 'This was generally well answered, and allowed candidates to make points about form and structure more cogently than in some previous papers, probably due to the accessible nature of the poem and theme. Most candidates seemed to find something relevant they could say, even those working towards the 'limited' end. A surprising number did pick up on the transition from infancy to a more mature threshold to adolescence, and this subtlety offered plenty of room for the top end of the spectrum to shine.'

Another examiner provided this detailed and useful feedback: 'Question 1: The unseen poem responses to *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* were very good. A wide range of responses came through and were all really enjoyable to read. I felt that the poem allowed a good and wide range of opportunities for students to comment on all sorts of dimensions of the poem.'

Specific points include:

- strong comments on structure and the passage of time from stanza to stanza
- the 'laugh of a bell' metaphor
- the comparison of school to home, something many responses indicated identification with
- the second person point of view and voice to include the reader
- the imagery of 'sugar paper' and 'coloured shapes' (and the personal reflections on their own primary school experiences)
- the tangible poetic and sensory effects of tracing your finger along maps on blackboards

- the passage of time reflected in the tadpoles becoming frogs
- the metaphor of the classroom as a sweetshop (this being a largely dominant and common simile to pick up on).

A couple of things that students got side-tracked with were:

1) 'Brady and Hindley' – instead of interpreting this reference as a way of reinforcing the safe, protective environment of the classroom through the dangers of the outside world being 'rubbed out like a mistake', some students wrote about the massive dangers here and how they were child killers and other irrelevant comments. One response contained two whole pages explaining the murderous couple and how the poem was all about murder and danger.

2) 'The heavy, sexy sky' – students didn't really know what to say about this except for a few students that commented on the child's growing up into adolescence as children learn about sex and reproduction. Instead, they wholly missed the metaphor of the sky splitting open as if it were itself giving birth and the cyclical nature throughout the poem.

There was evidence of the rare and unexpected response providing an 'alternative' reading but, in these rare cases, marks have been awarded for any relevant point or plausible interpretation.

Question 2

Prose extract from: *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee

Question: How does the writer convey childhood memories in this extract?

Having the same question for both Questions 1 and 2 worked well, as there were no examples of responses answering to the wrong question/poem or text, which we have occasionally seen in past series.

The prose extract produced some very strong responses and a full range of marks were awarded, but this was not as popular as Question 1 and in many cases not as successful, although the basic topic was the same: school and childhood memories. Perhaps this could be because Laurie Lee's writing is quite sophisticated and full of wry humour and observation. Most candidates got the gist of the text, an unwilling boy going to school, his experiences in the playground but, more often than not, the humour in the text was missed. Also very few commented on the quick fire exchange between the author and his sisters. There was comment on the bullying going on in the playground with the author as a victim, but little mention of how quickly he learned and became 'a veteran' in this whole situation. The lesson in survival was missed by many. There were comments on some of the images, especially 'shrapnel' and the writer being 'bundled up in scarves'.

One examiner commented: 'As ever, many candidates thought this was a poem, and this inhibited their discussion of form and structure. I don't know if this is through lack of exposure to past papers or working with extracts: it does seem odd that they still don't seem to be expecting a prose piece. This question seemed less successful to me, with many candidates seeming to struggle with the 'old fashioned' nature of the text, and missing the humour. However, the playground imagery invoked was well explored, with several picking up on the 'war-like' language choices.'

Another examiner commented: 'The extract from *Cider with Rosie* was a good choice for weaker students who felt intimidated by poetry, which seemed to be more popular for students in the lower bands of marks. Overall, this was a good theme for candidates, as all students from every walk of life could relate to it.'

Specific examiner feedback included comments about:

- the lexical fields of war compared to the school grounds which allowed students to interpret and explain quite well
- the use of colloquial language
- the protective nature of the sisters who wrapped Laurie Lee in scarves and gave him a potato
- the ruthless nature of children and how the boy himself becomes one of them as a 'veteran'
- the mistaken meaning of 'present' (although the humour was not always identified)
- the personal responses that candidates could include, as each student has themselves felt nervous and anxious on their respective first days at school and could thereby identify and respond to the poem on a personal level.

An examiner stated: 'What I felt did not work well for the prose extract was that because it is not structured in an overtly intentional way (the way a poem is), students didn't really manage much by way of meaningful commentary on form and structure.'

Section B

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 3 was the more popular.

Question 3

How is losing a parent or child presented in Poem at Thirty-Nine and A Mother in a Refugee Camp?

Of Section B these were by far the more popular responses and offered mixed responses. Question 3 was well answered, and the poems chosen appear to have lent themselves perfectly to the question. Candidates did tend to stray from the question in *Mother in a Refugee Camp*, going into general description of the camp and conditions. Candidates often failed to comment on structure and form, unlike in Question 1, and this seemed odd since they were prepared for these poems. Possibly a deeper understanding of the language and themes almost distracted them from remembering to comment on the structure and form.

The choice of poems appeared to be a sound one as all candidates, bar a tiny minority, responded to the idea of loss. There were some very thoughtful responses to *A Mother in a Refugee Camp*; many commented on the image of the Madonna and child with some of the more confident responses noting that this was more like the images of the Pieta (the Virgin Mary cradling the dead Jesus) and not Mary with baby Jesus. There were a few who thought Madonna referred to the pop artiste, which demonstrated that a full understanding of the poem was lacking. Many picked up on the desolation of the camp – some even noting the irony of the situation – the camp was supposed to offer shelter and a haven.

Poem at Thirty-Nine saw some good responses – there were comments that on the whole this poem was the celebration of someone's life. Some interesting, and sometimes unusual. There were comments about the father 'being always tired' and some exploration about the 'violence' towards the poet. These responses were less technically orientated – looking at the poems more holistically; however, both poems appear to have worked together really well. Most examiner reports said that candidates identified:

- the way the two poems deal with grief
- the way the two speakers love their respective kin
- the way the two speakers choose to live their lives in memory and legacy of their respective kin
- language devices in both poems (metaphor, alliteration, assonance, similes, etc.)
- how people who have experienced loss must go on as the mother does.

There were far fewer rubric infringements seen than in previous series/years. Different approaches had been employed, either by analysing the poems separately or by comparison (which is not a requirement).

Question 4

Show how the poets convey their thoughts and feelings about close relationships in Sonnet 116 'Let me not to the marriage ...' and one other poem from the Anthology.

Candidates showed a good understanding of the sonnet and its form. Some, as sometimes occurs, chose poems that made discussion of the question rather difficult. The most successful and popular choice of poem seemed to be Rossetti's *Remember*. Many chose to write about *Poem at Thirty-Nine* alongside it, and this worked better than expected: candidates were able to discuss close relationships in different contexts. Candidates did seem to have more to say about structure and form than in Question 3, possibly as they have been taught the sonnet form more explicitly, but often structure and form are not commented explicitly upon.

One examiner commented: '*Sonnet 116 'Let me not to the marriage... was a good sonnet to explore. Students were good at picking up on the metaphors throughout the sonnet, which was rich enough for a wide range of comments and interpretations. One response commented explicitly on the negation in the poem, which was fantastic to read.'*

Another examiner said that: 'There was quite a range of poems to compare the sonnet to. Popular responses were *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *My Last Duchess* though some students chose a poem from Question 3. Some of the better responses were to *Piano* and *Remember* in my allocation of scripts.'

Another comment received stated: 'What works well for this question is the choice for students to demonstrate their expertise in their studies. Yet, one of the typical downfalls present (also seen in Question 3) is the lack of explicit structure and form commentary. Students are very good at language skills, but are not commenting meaningfully on structure and form, which is an important area to demonstrate in the exam.'

Finally, in a summary, one Team Leader commented: 'Examiners felt this question was generally not as well done as Question 3 because 'responses were lengthy but not always relevant...candidates wanted to talk about everything they knew about the poets, the context of the poems and what the "stories" were about...rather than their structure, technique or language use, or anything related to the actual question.'

Where candidates were less successful, literary devices had either been identified without explanation or were simply listed. Greater success would be achieved if candidates analysed specific areas of the text and developed their ideas, supporting them with relevant examples. 'Feature-spotting' is no substitute for detailed analysis. The ability to examine the writer's methods and to connect these with the question and with the ideas and feelings in the poems were often the most successful responses. It was good to see some candidate's referring to the effect on the reader, as this enables candidates to engage more with the effect of the language, structure and form.

The handling of form and structure was often disappointing in that there was some mention of stanzas and the presence or otherwise of rhyming patterns, but comment was often minimal as to how these contributed to the thoughts and feelings in the text.

Candidates should be reminded that they must write about two poems in Section B and, for each poem, they should consider the language, structure and form when answering the question.

Please do remember that the two poems in Section B **do not** have to be compared. We have been asked about this and should like to reassure all centres that a comparison is not required for this paper; however, some candidates do compare the two poems and often they do this with such confidence that the marks in the higher levels are achieved. It is important to remember that the full range of marks can be achieved without comparisons being made.

Conclusion

Centres are advised to make greater use of past papers and the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs), available online, in order to make candidates more aware of question format and structure.

In some cases, more time needs to be given to the teaching of the *Anthology* poems in order to allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available. There was evidence of accomplished work produced during the examination and many centres should be congratulated on the thorough preparation of their candidates.

There were a number of candidates who had not crossed the question number box on the examination paper. There were 160 'unidentified' unseen Section A responses and 223 Section B, *Anthology* responses. Centres are asked to remind their candidates to ensure that they tick which question they have answered.

To conclude, I should like to congratulate all of our candidates who have worked so hard for their qualification. Our candidates are always our priority. I should also like to thank ALL centres for choosing the Pearson Edexcel qualification as their preferred choice and to say a huge thank you to all teachers for their continued hard work, dedication and excellent preparation of their students. Thank you. We hope you join us again in the summer.

