GCSE (9-1) English Literature

Paper 1: Section B Post-1914 Literature

Text: Boys Don't Cry

Exemplar Scripts and Commentaries
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This booklet contains 5 scripts responding to the following question from the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs).

‘Dante, you’re the dad. Emma is our daughter’. (Melanie)

In what ways is Emma important in Boys Don’t Cry?

You must refer to the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 29 = 40 marks (includes 8 marks for the range of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures, and accurate use of spelling and punctuation)

The SAMs can be accessed through the following link:

Script 1

Towards the beginning of the novel Malorie Blackman uses the character of Emma to reveal that Dante struggled with the idea of children as he treats her more like an object and less of a person, calling her a ticking tomb and ‘it’. This reveals that he has no experience of children which is sad to see because that is his daughter he is looking at. This is a link to society because most boys of his age do not want to be looking after babies, they want to be going to a college or a university or going out and having a career. ‘Ticking time bomb’ links to this as Emma will literally change his future.

However, Dante does mature in the novel and Malorie Blackman uses the character of Emma to reveal how Dante turns from a boy to a mature adult. This is seen when Dante says “I gave up my place in uni” which is a shows how much he wanted to and this therefore shows that he has made the mature decision to care for his daughter instead. This reflects on society of today because the expectation is for him to still carry on with his studies and go to university, particularly because he got good grades at school, but instead he has to stay at home and look after his daughter.

Malorie Blackman also uses Emma character later on in the novel to demonstrate that Adam is more like a father than Dante. When Adam first meets Emma he is more loving and caring than Dante. He calls her positive things like ‘beautiful’, ‘gorgeous’ and ‘fresh” which therefore shows that Adam is treating her with a lot more respect than Dante is, which helps to show that he is more mature than his brother and this links to the society of today because not all boys are mature enough to show their feelings.

Towards the end of the book, Emma is important as Blackman uses her character to help out Adam emotionally after he has had his accident. This is seen when Emma goes to see Adam for the first time in months and he is surprised “she didn’t look at me like I was some kind of a freak”. This is a really important thing for Adam because he feels like a freak and is surprised but pleased not to be judged by Emma and it makes him feel nearly normal. This is a link to the society that we live in today because everyone cares about what they look like and if someone does not look right or they have something that it is noticeable then the person starts to worry more about what they look like. Mental health is an important issue in society today often caused by appearance and perhaps Blackman uses this to show that help is out there for people, because Adam attempt suicide but is helped back by Emma and the fact that she doesn’t judge him.
Script 1: 27 Marks

AO1/3 – Level 4 (20 marks)

AO4 – Level 3 (7 marks)

- A well-structured and sound response that considers how Emma is important in 4 key areas of the novel:
  1. her impact on Dante at the start of the novel and how he treats her ‘more like an object’
  2. how Emma helps Dante to mature as the novel develops
  3. Adam’s initial reaction to Emma and the way he seems ‘more like the farther than Dante’
  4. how Emma helps Adam ‘emotionally after he has had his accident’.

- All points have appropriately selected examples integrated within each paragraph, which support the points being made and place this response securely in level 3 for AO1. To raise this into level 4, more could perhaps be made of some points, particularly the impact Emma has upon Dante which could be expanded to take into account his relationship with his father.

- Analysis maintains an appropriately critical style, showing a sound understanding of the novel.

- Contextually, the points are relevant and sound and explore the relationship between the text and context. Paragraphs 1 and 2 a little repetitive in focusing on the impact Emma has on Dante’s education. However, the contextual comment in paragraph 4 is very good as it begins to show a detailed link between the text and the impact of appearance upon mental health. This lifts the response into level 4 for AO3.

- AO4 – although some sentences are rather long (concluding sentence in paragraph 3), overall, the quality of writing maintains the requirements of a Level 3 mark.
Script 2

One way Emma is important in the novel ‘Boys Don’t Cry’ is that she is used to show the real feelings Dante and his dad have for each other. Dante and his father can’t show their feelings for each other at the beginning of the novel which is why it is called ‘Boys Don’t Cry’. For example when Dante tells his father about his results his Dad does not show much enthusiasm or praise which hurts Dante, but his father is able to show care and love for Emma as he buys all the things she will need. This does show care and love for Dante as well as he knows Dante can’t afford them but he is unable to tell him properly. This shows that society makes men hide their feelings and how damaging it is but by the end of the book they are able to say ‘I love you’ to each other as Emma has helped them to bond.

Another way Emma is very important to the novel is that it shows that young adults can love their children even if they were not planned or wanted. Dante is at first not keen on Emma and resents her which is what most readers would expect from a teenage boy but when he listens to Emma say “Dadda” as her first word it makes him realise how much he loves Emma and how much she means to him. This relates to society as many people believe young adults will never love their children, even if they were a mistake. However this is untrue and this is shown in the novel as Dante ends up giving up university and becoming a mature father for her.

In chapter 34 Emma is also used to show the lack of respect society has for young single fathers with their children. When he takes her to the doctors, the receptionist is surprised, “your daughter” she says, when Dante tries to book her in for an appointment and says that her mother probably has the documents he needs. This shows that society mainly is shocked at single fathers as some people think it is a stereotype that mothers will always take the child with them. When Dante leaves he realises he needs to sort everything out to be able to keep Emma, which shows to readers that boys can be fathers.

Another reason Emma is shows to be important in the novel is because she is used to help Adam recover from his depression after he was jumped by Dante’s old friends Josh, Logan and Paul. “Hello unkie” is what Emma says to cheer Adam up when she sees him for the first time after his injuries and she strokes his face which shows Adam that there is nothing to be afraid off and helps him to think that other people might feel like Emma. This shows readers that appearance is not as important as they might think. Her innocence makes him see that what he looks like does not matter as much as being loved by a family.
Script 2: 30 Marks

AO1/3 – Level 4 (23 marks)
AO4 – Level 3 (7 marks)

1. Four key points are covered effectively, showing a sound understanding of Emma’s importance in the novel. Comments are sound throughout with some thorough engagement:
   - Emma’s role in bringing Dante and his father together is soundly covered, but a slight lack of explanation of how it is Emma that brings them together keeps this in level 3.
   - Emma’s role in showing that young people can love their children is an interesting point and is developed with effective evidence.
   - The third paragraph effectively develops the point made in paragraph 2.
   - Emma’s role in helping Josh is explored soundly.

2. Each paragraph follows a PEEC format, with appropriately chosen examples to support points made. The structure is particularly effective in paragraph 3 where the evidence is concise and well-chosen, moving the response into level 4.

3. Each paragraph is accompanied by a relevant contextual point and the paragraph format helps the student to make clear links between text and context, for instance ‘however, this is untrue and this is shown in the novel...’. This clear contextual linking shows detailed awareness and lifts the response into a level 4 for AO3.

4. AO4 – the response meets the requirements of a Level 3 as spelling, grammar and punctuation are consistent and the one or two lengthy sentences do not detract from the overall meaning.
The character of Emma is very important as she changes Dante’s life very profoundly as he has to give up on his dreams of university in order to look after her. From the start, Blackman presents him as very concerned about his educational success, showing him repeating the mantra ‘I need to pass’ and as wanting a university degree in order to be able to support his family. In this way Blackman subverts some stereotypical representations of young black men as reckless and disaffected.

Malorie Blackman uses the character of Emma to show how Dante’s relationship with his father changes. Dante and his Dad at the start are miles apart and Dante feels his father does not value him, this is conveyed when he does not praise his son for his results and Dante feels ‘disappointment flaring up inside’. Dante and his father find expressing their feelings difficult and that is what the title of the book means ‘Boys Don’t Cry’, and Dante’s tricky relationship with his father reflects how men are expected to be strong and tough in modern society. However, they are eventually able to bond over Emma as Dante’s father shows him how to be a parent, for instance how to hold her and feed her. By the end, when they are at the hospital, Dante’s father finally tells his son that he is proud of the way his son has become a real father. This suggests to readers that it is good to show your feelings and creates a role model in Dante of somebody who can rise to the challenge of being a teenage parent.

The character of Emma is also important as she shows how difficult it still is to be a teenage single parent in modern society. Whilst teenage girls are no longer hidden away if they get pregnant Melanie finds looking after Emma so hard that she abandons her and does not come back. She tells Dante that she has ‘tried and tried’ as she has had no experience of what a good family is like and admits that she is scared of what might happen if she keeps her. The fact that she doesn’t come back is unusual and interesting for readers as it demonstrates that men can be effective parents as Dante manages without her. It also really reinforces the hard reality of teenage parenting.

The character of Emma is also important as she shows how much Dante changes. For instance, when he has his first public encounter with the baby at the Bar Belle, he defends her from his friends who are rude about her. This highlights a growing maturity for Dante as he puts his daughter first and leaves the bar to take her home. This is another subverting of stereotypes as young teenage boys are not usually seen as capable of responsible parenthood. Blackman also suggests the character of Emma is important when she helps Dante cope with Adam’s attack. He lifts her up and uses her for comfort. This portrays him as caring in a mature way and understanding that he loves her, which is another way that Blackman suggests that men should show their feelings.

Emma is also the one who helps Adam start to accept what has happened to him, as she kisses his scar and does not seem to mind what he looks like. This links to modern society as people today are obsessed with appearances like Adam is, but Emma’s reaction exemplifies that what you look like is not as important as how you act, because all Emma cares about is that Adam loves her.
Script 3: 33 Marks

AO1/3 – Level 4 (26 marks)

AO4 – Level 3 (7 marks)

- This is a thorough response which demonstrates a sustained understanding of Emma’s importance throughout the novel. Four key areas are explored:
  - The effect on Dante’s life and on his relationship with his father.
  - Society’s reaction to single teenage parents shown through Melanie.
  - The change in Dante and his ‘growing maturity’
  - Emma’s role in helping Adam come to terms with his disfigurement.
- Every point is well supported by well-chosen references.
- Contextually, the candidate has added relevant comments to each analytical point which show a range of ideas and a sustained understanding of the ways the text reflects the context. To move into L5 the context needs to be integrated throughout the paragraph [as it is in paragraph 3 about Melanie] and show an understanding of the writer’s intent. Points could also be more subjective through the use of ‘might’ ‘could’ ‘possibly’ etc to fully show an understanding of the nuances of contextual link [for instance, not everybody is obsessed with their appearance].
- Another area that could enhance the response would be the addition of an overview at the start and the use of a variety of discourse markers at the start of paragraphs to avoid repetition of ‘The importance of Emma’.
- AO4 – the quality of writing is effectively controlled and spelling, punctuation and grammatical devices are accurate enough to warrant full marks for AO4.
In the novel ‘Boys Don’t Cry’ Blackman uses the character of Emma to reveal the way in which people grow in response to changes in their lives, and how people in society fall back on damaging stereotypes when judging people.

Firstly, Blackman uses the character of Emma to reveal that people can grow and mature in response to change in their life. This is seen most clearly through Dante’s character arc; the opening of the book is striking in its portrayal of him as a typical self-centred teenage boy, boasting about his brilliant future as a journalist and disgusted by the changing of Emma’s nappy. However, as the novel progresses Dante learns to overcome his shock, applies for a part-time job and takes advice on getting full parental rights for his daughter. Blackman perhaps does this to demonstrate that society needs to help young people like Dante rather than dismissing them. This typical attitude is shown most clearly by the doctor’s receptionist who reflects society’s attitude that women should look after children, not young men like Dante.

Emma is important in terms of society’s attitude to mothers, as her abandonment by Melanie would be very shocking for many readers. Melanie cannot cope and feels she will ruin her daughter’s life by staying. This is an unusual storyline and Blackman perhaps uses it to highlight how hard it is for young single mothers, even in modern society, if like Melanie they have no good role models.

In fact from the start Blackman is unusual in her picture of young people, as even though Dante is selfish at the start, he is shown as serious about his education which is a positive image of black people for readers of the novel, and he becomes a responsible father which overturns another society stereotype about black families. Another positive image is Adam as a young gay man, able to show his uninhibited feelings to Emma from the start, and she is important in terms of helping to make him a positive role model for young men who might be struggling with their sexuality, as he is shown to be happy and natural when displaying affection towards her.

Emma is also shown to be important to Adam’s growth as a person as she helps him to recover after his attack by kissing his ‘scar-ridden cheek’ rather than recoiling in horror at his changed appearance. It also reflects society’s damaging prejudices against those who look unusual or different. She is also important in terms of his sexuality as unlike Dante, she does not withhold affection because he is gay. Blackman shows her as innocent, as she does not see Adam as any different, she just loves him because he loves her. Perhaps Blackman is saying that we should all be more innocent in our approach to other people and not judge them purely on appearance or their sexuality. This narrative arc will also help younger readers in particular too think seriously about their self-image as Emma makes Adam see that he is missing out on happiness by hiding away and worrying about what he looks like.

Another way in which Emma is shown to be important is the way in which her presence in the family helps to bring Dante and his father together. Their relationship evolves from a type of passive-aggressive relationship, with Dante disappointed in his father’s response to his exams,
to a more caring co-dependent relationship where they are finally able to say ‘I love you’ to each other. Contextually, this goes against society’s stereotype of men being unshakeable emotional rocks all the time as Blackman makes showing emotion and being more open seem the most sensible path for men to take as the family are happy at the end of the novel. Also, Emma gives Dante and his father a bond as they are both single parents and the novel helps to shine a light on some of the problems faced by modern single families today.

Overall, perhaps Emma’s most important role is being a catalyst for character and plot development. Not only does she help Dante and his father show their emotions and help Adam come to terms with his assault, she ultimately brings the whole family together. Blackman ends the novel with a classic scene of a family meal, with the family reconciled and laughing together, but by using a messy family unit like the Bridgemans, she seems to be suggesting to readers that modern single-parent families can be as effective as traditional nuclear units.
The answer starts with an overview which shows perceptive understanding of the author’s purpose.

The response meets all the requirements for a mark at Level 5, but paragraph 2, 3 and 4 lack quotations and are slightly heavier on the context at the expense of textual analysis. It is an assured response that shows a high level of engagement with the text and covers several key conceptual areas with maturity.

- The idea of personal growth, exemplified through Dante
- Melanie’s inability to cope and how this highlights attitudes to single mothers
- Blackman’s depiction of young people
- Emma’s importance to Adam
- Dante’s relationship with his father
- Emma’s role in bringing the family together

Exemplification is discerning [This typical attitude is shown most clearly by] and sharply focused and concise – for instance when discussing Adam’s growth the reference is succinct with a short quotation nearly embedded: ‘by kissing his ‘scar-ridden cheek’ rather than recoiling in horror at his changed appearance’.

The critical style is impressive with several sophisticated phrases making the perceptive understanding clear – for instance ‘This is seen most clearly through Dante’s character arc; the opening of the book is striking in its portrayal of him as a typical self-centred teenage boy’ which combines succinct text reference with interpretation.

It is in the integration of context where this response fully deserves full marks. All the interpretation is firmly embedded in an excellent understanding of the full variety of contextual issues carried by the novel. Modal phrases are used to imply subjectivity, Blackman’s purpose is considered and reader response is perceptively interpreted. Most impressive is the perceptive understanding of the unusual portrayal of Dante and Melanie as atypical of young people today.

AO4 – spelling and punctuation is consistently accurate. Sentence structure is sophisticated and helps to carry convincing interpretations.
Overall, Emma is important in the novel Boys Don’t Cry as she helps to develop Dante’s relationship with his father and brother, whilst also exposing some of society’s issues such as the obsession with appearance and negative attitudes to single parents.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, Blackman uses Emma as a catalyst within the family, bringing certain characters together. In Dante’s relationship with his father, Emma is also used to highlight the problems men have in modern society with showing their feelings. In the early stages of the novel, Dante and his father struggle to show affection towards each other; for instance, when Dante gets his exam results his Dad almost dismisses his achievement, which hurts Dante badly. His reaction is internal however, he ‘thinks sourly’ rather than speaking to his father, showing the reader how Dante and his Dad struggle to share emotions with one another. This is perhaps reflective of society at large, as men do often struggle to show their feelings even within family relationships. Dante spends much of the novel feeling he has disappointed his father and is seen by him as a ‘waste of space’, which shows the damage that can be done by keeping feelings hidden.

However, it is Emma who finally brings father and son together. Dante’s Dad is able to show affection towards her almost from the start and takes practical charge of her care immediately, buying the essentials Dante will need to become a father. This is an interesting, and perhaps, rare positive presentation of single fatherhood. This continues as Dante and his father gradually begin to bond over her, until Dante eventually sees when ‘Dad had a smile on his face’ that he has finally pleased his father. By the end of the novel Emma has helped them to bond to the degree that they are able to say ‘I love you’ to each other, which perhaps demonstrates to the reader that men should display emotion as they are both happier when they do. It might also show readers that not all families have to have a mother and father, men can manage just as well on their own.

Blackman also uses the character of Emma to develop Dante and his brothers’ relationship, as she helps to bring them closer. At the start of the novel the two brothers showed envy towards each other, for example, when Dante complains about Adam being naturally smart and Adam being their Dad’s favourite. They also clash over Adam’s sexuality as Dante feels it is just a phase, which is reflective of the struggle many young men have when they come out as gay. However, as the novel progresses, Dante and Adam become closer as they bond over the baby and Dante becomes protective of Adam and accepting of his sexuality, eventually saying “No one does that to my brother”. This suggests to the audience that Dante, having to look after Emma and becoming protective over her, has made him become a more caring person, and she has helped to strengthens their bond. Perhaps Blackman is suggesting that if people become more caring then today’s society can become a more tolerant place.

Emma also helps Adam and comforts him at a time where he feels bad and has low levels of self esteem. For example, she kisses his scar which he is very embarrassed about. This is perhaps meant to show how wrong it is in society to be concerned about appearances as Emma is shown not to care. This reveals to the reader Emma’s importance in the novel as she not only acts as a pivotal part of the family and brings them all together, she shows things
about society and helps readers to think about things like self image. It is when he thinks of being with Emma that Adam realises he misses life and gets the courage to leave his room despite his disfigurement.

The final way Emma is really important is in the way Blackman uses her character to reveal society’s opinions on single parents. The comments “Kids having kids”, and “no doubt living of benefits” shows how harshly society judges single parents and in particular they judge teenagers as they think they are too young and assume they all live off the state rather than working. However, Blackman turns this around as Dante makes a success of parenting and ends the book on a positive note with the family laughing together.
Script 5: 40 Marks

AO1/3 – Level 5 (32 marks)
AO4 – Level 3 (8 marks)

• The answer starts with an overview which shows a high level of engagement with the text and a perceptive understanding of some of the societal themes in the novel.
• The candidate has produced an assured response, which shows a sustained understanding of Emma’s importance in the novel. A critical style is maintained throughout and several of the areas are explored with maturity. Overall, a balanced response that warrants full marks.

4 important areas are explored:
1. How Emma helps to develop Dante’s relationship with his father and the way her arrival in the house enables them to ‘bond over her’. A mature understanding is shown of the way this relationship reflects men’s inability to show their emotions.
2. The way Blackman uses Emma to ‘help and develop Dante and his brother’s relationship’ and to bring them closer.
3. Society’s reactions to Dante as a single parent and the negative reactions he receives. [A discussion of Emma’s importance/effect on the life of Melanie would have helped to move this to full marks as it would have strengthened the argument about societal attitudes to single parents.]
4. How Emma acts as a comfort to Adam when he has low levels of self-esteem, and how she is used by Blackman not only as a ‘pivotal part of the family’ but as a way of exploring ideas about appearance.

• Every point made is well supported with discerning textual examples, usually introduced with ‘for instance’ to show a high level of engagement with the whole of novel.
• The answer is well structured with a clear introduction and a variety of paragraph openings which ensure the ideas connect and flow.
• All the ideas are underpinned by an excellent understanding of the full range of contextual background to the novel. Context is fully integrated and interleaved with analysis, with modal phrases such as ‘this is perhaps reflective of’ showing a nuanced understanding of the link between text and context. Contextual points are also grounded in an understanding of what it is the writer wanted to convey to readers.
• AO4 – Spelling, punctuation and grammatical structuring are effectively controlled and the response warrants full marks for the AO.