

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2016

GCSE English (5EH3A)
Poetry and Creative Response

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5EH3A Principal Moderator Report

For Reading and Writing, centres and candidates have a choice of four themes to answer on set by Edexcel: Relationships, Clashes and Collisions, Somewhere, Anywhere and Taking a Stand.

For Poetry (Reading) candidates must complete one reading task individually and following their preparation they have up to two hours to complete the task. The response must be a written response of up to 1000 words or a digital media response which demonstrates that they have read and understood the poems or a multi-modal response combining the previous options. For the chosen theme candidates respond to two poems which they can select from the Edexcel Poetry Anthology and one poem which is set by Edexcel and changes every year. They prepare by making notes and planning their response to the task.

The reading response must show that candidates can:

- read the poems with insight and engagement
- interpret the writers' ideas and perspectives.

For Creative Writing candidates must complete one writing task on their chosen theme. For each theme, there is a choice of stimulus material which is designed to be used as a starting point. For three of the themes in this series, the stimulus material consists of a series of four photographs, and for one theme a digital video clip is provided. Following their preparation they have up to two hours to complete the task and their response must be an individual written response of up to 1000 words. The writing response must show that candidates can:

- Write clearly, effectively and imaginatively in a chosen form to engage the reader
- Ensure spelling, punctuation and grammatical structures are accurate and appropriate for purpose and effect

The pattern established last summer, in which centres often appeared to be entering part of a cohort rather than the entire group, was continued this series. Once again, whilst a range of marks were seen, there were fewer at the top of the range than in previous years: marks were often clustered around the 20s and 30s.

Across the four themes, responses were fairly evenly divided between 'Clashes and Collisions' and 'Relationships'. Some centres chose 'Taking A Stand' and a small number used 'Somewhere, Anywhere'. One moderator reported centres misinterpreting the Creative Writing task for Taking a Stand, but equally, some very good work was seen in response to this.

For Clashes and Collisions 'Exposure', 'August 6th' and 'Invasion' were particularly popular and for Relationships, 'Song for Last Year's Wife', 'Our Love Now' and '04/01/07' were seen most often. As these selections suggest, there was more evidence of centres choosing poems to complement the set poem this series, which was a positive feature, and a significant number of candidates were able to make detailed and developed comments on the ways in which loss is presented. Responses to the Relationships set poem 'Stop All the Clocks' were generally good although some tended to work through devices rather than fully engage with meaning. Candidates also engaged well with 'To His Love', despite some irrelevant use of biographical detail, and often clear connections were made between this and Exposure. Less successful choices to use alongside this text included 'Hitcher', 'Your Dad Did What?' and 'The Class Game'

Fewer very long responses were noted this year, both for Poetry and for Creative Writing.

The Creative Responses also tended to use the Relationships and Clashes and Collisions stimulus material. Some of the Relationships images produced very strong responses: the couple in the café, and the two children at the beach were noted as being particularly successful: a number of candidates used these images as the starting point for complex narratives involving flashbacks and reflections on time. The image of young people tended to produce less developed responses, mainly using a festival setting in the present day.

For Clashes and Collisions, modern images were deliberately chosen: however, many centres had all candidates producing WW1 stories which seemed to draw more from the poems than from the intended stimulus. These varied in quality – some were formulaic and showed little sense of development, but others were strong and original. Those which used the idea of modern warfare were often gritty and powerful.

Few responses were seen to the other themes. As noted earlier, one moderator commented on some misinterpretation of the 'Taking a Stand' material, but other well-developed pieces were evident, including one in which a candidate imagined themselves in the audience for the recording of Strange Fruit and then linked this to a contemporary reflection on the message of the song.

Some centres seemed to have ignored the stimuli altogether, offering 'A Ghost Story' as their Creative response!

Most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria consistently: there were relatively few severely inconsistent centres where marks were moderated both up and down. However, the main pattern was one of leniency, particularly around Bands 3 and 4.

As noted in previous reports, Band 3 responses are 'sound' – they explain how the writer has used techniques to create effect, and support these points with specific examples. Band 4 responses are 'thorough' – understanding is more developed and the response is

sustained and consistent. For Band 5, candidates need to demonstrate 'perceptive' understanding across all three poems with well selected and discriminating use of evidence. The rigid frameworks referred to above sometimes prevented candidates from moving into the top of Band 4 and into Band 5: candidates need the freedom to move beyond PEE and PEEL in order to develop their own conceptualised response. Some centres still award Band 5 where there are only flashes of perceptive understanding of the poems.

In the Creative responses, centres need to look at the balance between imagination and control. As ever, consistent use of verb tenses and accurate use of commas are key discriminators. The strongest responses show control of voice and tone as well as a high level of accuracy. Whole text structure and links between paragraphs/sections are also important and sometimes overlooked by centres.

Where candidates have not produced an imaginative response but have offered a literal description of what they can see in the picture stimulus, it is very difficult to apply the criteria. This was noted more frequently in this series, particularly among candidates at the lower end of the mark range.

Although the stimuli are intended to be just that – a stimulus for thought, not a straitjacket – in some cases, centres seemed to have bypassed them entirely and it was not clear from either the cover sheets or the responses which stimulus set had been used.

This specification is coming to the end of its life, as is the concept of Controlled Assessment in English. Whilst it is clear that when taught and administered well this unit allows candidates to demonstrate effectively the depth of their thought and understanding, the administrative issues that have occurred since the beginning of the specification have continued. Some centres still do not standardise effectively or transfer alterations in marks to the final cover sheet, which can make the moderation process difficult.

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>