

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

GCSE English (5EH3A)
Poetry and Creative Response

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General Overview

For the first time, this unit is awarded completely separately from Speaking and Listening, which is now an endorsement rather than part of the unit.

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

Most candidates had been well prepared by centres for this component and engaged well with the themes, tasks and texts. All topics were well received by candidates.

Across the three 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'. There was limited evidence of differentiation in the choice of poems from the Anthology, but more variation than in previous series, which may be a response to the recommendations in the PM report. Choice of poems and even of clusters can be an excellent tool in allowing candidates of different abilities to produce their best work, and some centres used this to good effect, with different groups responding to different clusters. In some centres, candidates had studied the set poem and then made their own (guided?) choice of poems to write about, which worked well.

For Taking a Stand, 'Those Bastards in Their Mansions' and 'No Problem' were most frequently used. For Clashes and Collisions 'Exposure', 'The Drum' and 'Invasion' were particularly popular and for Relationships, 'Valentine', 'Kissing' and 'Rubbish at Adultery' were seen most often. Candidates were more successful with the set poems in this series, and responded particularly effectively to 'Lamentations'. However, a number of candidates struggled with poems chosen by their centre: 'No Problem', 'and Half Caste' were often dealt with less successfully, and less able candidates struggled with the complexities of 'August 6, 1945' and 'The World is a Beautiful Place'. However, most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had engaged with the meaning and language of the poems, and supported their points with textual references. This was made easier when candidates could see a conceptual link between the poems chosen – so, for example, 'Exposure' and 'Lamentations'.

Once again, there is still significant evidence that the use of literary terms can become a straitjacket rather than a supportive framework, leading to a tendency to 'feature spot'. While the use of 'Point, Evidence, Explanation'

is helpful in allowing candidates to structure their writing, for students working towards Band 5, there is a need to show perceptive and discriminating analysis, and for this purpose a fully conceptualised response is necessary, rather than a more mechanical process. Some centres had attempted to help candidates by giving them a framework to structure their answer: in the worst cases, this led to very similar responses which did not allow candidates to demonstrate their own understanding. Irrelevant contextual detail was less common but still a concern as it is unnecessary and often takes up too much space in the response.

No digital or multi-modal responses were seen by the PM or reported by moderators.

For Creative Writing candidates produced a wide range of thought-provoking responses. Candidates do not have to use the same theme for the Poetry and the Creative Writing task, and so here 'Relationships' and 'Clashes and Collisions' were the most popular choices.

The Relationships photographs stimulated a range of different responses and had clearly engaged candidates' imagination. For Clashes and Collisions, there were some very strong responses based on the picture of the horse, which drew on imagery from War Horse, and 'Hitler in Hell' also led to some striking monologue work.

There is evidence that centres are explicitly teaching narrative techniques such as flashback and focusing on vocabulary and sentence structure for effect. The main weakness in responses is accuracy – particularly in sentence punctuation, with frequent comma splicing, and in agreement of verb tenses. A greater focus on these elements would help candidates to achieve higher marks.

Most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently: there were relatively few severely inconsistent centres. However, there was some significant bunching around previous boundary marks and where centres were lenient it tended to be at this point. Centres tended to be lenient more often than they were harsh.

Most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently. At the top of Band 5, there were a number of candidates who produced detailed and original pieces of Poetry analysis. The main inconsistency remains the boundary between Band 3 and Band 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.

Unlike Unit 1, there is no requirement for comparison in this unit. The key skills are engaging with the meaning of the poems and showing an understanding of the poets' choices of language and technique. As in the previous series, there is still some evidence of 'over-preparation' which limits candidates. Some centres, however, had noted the mention of 'personal comments' in the previous report and had encouraged this, with mixed results.

The application of the marking criteria for the writing task was mainly accurate although occasionally optimistic. Once again, the main issues came from responses which were poorly planned and structured. The assessment criteria for AO3 (i and ii) were applied consistently in most cases at Bands 1 and 2. Marks at the boundaries between Bands 3, 4 and 5 were less secure. The main issue in this area was control. Band 3 specifies 'some evidence of crafting in the construction of sentences' and 'controlled paragraphing', whereas Band 4 specifies 'variety in the construction of sentences' and 'secure organisation'. At times, responses with little control of sentence structure or paragraphing were placed in Band 4 because some of the vocabulary choices were apt and effective. In such cases, centres need to consider the balance between all of the bullet points in the mark

scheme. Band 5 responses are typically 'convincing', 'sophisticated' and 'compelling'.

Assessment criteria for AO3 (iii) were applied consistently in most cases, although with some leniency at the top of the range and harshness towards to bottom of the range. For 6 or 7 marks there should be clear evidence of using punctuation devices with precision and sophistication **for deliberate effect**. Whilst assessment of spelling was mainly consistent, assessment of punctuation was not. Again, a useful reference point for punctuation is the accurate use of commas – some centres seemed to struggle with this, and there was evidence of teachers automatically correcting errors as they marked but then awarding marks which were higher than their corrections suggested.

