



Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2023

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced  
Level in English Literature (WET03)

Paper 3: Poetry and Prose

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## **Introduction**

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International A-Level provider.

For this unit, WET03, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose, on the two prose texts that they have studied.

For **Section A, Unseen Poetry**, candidates will use the reading and critical skills that they have learnt throughout the course. Candidates will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed on a separate Source Insert.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

For **Section B, Prose**, candidates answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, on the two studied prose texts that they have studied. Candidates can select from the themes: *Growing Up, Colonisation and After, Science and Society* or *Women and Society*. Candidate responses should be informed by an understanding and appreciation of the contexts in which their chosen texts are both written and read. Candidates should be encouraged to view the texts in comparison to each other.

In Section B, students will study two out of a choice of three thematically linked texts. They will learn about:

- the importance of the relationship between texts, making connections and comparison between texts
- the significance of the cultural and contextual influences under which literary texts are written and received
- how to respond creatively, relevantly and in an informed way to texts using appropriate terminology and concepts as well as coherent and accurate written expression
- how to analyse texts from a critical perspective.

There are 20 marks available for Section A and 30 for Section B.

The total number of 50 marks available for this paper represents 25% of IA2.

**Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives A01 and A02.**

**Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives A01, A02, A03 and A04.**

A05 is not assessed in this paper.

*Please refer to the specification for details of the Assessment Objectives and their full weightings.*

## General Overview of the WET03 January 2023 paper and performance

This has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose. For this series, a full range of marks was awarded.

Firstly, centres should be recognised for how well candidates have been prepared for this section of the examination paper. The unseen poem for Question 1 was *Duty* by Natasha Trethewey. Most candidates produced successful and interesting responses to the poem and few seemed to struggle with accessing the poem in a meaningful way. It was a pleasure to read the interpretations of the poem offered. The full range of levels were accessed across the mark scheme, with most candidates placed between Level 2-4. It should be noted, that as in previous series, candidates are drawing from an impressive array of poetic and literary terminology (particularly with reference to form and structure) but this knowledge is not always used to explore theme or meaning within the poem. Responses that are able to link poetic form to function, rather than by listing the techniques used by the poet, invariably access the higher levels of the mark scheme more successfully. Candidates should also take care not to attempt to analyse structural features that are not present in the poem (iambic pentameter, for example) as this can make it seem as if they are working through a pre-prepared checklist of techniques that *might* be present rather than responding to the poem itself.

In the Prose section, the most popular theme was *Science and Society* (Questions 6 and 7) with the second most popular theme *Growing Up* (Questions 2 and 3). There were fewer responses to *Women and Society* (Questions 8 and 9) and *Colonisation and After* (Questions 4 and 5). All texts had responses written on them in this exam series and many candidates were placed in Level 3-5.

As with previous exam series, written expression is mostly clear and many candidates are meeting the requirements of writing fluently and accurately, conveying their knowledge and understanding of their studied texts effectively. On the whole, contextual comment has been used more effectively than in previous series. However, the demands of Assessment Objective 1 (AO1) and Assessment Objective 4 (AO4) were not always evenly covered. Candidates should ensure that they address each of the Assessment Objectives.

Handwriting could also sometimes be an issue. It's incredibly important that it is as clear as possible.

## Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

### Question 1

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *Duty* by Natasha Trethewey. This was a discriminating poem that allowed students to access the full range of the mark scheme. There were few responses at all in Level 1.

The poem gives an account of the poet's father evacuating himself and her from the family home during a hurricane. It was a pleasure to read many of the responses to this which were wide ranging in the material they covered, spanning explorations of the way in which the central father and daughter relationship is presented to more abstract presentations of fear, family and the way in which memory and family stories are passed down through the generations. One particularly successful response began with the poet's presentation of her father and used it as a jumping off point to explore more abstract ideas of masculinity. The most successful responses – those that are controlled or nuanced – were able to deftly weave textual evidence and discussion of poetic technique throughout to support points.

It should be noted that responses are most successful where time is obviously spent on planning. There is a lot to do in the allotted time: candidates must read, absorb and analyse an unseen poem and a clear plan would help in marshalling together an argument that would help to give responses shape and clarity. Planning is time well-spent in the examination.

Some responses were also not quick enough to get to the point of what they wanted to say, spending time in their introduction describing what the poem was about in detail, when they would have been more successful had they outlined a brief thesis statement before closely analysing the text.

All responses seemed to be aware of Assessment Objectives 1 and 2 (AO1 and AO2) and of the importance of exploring how meaning is created within a poem and of how literary and linguistic terminology as well as structure and form are used to do this. Candidates referred to the extended metaphors of love, duty (one high scoring response spending time exploring the connotations of the title and its focus on *nobleness and obligation*) and protection used throughout the poem and were able to talk effectively about the way in which imagery and word choice is used by the poet to convey panic and danger as contrasted with the safety provided by her father. Many responses discussed the dramatic way in which the incident is framed by the poet, pinpointing the theatrical semantic field used to do this ('backdrop' and 'props in the story'). Other responses noted the presentation of nature as an *uncontrollable force*, focussing on the way in which personification *ascribes both God-like power and intention to the hurricane*.

At Assessment Objective 1 (AO1), candidates are most successful where they can use evidence consistently to support their points. Some candidates were not discriminating enough in their selection of quotation or did not use evidence to underpin their exploration of theme, idea and meaning.

Candidates are able to discuss imagery well but are still approaching structure and form with varying degrees of success. One particularly successful way in which comment on structure was tied to an exploration of meaning in the poem was the comment on the repeated use of two-line stanzas and the link between this aspect of the form of the poem and the central relationship between the two characters. This was a good example of how to link comment on

structure to an aspect of theme. One good example of how to explore structure stated how the disjointed form of the poem echoed the way in which the memory of the event is fragmented. The candidate notes that *The poet frequently utilises enjambment, hyphens, colons ... to illustrate the panicked and disjointed nature of the story* before going on to link the deliberate structural choices to the trauma of the situation.

However, some responses made superficial comment – those often placed in Level 2 – on aspects of form (such as blank verse or rhyme scheme) that are either not present within the poem or were not tied to a discussion of its meaning. Others, as in previous series, commented on the shape and layout of the poem. These responses – Level 2 and bottom Level 3 – often ignored discussion of voice and perspective in favour of identifying structural technique that was not developed or relevant to the point being made.

For this section of the paper, candidates are required to show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features, conventions in poetry, and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts and by responding critically and creatively.

It is recommended that centres continue to make use of the *Sample Assessment Materials* and past papers in order to become even more familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. In order to achieve Level 4 or above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Analysis of the poem should be controlled and well supported with evidence and close reference to the techniques used and should provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Unseen Poetry question assesses Assessment Objectives 1 and 2:

A01: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

A02: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

## Section B: Prose

Centres should be congratulated on having thoroughly prepared their candidates for the examination. Candidates knew their texts well and many could make perceptive and insightful comparisons between them. A full range of marks was awarded.

Assessment Objective 3 (AO3) asks candidates to make connections between a text and its context. In contrast to previous series, candidates are often including more contextual comment including references to literary context as well as contemporary reception of a text. For instance, responses to the *Growing Up* set of questions that explored *Great Expectations*, often commented on Dickens' role as social commentator. One response to Question 2 made the point that Dickens presents Pip's struggles and social education as a way of talking allegorically about class and the role it played in Victorian society. This candidate covered Assessment Objectives 1, 2 and 3 in this analysis – demonstrating awareness both of how the character of Pip is a literary construct, crafted by Dickens, and a product of the context of the time.

Candidates were often less secure in applying the skills needed to meet Assessment Objectives 1 and 4.

Assessment Objective 1 (AO1) asks candidates to write *informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression*. Some responses were eloquent and thoughtful but lacked the articulation of how the writers used method and literary technique that would have placed them within a higher level. Candidates are encouraged to explore narrative perspective, voice and literary and linguistic technique in their investigation of their chosen texts. Responses that do this demonstrate an awareness of the crafting of the texts and are more highly rewarded as a result.

In relation to Assessment Objective 4 (AO4), there were few responses that dealt with the texts as separate entities, but candidates are not always exploring points of connection between them in depth or considering the ways in which the texts might cover similar or different ground and why. Where discourse markers such as 'similarly' are used it's often clear that the link between the two studied texts is a tenuous one and that the candidate has not considered the connection thoroughly. In other cases, responses made very good comparative points but didn't always support them thoroughly enough or explore them in detail (AO1 and AO2).

There are many comparisons that candidates can make between their chosen texts. These can include characters, theme, setting and context (both social and historical as well as literary) but it is worth remembering that points of comparison can also be made on the style, technique, form and voice used within the novels. One response to Question 6 on *Never Let Me Go* and *The Handmaid's Tale* set up a brilliant point about how language is often used as a tool of oppression rather than communication in dystopian societies, but didn't go on to develop the comparison in a way that would have pushed the response into Level 5.

As with Section A, candidates would benefit from spending time planning. Where this was apparent the response was frequently more controlled, discriminating and more tightly comparative.

Comments on each question are based on the evidence seen and only included for the most popular questions.

### **Questions 2 and 3** ***Growing Up***

The set texts for the theme of **Growing Up** are: *What Maisie Knew*, *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*.

There were fewer responses for the **Growing Up** option although all of the texts were considered. Question 3 had the higher number of responses and is considered in more detail.

**Question 2:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present secrets.

There were only two responses to this question.

**Question 3:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present how characters respond to challenges.

Candidates explored the various ways in which challenges are explored within their studied texts. *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple* were the most popular text choices although some candidates had studied *What Maisie Knew*. Points made included: how challenge is built into the form of the bildungsroman, how characters face challenges that arise from family, moral choices or society and how characters often achieve self-improvement as a result of the challenges they face. Better responses compared narrative voice (one particular response comparing the relative educations of Pip and Celie and how this is expressed through narrative voice and style and how that develops through the course of the novels) or secondary and even minor characters. One response explored the challenges faced by Mrs Pocket and was particularly effective.

### **Questions 4 and 5** ***Colonisation and After***

The set texts for the theme of **Colonisation and After** are: *Heart of Darkness*, *The Lonely Londoners* and *A Passage to India*.

This section had the fewest number of responses across both questions although all three texts were considered.

**Question 4:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts use symbolism.

There were few responses to this question.

Points that candidates could have made for this question included: the symbolism of the titles, the use of setting and place (Waterloo station in *Lonely Londoners*, the Congo River in *Heart of Darkness* and the Ganges in *A Passage to India*) and the way in which the writers use imagery and motif.

At Assessment Objectives 1 and 2, responses were least successful where they described or re-told the story of the novels. Assessment Objective 3 was covered well with candidates integrating contextual nicely into their responses.

**Question 5:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore suffering.

Points that candidates could have been made in response to this question included: events and settings in each novel that depict suffering, the way in which characters suffer and how this might be caused by internal or external factors

As with Question 4, candidates were strong on Assessment Objective 3 and were able to incorporate a range of contextual comment on the impact of colonisation into their responses. In weaker examples, this verged into ‘bolted on’ context. One mid-scoring response was able to comment on how the narrative within *A Passage to India* is able to convey the suffering of many characters, commenting on the ‘polyphonic’ quality of the novel and how this is used to present competing fears and experiences.

### **Questions 6 and 7** *Science and Society*

The set texts for the theme of **Science and Society** are: *Never Let Me Go*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Frankenstein*.

This theme was by far the most popular with the vast majority of candidates in this section responding to Question 6. There was an even distribution between the text choices for this theme.

**Question 6:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore loneliness.

This was a question that was open to a range of interpretations and avenues of exploration. Points made included: how the loneliness of characters is used to portray the fragility and suffering of the human condition, how loneliness is undesirable but used as a method of social and political control within dystopian societies and how settings are used by writers to evoke loneliness.

Assessment Objectives 1 and 2 were handled particularly well in the best responses to this question and candidates were able to talk about effectively about shifts in narrative perspective. This was most evident in discussions that linked *The Handmaid’s Tale and Frankenstein*.

Contextual comment for Assessment Objective 3 was also well integrated. Candidates were able, as in previous series, to discuss the literary contexts of the Gothic or dystopian genres but were also to link their own experiences to their reading of the texts. One candidate made a link to their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and how a modern reader might see themselves within *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Frankenstein*. This was particularly perceptive.

**Question 7:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present threatening environments.

This question was not as popular as Question 6 but still produced a range of interpretations and responses. Points made included: how a veneer of safety is created for the students of Hailsham in *Never Let Me Go*, the menacing and isolated quality of Frankenstein's laboratory and the overt brutality displayed in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In particular, there were some perceptive and insightful comments made on the use of concepts and the technique of the writers in each text. One response explored the way in which Atwood and Ishiguro both use juxtaposition in settings to convey the manipulative and dangerous quality of the worlds the characters live in.

### **Questions 8 and 9** ***Women and Society***

The set texts for the theme of **Women and Society** are: *Wuthering Heights*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Beloved*.

The most popular texts were *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved*. There were fewer responses on *Mrs Dalloway* and comment is limited to the most popular novels.

**Question 8:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore the impact of painful experiences.

A range of responses and interpretations were provided for this question and candidates explored – often in detail – the impact of painful experiences upon the characters. Points included discussion of the haunting of Heathcliff within *Wuthering Heights* and the use of Cathy's ghost to symbolise the way in which past guilt is manifested in the present, the patriarchal worlds evoked in *Mrs Dalloway* and *Wuthering Heights* and the ways in which failed romantic relationships and rejection can leave a painful legacy.

Assessment Objectives 2 and 4 were handled well on this question, but at times the links made between the studied texts would have benefitted from support from precise quotation and analysis of literary technique.

**Question 9:** Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts create a sense of fear.

There were no responses to this question.

## Paper Summary

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and there have been many marks awarded in the top two levels. Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates so well.

Based on performance on this paper, centres are offered the following advice for their future success:

- address the assessment objectives and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching
- incorporation of linguistic and literary technique into an exploration of texts is important. Candidates should be encouraged to use a range of terminology to support their points on how writers create meaning and the effect that this has on the reader
- for Section A, encourage candidates to discuss a broad understanding of the poem and its overarching ideas before moving into a close analysis of poetic technique. Candidates should spend some time carefully reading, annotating and planning before they start to write their response. **Ensure that enough time is given to this section of paper**
- for Section B, narrative approaches are rarely successful in meeting the demands of the assessment objectives. Candidates must consider the writer's techniques in order to meet the demands of Assessment Objective 1 (A01) and should explore the range of ways in which writers construct and craft their novels
- in order to meet the demands of Assessment Objective 4 (A04), students must consider links between their two studied texts. Comparison can be found in a variety of ways – contextual, thematic, stylistic and so on – but 'bolted on' connections do not fully demonstrate comparison between the two texts and are rarely successful
- read the wording of the question carefully and spend some time planning the response
- enjoy sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm for the novels studied with the examiner

