

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

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International GCSE
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Q1 Reading

Question 1 was based on Veronica from the Edexcel Anthology and asked candidates to explain how the writer brings out the contrasts between the life of the narrator and the life of Veronica? The question provided supportive bullet points directing candidates to address their differing family backgrounds, their attitudes and what each expects of life, their differing experiences after the narrator goes to the city and the use of language. The question was accessible to candidates and almost all candidates made some attempt to answer it. Most candidates could explain some form of contrasts in terms of childhood and attitudes and what happened to them as they grew up such as, that 'Okeke was not as poor as Veronica', or that 'Veronica showed few signs of unhappiness despite her hardships'. Some better responses were able to explicitly 'contrast', rather than simply explaining the two characters' lives and were able to recognise and comment on some of the more subtle differences such as the comparison of their marital status; Okeke's desire to help and heal; the use of symbolism such as the darkness of the hut and that of the stream. Interpretations of the stream were many and varied and examiners were instructed to credit all valid interpretations. Weaker responses were often narrative-based and did little more than retell the story. Better responses tended not to go through the text in chronological order but made a series of analytical points and then supported them with aptly chosen evidence from the passage. Many responses identified literary devices such as short sentences and alliteration but it was only the stronger answers that used these to support their interpretation of the text rather than identification being an end in itself.

Question 2

Question 2a

This question asked candidates to write the text for a speech to be given in this debate either arguing for or against living in a city. Many candidates recognised the format of a speech and opened their speech in a formal way. There is clearly a cultural difference in interpretation of what constitutes a village, which is very different from a candidate in the Yorkshire Dales in England to one in some parts of Africa. Markers were instructed to mark what was presented and they had no preconceptions about how candidates would interpret these concepts. Similarly the idea of the difference between village and city life in some parts of the world was more of a juxtaposition of survival and success, much like the story of Veronica, rather than simply about greater noise, pollution and overcrowding. Many made the points about access to amenities, for instance, such as hospitals and better schools only being an option if one lived in a city. In the country, in villages, no such amenities were available. The best responses were those that had clearly been taught the range of techniques that can be employed when writing persuasively and then applied them judiciously and with flair to produce a

piece of writing that was skilful in its use of language. Some candidates presented a balanced essay noting the points in favour of and against living in a city and these were credited equally with those that adopted a single point of view. Answers in the mid-range often communicated clearly but were held back by a lack of variety in sentence use and in vocabulary and in the over-use of some persuasive techniques, particularly the use of rhetorical questions. Weaker responses were generally lacking in clarity and were characterised by a lack of control in paragraphing and structure.

Question 2b

This question asked candidates to give advice to older people so as to help them understand the ways in which young people behave nowadays? Of the three writing questions this was the least popular. For some candidates it was a challenge to maintain a controlled tone and balanced view that enabled them to offer advice as the question asked, rather than seeing it as an opportunity to rant at older people for not understanding young people. Some candidates didn't try to explain why teenagers act the way they do but rather how adults should treat teenagers. Examiners were instructed not to mark any such answers, but to apply the mark scheme to them equally. Better answers demonstrated a strong sense of a reader:writer relationship where candidates were well aware of their effect on the reader. Weaker responses were often brief and struggled to write at length without repetition and also found it difficult to create an appropriate structure for this piece of writing. As ever, it is the overall shape of the writing that weaker candidates struggle with.

Question 2c

The prompt of "If only" was extremely effective in generating a wide range of interesting responses that were influenced by an impressive range of interests and experiences. This meant that candidates were able to effectively respond to the question using a wide variety of narrative techniques and this proved to be an effective discriminator for their differing levels of ability. Practically all candidates' stories were linked to the title of, 'If only...' Many answers were based on working hard at school, others centred around lost and missed opportunities and a smaller number were based very closely on the passage, 'Veronica', from question one. Some answers even copied some of the phrases from the original passage. It must be stressed that this is an assessment of writing; therefore it is not acceptable to use the writing of another in this way and it will not attract any credit through the application of the mark scheme. A small number of responses were on occasion very contrived: it looked as though a set answer had been learnt and the answer sought to manipulate this essay title to accommodate it. Centres should be aware that this is not considered good practice as it seldom allows candidates to write freely in a way that fully enables them to achieve the highest marks. One notable feature of responses to this question is that they were often able to exhibit skills in crafting sentences; most included a one word sentence either at the beginning or end of the piece and used a variety of sentences throughout the

text. Weaker answers were often very clichéd in their approach and lacking in sufficient control and range of expression to fully realise what they were trying to convey. The highest scoring answers tended to eschew the obvious responses and instead create works of genuinely compelling communicative impact where a wide range of techniques was subtly used to craft and sustain the reader's response.

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