

# Examiners' Report

## IGCSE English Literature (4360)

June 2006

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## 4360 ENGLISH LITERATURE, EXAMINERS' REPORT

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### Paper 1 Drama and Prose

#### General Comments

In this session there was a very definite list of favourite texts. *A View from the Bridge* was the most popular play by far. In the Prose section, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* was very popular along with *Pride and Prejudice* and *The English Teacher*.

#### Section A Drama

It was noted in the November report that, generally speaking, candidates knew their material very well and this was also the case in this session. However, what was of particular concern to examiners was the failure of many candidates to focus on the terms of the question. This appeared to be more widespread in this session and consequently examiners felt that the overall standard was a little lower than last year. Candidates who offered responses to Question 4a, for example, very often gave full character studies or outlined what happened when each character appeared. However, the focus of the question was on the dramatic importance of the characters and unless this was the focus of the answer, high marks could not be awarded. Similarly with Question 4b, candidates were invited to explain their response to the ending of the play whilst referring to the events that led up to it. Far too many candidates took the question as an opportunity to write all that they knew about the entire play and, again, such unfocused responses cannot attain high marks. Candidates must be encouraged to look closely at the question and its demands and then limit themselves to meeting those demands. Unstructured responses which set out to show the examiner all that the candidates knows about a text cannot be rewarded with high marks.

#### Section B Prose

Many of the points made in the Drama section are also true for the Prose section of the paper. Question 7a was particularly popular and stronger candidates were able to offer interesting analyses of each individual's development along with well argued explanation for their choice of the character that most engaged their interest. Weaker candidates presented character studies of each boy or they looked at the relationship between the two boys. One or two sentences were then tagged on to the end in answer to the second part of the question.

It was a source of some surprise that a number of candidates who answered Question 6b appeared to be rather confused in their understanding of the word 'prejudice' in the title of the novel. There also appeared to be a lack of attention to the word 'episode' in Question 8b. If a question requires a choice of a given number of episodes then candidates would be well advised to choose carefully, be very clear about their choice and not range widely all over the novel in their response.

As is often the case and indeed as is often written in reports such as this, weaker candidates made the error of narrating too much of the stories of the novels instead of confining themselves to writing only about those aspects which directly answered the question. Able candidates responded to questions in more focused, thoughtful and analytical ways, offering interesting insights which were well substantiated.

## Paper 2 Poetry

### General Comments

Question 1 was the most popular question on this paper.

A number of candidates appear to have prepared in advance general criticisms of poems which they are intent on writing out in full, irrespective of the question. As has been noted before in earlier reports, candidates are required to respond to the questions and tailor their knowledge to meet the demands of the questions. Examiners assume that candidates know the poems - indeed, the poems are printed on the paper and so what is of interest to the examiner is the way in which the candidate uses that knowledge to answer the question. It is understanding of the poems which is required, not simply the ability to reproduce texts which are provided in the paper. Detailed paraphrases of the poems cannot attract high marks: close analysis and personal response to the question will attract high marks. Questions such as Question 2, which require the candidate to make a choice of poems, must be thought about very carefully. Some candidates ended in rather a muddle as they had not chosen sensibly and they became confused about whose viewpoint they were actually trying to illustrate.

## Paper 3 Coursework

There was an increase in the number of Centres choosing this option this session. All of the Anthology poems featured except for *In your Mind* and *An Unknown Girl*.

The importance of the assignment title cannot be stressed too much. If it is too general then candidates are unable to focus their work and they often then lapse into general commentaries. The lack of precise focus led to another problem in some Centres in that many candidates simply reproduced identically worded points and used the same quotations; this practice cast doubt on how much the candidates really understood.

There was a marked improvement since last summer in the opening and concluding paragraphs, which more closely reflected the focus of the question/assignment. Unfortunately, while the better candidates maintained this focus all the way through - showing quite clearly how the appropriately chosen detail fed into the overall poem and related to the question - too many quickly lapsed into a general commentary on the whole poem, only returning to the theme at the end. Some fairly loose assignment titles encouraged this, for example, *The three poems express sadness (the approach of death/power of memories etc.)*. *Explore these three poems fully* - the second sentence here introducing a note of ambiguity that

left some candidates unsure of exactly where the focus of the coursework should lie.

Candidates did make use of quotation, some with great skill. Weaker candidates, however, often let the quotations stand for themselves without any explanation about their effects. In the same way, figures of speech were correctly identified but analysis was incomplete, for example Lawrence's onomatopoeia 'in the boom of the tingling strings' was recognised as appealing to the sense of hearing but there was no attempt to explain how that particular sound could have two such different qualities as 'boom' and 'tingling'. Work largely made up of these sorts of comments was often over rewarded by teachers with extremely high marks.

While coursework does bring advantages of the flexibility of time, it does have the disadvantage of making certain errors much less excusable. Candidates must make sure that they know the gender of the writer, the spelling of the name and the exact title of the poem. Proof reading should edit out the worst errors, especially in the work of otherwise very able candidates. Often these errors appeared not to have been noticed by the teacher.

Once again, however, all the candidates, at whatever level of ability, showed a clear general appreciation of the ideas and language of the poems and the very best showed a highly individual response well grounded in rigorous critical analysis.

## **4360 ENGLISH LITERATURE, GRADE BOUNDARIES**

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Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Option 1	70	59	48	37	28	19	11	3
Option 2	76	64	52	41	32	23	15	7
Option 3	76	64	52	41	32	23	15	7

Option 1: candidates taking papers 1 and 2

Option 2: candidates taking paper 1 and submitting coursework

Option 3: candidates taking paper 1 and transferring a previous session's coursework mark

**Note:** Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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