

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE and
The Edexcel Certificate
English Literature (4ET0 and KET0)
Paper 1

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General Overview

Overall, candidates engaged positively with the paper, and responses commensurate with all abilities were seen by examiners. This was encouraging in light of the single level nature of this paper, demonstrating the breadth of entry. On the whole, character based questions were more popular with Level 2 and 3 ability candidates, except in the case of *Of Mice and Men* where the question on friendship elicited a large number of responses.

It was most encouraging to hear from examiners about the extent to which candidates had engaged with the texts and genuinely formed distinctive and well executed personal responses at all levels of achievement.

The most successful responses at all levels of achievement used planning skilfully to focus their responses and avoided over reliance on narration in their responses. Very few candidates demonstrated poor knowledge of the texts, but quality of application varied with some candidates creating over complex plans that did not support their responses effectively.

Quotation is proving to be increasingly well used in essays with more candidates able to select and embed this support strategically. It was encouraging to see fewer examples of candidates ‘bolting on’ quotations to points or quoting indiscriminately and at length.

Focus on the questions was at times compromised by reliance on narrative or a lack of textual support and development. Candidates who clearly knew the nature of the text they were writing on as drama or prose were at an advantage. Some less confident candidates referred to plays as ‘novels’, whereas those who were aware of the varying audiences and formats of the texts seemed to produce more coherent and developed arguments.

Less successful responses tended to attempt a stock or reconstructed model response previously studied in response to questions, or relied heavily on assertion and speculation.

While rubric infringements have declined in frequency, they are still in evidence with some candidates attempting both questions on the text or, in a few cases, every single question on the paper.

Comments on Individual Texts

Question 1 *A View from the Bridge*

- 1a) Some very good responses were seen, particularly where balance was demonstrated between handling of Beatrice and Catherine. The most accomplished discussed contrasts and comparisons in Miller's portrayals. Many used Eddie's character as a means to explore the reactions and motivation of these two women as the play developed. Comments included the ways in which Catherine changes throughout the play, whereas Beatrice remains stoic and loyal. These responses and those in response to 1b showed strong insight into the cultural and contextual issues presented by the play.
- 1b) The most successful responses considered both violence and anger; some candidates struggled to differentiate between the two themes, but, on the whole, there was a wide range of relevant comments made with examples including the play's ending, anger at the Vinny Bolzano situation and Catherine's increasing anger towards Eddie. Scenes such as the holding up of the chair, boxing and Eddie's forceful kissing of Catherine and Rodolpho were discussed. The strongest responses were clear about the play's cultural background and used it to support relevant arguments in response to the question.

There were some exceptional Band 5 responses seen on this text.

Question 2 *An Inspector Calls*

- 2a) This question offered opportunities for candidates to discuss characters in the play, many stronger responses, using Eric and Sheila as a means of comparison with the older generation of Birlings. This was a popular question with which most candidates seemed confident. Some of the strongest responses commented on Sheila's 'conversion' to the side of the Inspector and Eric's 'confession' towards the end of the play.
- 2b) This question was less popular than 2a; examiners reported that some candidates struggled with the concept of social class and its significance in the wider cultural context of the play. Some wrote basic responses about the difference between the rich and poor. The most effective responses were well informed and structured, demonstrating confidence with the concept and an ability to produce detailed arguments.

Question 3 *Henry V*

Very few candidates responded on this play; those who did seemed comfortable when writing about Henry V's presentation in 3a. Question 3b was very rarely seen; the theme of war is central to the play's development and offered

candidates the opportunity to write at length, though careful structuring of responses was essential to success.

Question 4 *Much Ado About Nothing*

Few candidates responded on this text, but those seen by examiners dealt well with the characters of Hero and Beatrice in 4a, often seeking to use comparison and contrast as a means of developing argument. This worked well for the most part. In terms of 4b, candidates approached this with confidence and were able to discuss some clear examples of lies and deceit in the play. Most focused on the negative outcomes from these themes with only the most able noticing and commenting on positive points that resulted from them.

Question 5 *Romeo and Juliet*

5a) This question was well handled by most candidates, who rose to the challenge of arguing Tybalt's villainy in the play. This was a very popular question answered by candidates of all abilities. They showed a strong appreciation of how to respond critically and analytically on the character, offering support from the text. Some used the opportunity after exploring Tybalt to consider other potential villains, for example, Lord Capulet and Romeo. Examiners reported some very thorough and creative responses on this question.

5b) This was also popular and confidently answered in most cases. Responses considered not only death as a theme, but its dramatic presentation by Shakespeare, for example, Mercutio's accidental stabbing, Tybalt's demise at the hands of Romeo, Juliet's fake death and the suicide of Romeo and Juliet. Again some creative and original approaches were seen, reflecting a refreshing approach to the teaching of this established text. Less successful responses to this question relied on narrative commentary on the deaths in the play resulting in lower marks.

Question 6 *The Importance of Being Earnest*

There were a few responses on this text with most candidates favouring 6b out of the choice of 2. The theme of marriage invited discussion of historical and social issues that were usually well applied and relevant to the question. Most responses to this question were effective with some impressively assured and perceptive essays commented on by examiners. 6a responses successfully discussed the humour generated by Lady Bracknell's character in most cases.

Question 7 *Our Town*

A very small number of responses were seen on this text, most answering 7b. Responses offered discussion of town and community as one entity rather than looking at the differences between the two.

Question 8 *Pride and Prejudice*

8a) Examiners reported seeing many apposite and articulate responses to question 8a which was by far the more popular of the two on this text. In the majority of responses, candidates presented clear and developed arguments supported by well-embedded quotations. Those candidates who interlinked ideas about how the characters changed fared well, sustaining their arguments purposefully. Many responses to this question were excellent, exhibiting perceptive use of knowledge and understanding in their responses – Level 5 responses.

8b) This question attracted fewer responses, but was also well answered in most cases. Examiners noted that most candidates focused on marriage as an important factor when considering the role of women in society. Some candidates effectively used the character of Elizabeth to highlight what society expected of women while other less successful responses strayed too far from the question, thereby compromising achievement. Many commented on the fate of Lydia and views of Mrs Bennet in their arguments.

Question 9 *To Kill a Mockingbird*'

9a) Most candidates were comfortable when writing about Atticus in this question with more able candidates tackling the idea of his relative importance in the novel. Examiners reported seeing a wide range of interpretations of the role of this character; this was encouraging and successful when such responses were well supported by textual reference.

9b) Candidates writing in response to this question were not always secure about the concept of racism as a theme which led to some lack of confidence in lower and middle level responses. Some started well but lost the thread of their argument, thereby losing relevance. This text was only moderately popular but those who responded on it demonstrated good knowledge and understanding in most cases.

Question 10 *The English Teacher*

Few responses were seen on this text with the a) and b) choices roughly equal in popularity. Both questions invited interesting arguments from candidates which

accommodated understanding of context as well as the plot, characters, themes and structure.

Question 11 *Of Mice and Men*

This was an extremely popular text with questions answered by candidates from the full ability range.

11a) This question proved accessible to those working in the lower and middle level descriptors as well as challenge for those working higher up the scale. Candidates were able to split their essay between the two characters which seemed to give them more material to discuss and a natural structuring device in addition. More able responses used the question to compare and contrast the characters of Crooks and Candy with some perceptive outcomes. There was occasional confusion over the identities of Crooks and Candy in the novel with some mistaking one or the other for Carlson or Curley. Many candidates commented on the characters as outsiders or even outcasts, discriminated against because of age, disability and race, largely with success.

11b) This question was very popular with candidates. Examiners reported an extremely varied range of quality in these responses with the lowest ability candidates offering very limited comments about friendship with little development or use of detail. Middle ability candidates discussed George and Lennie's friendship at length, the stronger of these using their arguments to consider some aspects of wider significance. Better candidates reflected on friendship, or the lack of it, between other characters such as Candy, Crooks, Curley and Curley's wife. Some developed a discussion of Candy and his dog alongside the relationship of George and Lennie, mentioning the foreshadowing of Lennie's death. Some less successful responses used the question as a springboard to reconstitute a pre done essay on loneliness, however some really strong responses juxtaposed the theme of friendship with that of loneliness in a strategic approach.

Question 12 *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

12a) Many responses on this question demonstrated good insight into the position of Cassie as child narrator and, on the whole, examiners reported that this question was well answered. Some candidates effectively related Cassie's character to the intentions of the novel and reflected on the social, cultural and historical context with relevance.

12b) Examiners commented on the impressive confidence with which some candidates approached the idea of land as a central theme. This question provided a genuine and fair challenge to more able candidates who argued well in terms of the 'How far do you agree...' aspect of the question.

Question 13 *Nineteenth Century Short Stories*

13a) This was four times more popular than 13b, but overall the stories were attempted by a small number of candidates. Some very good responses were seen with subtle readings of John in the given story, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', discussed alongside 'Country Living' and 'News of the Engagement' as popular choices.

13b) These responses considered adventure in fairly broad terms, but seemed confident when discussing this theme.

Grade Boundaries

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<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>