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Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2023

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
In English Literature (4ET1)  
Paper 1: Poetry and Modern Prose

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Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel as their International GCSE English Literature provider. We very much hope that both our candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

## **Introduction**

The January 2023 series was very successful and performed well. The paper was very similar in performance to previous series, particularly for Sections A and C. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination.

Centres are once again congratulated on preparing their candidates so well, especially with the reintroduction of Section B, Anthology Poetry. The reintroduction of this section added to teaching and learning demands, while still recovering from two very challenging years during the pandemic. The challenges and demands have been taken into consideration during the Awarding process.

In Section A, candidates are presented with an unseen poem and answer a question based on it (20 marks). Section B, Anthology Poetry, gives candidates the choice of two poetry questions (30 marks). For Section C, Modern Prose, candidates respond to one of two questions based on the prose text that they have studied (40 marks). The total mark for this paper was 90.

The most popular prose text was, once again, *Of Mice and Men*. There were no responses for *The Joy Luck Club* or *Things Fall Apart*, but there were a small number of responses for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Whale Rider*.

As expected, the number of entries was much lower than in the summer, however, there were more than January 2022 series. A full range of marks was awarded with most candidates gaining marks in Level 3 or above. Again, there were some extremely good responses and a number of candidates gained marks in Levels 4 and 5, particularly for their prose response. All responses were marked by the Principal Examiner and two Senior examiners.

## **Section A Unseen Poem**

### **Q1 *Walking Away* by Cecil Day Lewis**

**Question: Explore how the writer presents thoughts about the child in this poem.**

The poem performed well and as expected. A full range of marks was awarded and performance was comparable to previous series.

In spite of its relatively straightforward structure, this proved to be a multi-faceted poem. Most candidates interpreted the poem as that of the poet reminiscing on how a child started to mature and move away both physically and psychologically from their parents. A number of candidates even interpreted the poem as that of a parent mourning a child who died eighteen years ago, considering 'walking away' as a euphemism for dying.

Most candidates noted the sorrow, and a small number noted anger, the parents were feeling on that 'sunny day'. The more confident candidates noted how in the last stanza the parent appears to accept the child's growing up and finally leaving the family home.

Many candidates commented on the image of the satellite 'wrenching from its orbit' and developed that to discuss how the verb 'wrenching' is quite violent and how it is juxtaposed with 'drifting away', contrasting the child's action of walking away to later rather aimless drifting until they find their feet. Not many noted that the first verse most probably referred to the child's earliest days in school. The more confident candidates commented on the image of the fledgling noting how the child was not quite ready to 'fly the nest' but was doing so nonetheless.

The image of the winged seed appealed to many, and many across the ability range noted how this image depicts how natural it is for a child to finally leave their parents. The image of the parting that 'gnawed' was also a frequent example with candidates noting that the word conjures up a feeling of pain and misery. The image of the 'irresolute clay' was mostly omitted. However, one very confident candidate noted how the 'ordeals of fire' express hardships and experience that hone a character and made the clay firm.

Many candidates commented on the regular structure and rhyme scheme which some commented on how it reflected the parent's sense of loss and sadness. The more confident noted the volta and the acceptance of what had happened in the penultimate line. The use of the personal pronouns 'you' and 'I' were commented upon, thus making the poem more personal and involving the reader more directly.

There was relatively little feature spotting in the responses. Possibly because the candidates could relate to the theme of growing up. Although many noted the enjambment which was used to express the parent's sad tone. There was a lot of empathy expressed for the parent and many candidates appeared to have preferred a holistic approach to the poem.

The majority of responses were in Levels 3 and 4. The responses were sensitive and empathetic. There were no glaring misinterpretations – only possibly that of death and the anger felt by the parent at this event in a small number of responses.

The poem performed extremely well and was very successful.

When comparing with previous series, the level of demand was similar. Key areas to consider for future series remain the same.

When responding to the Unseen Poetry, Section A, candidates should try to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of the poem
- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure and try to suggest why this may have been used
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- comment on all areas of the poem, not just the first few lines
- use short quotations and avoid copying large areas of the poem.

### **SECTION B, Anthology poems**

This section was reintroduced for this series following its removal during the pandemic. This is the first time, since the pandemic, that the full paper has been taken and the Anthology poetry reintroduced. In many cases, it was felt that candidates did better with the unseen poem. Unlike in previous series, the attention to depth and detail appeared to be lacking in some responses; possibly as a result of the section's reintroduction and the limitations of teaching and learning opportunities to study all 16 poems in sufficient detail.

## **Q2 Compare how the writers present the passing of time in *Half-past Two* and *Sonnet 116*.**

The question performed well and some responses were comparable to previous series; however, there were some brief responses and often close analysis was not sustained.

All candidates noted that time was central to both poems. In *Half-past Two* many noted that time here was a small, fixed period in the child's and the teacher's life. Some candidates noted that being left in the classroom, the child left to his own devices escaped the concept of time passing into a 'clockless land'. The child's innocence was also noted in the way the clock was described and personified. Many noted and commented upon why 'Time' was capitalised – some noted that it was the importance of time, others that it represented authority and hence the teacher of whom he was frightened.

*Sonnet 116* proved to be an effective companion and candidates, on the whole, were able to compare and contrast the poems. Many noted the difference in how time is viewed – personal to both poems. However, in *Half-past Two* it is a small fraction and limited in scope, whereas in *Sonnet 116* time stretches across the span of one's life. Also, many candidates noted how Love relates to Time – it conquers it and unlike Time itself it does not move or change. Candidates noted how Time was capitalised and personified to give it a sense of authority and also of power over mortals, but not over Love.

Structure was compared and many tried to analyse the importance of that. The structure of the sonnet and regular alternating rhyme lent itself to a discourse on the importance of constancy in love. A number of candidates wrote that this regular pattern meant that the poem was read in a slow and 'thoughtful manner'. One candidate wrote that there was a didactic element in the sonnet. The free verse of *Half-past Two* had the feel of a story with a beginning and an end. In the sonnet there is no end as it talks about the 'edge of doom'.

There were many thoughtful analyses of *Sonnet 116* as a way of discussing the strength of true love, and comments on the fact that *Half-past Two* is a light-hearted poem. This difference in atmosphere was frequently noted. Less confident candidates tended to feature spot, without noting the importance and effect the figure of speech will have on the reader, rather than taking a more holistic approach.

## **Q3 Compare the ways the writers present a story of an event in *Blessing* and one other poem,**

The choice for the companion poem was wide, the most popular being *War Photographer*. Other popular poems to compare with were: *Prayer before Birth*, *Hide and Seek*, *Piano* and *Half-past Two*. Although there were not many examples, possibly due to the length of the poems, *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *My Last Duchess* lent themselves well to comparison with *Blessing*, even among the less confident candidates, probably because they actually described an event and like *Blessing* told an actual story. *My Last Duchess* having a 'twist in the tale' towards the end and the knight is close to death in *La Belle Dame*. *Half-past Two* also lent itself well to the task in hand as it depicted a moment when time was suspended for a young child. This was linked nicely to the moment the water gushes out of the pipe in *Blessing*.

There were some interesting comments on the religious imagery in *Blessing* and *War Photographer*. Some noted the difference in setting – water starved India and England with its green fields. A number of candidates noted the irony of water that in more affluent countries is taken for granted, is considered a gift from a kindly god. Religious imagery was also picked up on in *Prayer Before Birth* and that was used as the common link between both poems. The imagery of children in both poems were well noted – the ‘little bones’ in *Blessing* and the children in *War Photographer* who, being safe in England do not have to worry about treacherous minefields. Structure of both poems was discussed. For example, in *Blessing* the way the poem built to a climax of noise and light (together with a listing of all the pots and pans!) whereas in *War Photographer* the stanzas remained the same depicting a sense of monotony and the photographer’s despair of not being able to bring his message across to middle England. Candidates who chose *Prayer before Birth*, noted how the stanzas got longer and the child’s prayers and demands stronger and more personal.

Possibly the least successful were *Half-caste* and *Search For My Tongue*. Interestingly these were chosen by less confident candidates and it appeared at times that they were trying to fit their choice of poem within the parameters of a narrative. *Search for My Tongue* was possibly more successful as candidate wrote about the ‘bud’ growing and the ‘old stem’ rotting and dying. One candidate mentioned that half the poem was ‘written in a foreign language’ but did not elaborate on what the language was, nor what was the significance of this device. As with Q2 many of the less confident candidates tended to fall back on feature spotting and did not really develop a more holistic approach to the poems.

### **SECTION C Modern Prose**

#### **Q4 To Kill a Mockingbird: Boo Radley**

Although there were some narrative responses, there were some that were empathetic. Most considered how Boo was a ‘mockingbird’ character and gave examples of him leaving gifts in the tree and saving the children at the end of the novel.

#### **Q5 To Kill a Mockingbird: Responsibility**

There were very few responses, but those that were submitted were generally strong, well-developed answers and most candidates gained marks in Level 4 and 5.

#### **Q6 Of Mice and Men: Respect**

It was good to see almost a balance of responses across Questions 6 and 7. There was evidence of sound engagement with this topic and the novel in general. Several candidates took each character in turn and applied the theme of respect to them. This was a reasonably successful approach, as this demonstrated an understanding of the novel as a whole. There were some narrative responses and context was either a paragraph at the beginning or an add on. It was interesting to see the different variations of what respect is. Crooks for example elicited various versions. Some that he respected others because he had to, and many referred to the lack of respect. This lack of respect was also attributed to Curley’s wife. One response noted that we never found out Crooks’ real name either. Another interesting character referred to was Aunt Clara and George showing his respect for her by caring for Lennie. As expected, there were a number of responses that referred to Slim, but also to George and Lennie’s respect for each other.

#### **Q7 Of Mice and Men: Crooks**

There was a tendency in some of the less successful responses to just be a little narrative. However, the stronger candidates explored how Crooks tries to assert his

independence. Several were triggered by Q6 to think about respect as well. One candidate referred to him as 'a nice but misunderstood guy', another called him 'a realist'. Many candidates listed the incidents Crooks participated in without much analysis or development. On the other hand, there were strong links to context throughout nearly all the responses. There were several responses that would have been good as historical essays without enough focus on 'the character of Crooks'. Whilst the contextual knowledge was commendable, more focus on the task and reading the question carefully needs to be encouraged. The higher ability students managed to blend the world of Crooks with the World of 1930's America successfully.

Some candidates were a little hesitant and tentatively made points, 'may use' or 'perhaps', suggesting a lack of confidence.

### **Q8 *The Whale Rider*: Success**

There was just one response to this question that only considered one main point about Kahu saving the whales. The response was limited and lacked sufficient coverage of the novel.

### **Q9 *The Whale Rider*: Relationship Koro and Kahu**

For all responses to this novel, most candidates scored marks in Level 3 and above. Performance did not appear as strong as in past series, with some candidates not including sufficient examples from the novel. There was also little explicit contextual comment, although some comments naturally incorporated it, such as cultural heritage. It was noted that a number of candidates referred to the film version and provided examples that are not in the novel and therefore cannot be awarded.

### **Q10 and Q11 *The Joy Luck Club***

There were no responses to either of the questions: Loss and Waverly Jong.

### **Q12 and Q13 *Things Fall Apart***

There were no responses to either of the questions: Rejection and Okonkwo's wives.

In comparison with previous series, the Prose (Novels) questions performed in a similar way. A full range of marks was awarded, particularly for the most popular texts. The questions followed a similar style and there were no new phrases or alternative wordings to the question stems.

In summary, and as mentioned in previous series, when responding to Modern Prose, candidates should remember to:

- focus on the question
- avoid narrative retelling of the events in the novel
- provide a range of examples from their chosen text – remember that as this is a closed book examination, examples need not be quotations but examples of events or episodes within the novel
- prove to the examiner their knowledge of the text – do not assume the examiner knows everything
- comment on contextual points and try to relate these to the points being made
- avoid dealing with context separately. Do not write a page of historical background, but link all contextual points with an example from the novel and in relation to the question being answered
- when using film versions, which are most valuable teaching aids, remind candidates that not all scenes in a film appear in the novel that they are studying. Responses must be based on the novel and not a film version.

There were some responses where candidates had written in the wrong area of the answer booklet, which is possibly because the answer space currently begins on a right-hand page. If candidates fold their answer booklet over, it could result in them writing the second page of their response in the wrong place. It would be appreciated if centres could remind their candidates about avoiding this.

### **Conclusion**

As always, the responses are always a pleasure to mark and have, once again, been very enjoyable to read.

Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates for the examination. As always, we very much hope that you will continue to deliver this specification and that you and your students are delighted with results.

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