



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2024

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
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 November 2024 series was, once again, very successful and the 4ET1 01 paper performed well. The paper was very similar in performance to previous series across all sections. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination. Centres are congratulated on preparing their candidates so well.

For Section A, candidates are presented with an unseen poem and answer a question based on it (20 marks). Section B, Anthology Poetry, gives candidates to write in response to one 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 is 90.

Once again, the most popular prose text was *Of Mice and Men*. There were a few responses for other texts (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Whale Rider*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *Things Fall Apart*), which were all a pleasure to read.

As expected, the number of entries was much lower than in the summer, however, there were more than the January and November 2023 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. *Gathering Leaves* by Robert Frost

Question: Explore how the writer presents the gathering of leaves in this poem.

The poem was accessible and there was a wide range of responses from straightforward ones commenting on the monotony of the task, through to those considering the overall futility and monotony of life. Some considered the poem as a metaphor for nature, the cycle of life, growing up, maturing and dying. Many noted how once gathered, the leaves lost colour and looked dead.

Candidates noted how the task of gathering leaves was never-ending and monotonous and, hence, frustrating. More confident responses included the change in tone from joyful and 'fun-loving' to impatient and bad-tempered.

Many candidates commented on the comparison of spades being 'no better than spoons', with more successful candidates commenting on this immediately and

developing the point by considering the theme of pointlessness and then used that to track how that theme is developed as the poem progresses. The best responses linked this to how the poet has used language, form and structure.

Candidates noted the onomatopoeic 'rustle', the hyperbolic 'mountains', and the repetition of 'again and again' to emphasise the overall mood and tone of the poem. Rhetorical questions were also discussed. Candidates noted that the simile, 'light as a balloon', helped create a light-hearted and happy atmosphere. Not many appeared to understand the analogy of the rabbit and deer; some used this to comment on the cruelty of nature as these are prey animals and not raptors.

Comments on structure included the regular length of the stanzas, possibly reflecting monotony. Many also noted the first-person narrative. Who exactly the speaker of the poem is, was a matter of wide interpretation from a farmer with reference to the term 'crop' for the leaves, a child enjoying the rustle and elusiveness of the leaves, and those who just referred to the narrator. One candidate even noted that since the poem was written in the 1920s it could have been a soldier comparing his dead colleagues from the First World War to the never-ending piles of leaves that were being discarded.

Summary:

The poem and question performed well and as intended. A full range of marks were awarded, therefore, the poem was a good differentiator. The quality of responses was similar to past series.

The poem and question were similar in complexity, style and performance as past unseen poetry questions. 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
- make explicit references to the question
- use short quotations and avoid copying large areas of the poem.

As with anthology poetry questions, it is important to remember that simply paraphrasing a poem and supporting this with quotations is not deemed as close analysis of language, form or structure.

Candidates should select specific words and phrases and explore techniques and their effects on the reader.

PETER: Point, Evidence, Technique, Effect on Reader is a useful acronym to use as it covers the Assessment Objectives detailed in the mark grid bullet points.

Explicit comment should be made in relation to structure. If a candidate does not include structural comment, the mark will often be placed lower in the level. Similarly, if there are structural points and little close analysis of language, this too will hinder progress.

SECTION B, Anthology poems

Q2 Compare the effects the lady has on the knight in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and how the writer is affected by the powerful animal in *The Tyger*.

Most candidates were successful when comparing the effects of the lady on the knight and of the tyger (sic) on the narrator. Discussions and analysing *La Belle Dame* were perhaps more confident than those for *The Tyger*. The faery's powers of seduction were noted, and how once 'in her thrall' the knight was abandoned. Innocence (lilies) was contrasted with sexuality and sensuality (fairy grot, wild, wild eyes, the long golden hair). Candidates noted the ballad structure and archaic language, which fitted in with the warning and moral tone of the ballad. Some candidates discussed the opening questions to the knight and how this sets a tone of mystery. The cyclical nature was noted. There was evidence of candidates being aware of the use of pathetic fallacy and many higher level candidates discussed how the poet used the juxtaposition of the nature imagery, sometimes commenting on the 'roots of sweet relish' and how the effect of the lady on the knight was reflected in the negativity of 'no birds sing'.

Discussions on *The Tyger* were not as confident. Only a relatively small number of candidates discussed the mystery of the creator who was responsible for both the ferocious tyger and the innocent lamb. Not many candidates noted the beauty of the tyger. One thing that many candidates commented on was the use of colour imagery – how this was used was often a discriminator in terms of the level of the mark scheme in which it could be awarded. There was some discussion on the structure, the regular rhythm and stanzas, but many did not develop this further. An opportunity was missed in the description of the tyger's creation, the imagery of fire, anvils, hammering, and the link to a blacksmith.

There was some discussion about the question-and-answer form of each poem and the use of archaic language. However, relatively few discussed the effects of these techniques on the reader.

The most common approach to the comparison was to use *La Belle Dame* as a springboard for the different effects in the two poems.

Candidates who explored one poem and then the other before comparing tended to produce answers that were descriptive or narrative.

Q3 Compare the ways the writers use vivid descriptions in *Hide and Seek* and one other poem from the anthology.

The question worked as intended and, again, the full range of marks was awarded.

The candidates were asked to compare vivid descriptions in the two poems. The given poem was *Hide and Seek*. The most popular choice for the companion poem was *Half-past Two* and the comparison between both was generally successful. Some candidates offered *Piano*, which lent itself well to the task. *Prayer Before Birth* was also offered and these responses were, on the whole, sustained and focused. *War Photographer* was another popular choice.

Candidates discussed the structure of *Hide and Seek* and how the narrative developed from cheerful to a sense of betrayal and abandonment. This was contrasted with the child in *Half-past Two* who was not left, but brought back from solitude. There were some mature and interesting comparisons with *War Photographer*, another popular choice, focusing on self-imposed solitude, which led to loneliness. Many candidates commented on the isolation of the dark room and the vivid descriptions of the images appearing and how this was enhanced by the listing of war-torn places through the use of plosives. A number of candidates picked up on the darkness of both the shed and the photographer's still room. A few more confident candidates compared the different representations of childhood – the child in *Hide and Seek* has a relatively normal, if sad, experience when compared to the children in the war zones.

There were comments on structure, volta, rhyme, although comments on the effect of these techniques were not always carried through or sustained. Most candidates appeared familiar with figures of speech, but did not always analyse the importance of these nor their effect on the reader.

There were some interesting comments on the poets of *Hide and Seek* and the chosen poem developed their tone. These comments led to some mature comparison and candidates often developed some interesting points on poetic technique as part of their argument.

Anthology poetry Summary:

Students that did well in the Poetry section:

- thought about the deeper meaning of the poems
- explored language, form and structure skillfully
- analysed and integrated language, form and structure points together, rather than in separate paragraphs
- provided a balanced exploration of both poems when comparing
- considered the effects on the reader
- made explicit references to the question and
- succinctly answered the question in the conclusion.

SECTION C Modern Prose

The responses to the prose questions were mostly very successful. As in past series, the most popular option was *Of Mice and Men*. There were slightly more entries for *The Whale Rider* than *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There was a small number of responses to *Things Fall Apart* and just two responses to *The Joy Luck Club*.

Some candidates included some inaccurate references to their chosen texts and some did not include a sufficient range of examples from the novel. As this is a closed book examination, exact quotations are not expected; however, candidates should make reference to specific events or episodes throughout the novel in order to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the text.

Some did not qualify for a mark in the higher levels because of the lack of details or precision. Some examples were not discussed in sufficient detail. For example, when discussing the importance of money in *Of Mice and Men*, and if the candidate included points about Candy, they often did not include details about how much money Candy offers towards making the dream a reality or where the money was from. Or, when writing about respect in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, giving the example of Calpurnia teaching Scout respect when Walter Cunningham comes for dinner, but not mentioning the character's name or explaining why Calpurnia chastises Scout about her behaviour.

A number of candidates attempted to analyse language and structure, which are not assessed in the prose section, and some lost focus on the question.

Candidates should also be reminded about the need to include details from the chosen novel and not a film adaptation.

Q4 *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Discuss the theme of respect.

The question was successful and, similar to previous series, marks were Level 3 or above. Most candidates considered the respect that Atticus Finch is shown by his children and some members of Maycomb and how some others show some disrespect towards him for representing Tom Robinson.

Some candidates considered how Atticus teaches his children to be respectful and how they treat others, such as Boo Radley, Calpurnia and Mrs Dubose. Others included comments about the ways Calpurnia teaches the children, particularly Scout, to respect others, such as Walter Cunningham.

Q5 *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Explore the character of Tom Robinson.

There was only a small number of responses to this question; however, a range of marks were awarded from Level 3 to full marks. Some very thoughtful and perceptive points were made. The question gave candidates plenty of opportunity to explore the character and a range of examples were considered.

Candidates focused on the trial and Tom's innocence. Most candidates commented on Tom being a mockingbird character and how the children reacted to his being found guilty of a crime that he did not commit.

Very few made reference to Tom's family or include details about Mayella asking him to help her.

At times, for both questions, there was lack of contextual comment to support the points made.

Q6 *Of Mice and Men*: In what ways is George important in the novel?

This question on George was by far the more popular. Most candidates had a lot to write about George. Quite a large number of responses were narratives based on George's relationship with Lennie, whereas others discussed the symbiotic and unusual relationship between the two men, how George's relationship changed from bullying to looking after Lennie.

Many candidates commented on how the relationship is revealed through the opening of the novel – the ketchup, the mouse, the dream, etc. They also commented on what is revealed about George's relationship with Lennie when he discusses Lennie's child-like nature with Slim. George's profound influence on Lennie's behaviour was often noted, especially in the episode with Curley and the fight. George's volatile nature and his less positive characteristics were occasionally discussed – his misogyny is one example. Many candidates commented with great sympathy on George's final act of 'caring for Lennie' and the reasons for shooting his friend.

The more confident candidates noted that George represents friendship and stability to a vulnerable character in a hostile environment. His ambivalent attitude to the American dream was also noted. Many candidates were able to embed their contextual comments into their argument, particularly in terms of the nature of itinerant workers, ranch life and loneliness.

Most candidates displayed at least some knowledge about the text and the character. Examples were given in varying details. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates appear to have concentrated on the historical context of the novel at the cost of demonstrating their knowledge of the text itself.

When considering context, most commented on the lives of migrant workers, their living conditions, the American Dream and the treatment of disabilities. Some candidates noted that the dream would never come true and that George always knew that – they commented on the fact that George joining the other ranch hands in visiting the cat house was evidence of that.

Q7 *Of Mice and Men*: 'Money is very important in *Of Mice and Men*.' How far do you agree with this view?

The question on the importance of money was a less popular option. Many noted how central it was to the hierarchy of the ranch and how, to many characters, it would have been an escape route to a better life.

Some candidates mentioned that money does not buy happiness and Curley's wife was used as a prime example, suggesting that although she lacks for nothing, she is still unhappy. Some suggested that Slim does not appear to have much money, but he still appears to be content with his life. Money was explored as a symbol of power, with the Boss and Curley being discussed. Some considered the loss of money and the loss of status, such as Crooks whose family once owned a chicken ranch.

Several considered how, in spite of there being an incentive for saving, George would often spend his and Lennie's hard-earned money in the 'Cat house'. Thus raising the question of how realistic George's plans were for saving towards a small farm. Another area considered was that money meant independence – hence the dream. A few candidates conflated the two questions and discussed George and the dream of owning a little place and Lennie getting to 'tend the rabbits' in great detail rather than focusing on the wider theme.

Contextual comments included the Wall Street Crash and the American Dream and its relevance to George and Lennie. The possibility that Candy 'bought' his way into a friendship with George, by offering to share his compensation and savings to help get a small-holding was often considered, but ideas could have been developed further. More successful candidates developed some points, such as considering how Candy was an unusual situation that cast the Boss in a slightly more favourable light, as compensation for an accident was rare.

Overall context for this question was embedded quite well and there were few responses that used context as 'bolt-on'; however, there were some instances where contextual comments outweighed examples from the novel. Some wrote more about the Wall Street Crash or the Dust Bowl than the novel. We do not expect to see a balance in the knowledge and understanding of the text with comments on historical context. Historical context should simply support the points made that have been drawn from evidence in the text.

The responses for both questions displayed a range of knowledge and understanding of the text. Relevant examples from the novella were used to support comments and ideas although, at times, more specific details from the novel could have been included.

Q8 *The Whale Rider*: Examine the character of Koro

Responses to this question were mostly successful with candidates providing a range of examples from across the novel.

Candidates readily identified Koro as being tribal leader and mostly focused on his relationships with Nanny Flowers and Kahu. Some considered how he is respected by his people and how he is reluctant to embrace modern technology, being stubborn and set in his ways.

More explicit references to context could have benefitted some responses as, often, very little consideration of events at the time were included in the essays.

Q9 *The Whale Rider*: (Quotation provided in the question to help candidates.)

Explore 'oneness', man's relationship with nature, in the novel.

There were only a small number of responses to this question. Responses were mostly given marks in Level 3 and Level 4. The majority were sustained and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the theme and novel. A range of points were made. The question performed well and candidates were successful. The question and results compare similarly with previous series.

Candidates tended to refer to Koro's beliefs, 'If it dies, we die', Rawiri's narrative explaining the tribe's heritage, Kahu's affinity with the natural world and, ultimately, when Kahu rides the bull whale.

Responses were often a pleasure to read and demonstrated an enthusiasm for the novel.

The Joy Luck Club

Q10: In what ways is Lena St. Clair significant in the novel?

There were no responses to this question.

Q11: Discuss the importance of Chinese culture in *The Joy Luck Club*.

Although there were very few responses to this question, candidates were mostly successful. A range of examples were provided and often focused on the mothers' relationships with their daughters. There were some references to the parables and the significance of mahjong to the novel. Some mentioned the zodiac and others delved into the mothers' individual stories. There were a few who considered the ways in which the daughters struggled with Chinese traditions, feeling embarrassed and struggling with their mixed heritage.

Q12 *Things Fall Apart*: Explore Okonkwo's fears in the novel.

Responses to this novel are always a pleasure to read. Candidates engaged fully with the question and provided a range of examples. The vast majority considered how Okonkwo fears becoming like his father, Unoka, and how over compensation leads to his own demise. The fear of the loss of Igbo culture and traditions also featured in a number of responses.

There was less explicit reference to context in the responses this series; however, this is a novel that naturally produces responses that are exemplified with examples of Igbo culture.

Q13 *Things Fall Apart*: In what ways is the Igbo language (Ibo in the novel) important in *Things Fall Apart*?

Very few responses were seen in response to this question. Candidates were able to provide examples of Igbo language and explain how Achebe uses it in his novel to provide a more realistic account of the people, their culture and traditions. Some made reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* when discussing the inaccurate vs realistic attitudes towards Okonkwo's people.

Summary

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.

Feedback has been positive throughout and we were impressed with the majority of the responses seen.

As in previous series, a summary follows:

For the Prose section,

Candidates that did well:

- used evidence, such as short memorised quotations, paraphrasing, and referred to a range of specific examples or episodes within the chosen novel
- had a good knowledge of the context and how it impacted the text
- weaved context into the essay, rather than bulking it on at the end
- answered the question clearly.

Candidates that did less well:

- had less knowledge of the text
- had not provided enough examples
- provided narrative responses
- bulked on too much context at the beginning or at the end of paragraphs, or did not explicitly refer to context.

Interestingly, the points above are similar to those mentioned in previous centre reports, which supports the belief that overall, the performance of the paper was very similar to past series.

The paper performed as intended and provided equal opportunities for all candidates.

All Prose questions performed as intended and none stood out as more challenging as others.

Conclusion

As always, the responses are 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.

Do look at our website for more details about the Summer 2025 examinations and for the latest updates.

We are looking forward to the introduction of our two new prose texts to the paper, which will be first examined in Summer 2026:

Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro

Western Lane by Chetna Maroo

Please see our website for further details.

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Paper 1 modular examinations include different Anthology poetry questions to those appearing in the main paper. Modular Paper 2 has alternative questions for Section B.

Modular papers are available in both traditional paper-based or onscreen versions.

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Thank you.
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