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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**SUMMER 2017**

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2017

### COMPONENT 1

#### General Comments

After each section there is a summary of the Principal Examiner's findings under the headings: 'Characteristics of good responses' and 'Ways in which performance could be improved'.

As anticipated, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* were the most popular Shakespeare texts, although the other plays were well-represented, with *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* all with reasonable numbers. *Henry V*, too, had a stronger uptake than expected – all in all, a healthy variety of plays are being taught for Component 1. There were some incidences of candidates who responded to texts they had not been taught, particularly extract questions, but these were a very small minority. While examiners were able to credit these candidates for careful tracking of extracts and any insights they managed into characters or moods, such approaches to the paper were self-penalising, not least because of the time wasted which could have been more productively spent on the essay question on the text they had been taught.

There was a strong feeling among examiners that the paper did its job well: candidates across the whole ability range were able to access the questions and got on with the business of responding, showing real engagement with the texts. No questions appeared to mislead or confuse candidates; all seemed to be clear and specific enough to avoid misunderstanding. There was plenty to challenge the top end of the ability range, while less-able candidates managed to gain respectable marks with secure knowledge of narrative and character. Many candidates were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the texts across all the Assessment Objectives.

Given the anxiety that teaching the Shakespeare text to the full range of abilities for this specification has caused, it was particularly pleasing for so many examiners to note how impressed they were with candidates' ability to make specific references to the texts. English departments and teachers deserve great credit for preparing their candidates so effectively. In the vast majority of cases, candidates knew the play they had studied very well. The straightforward nature of the essay questions therefore enabled them to show their knowledge and understanding, and many essay responses ranged effectively across the text. However, in some cases it was clear that knowledge of the first three acts of the play was stronger than the final two. Knowledge of the whole play is essential. Candidates who had seen productions of the plays found it easier to discuss them, particularly perhaps when writing on the extracts. Unfortunately, film references sometimes intruded unhelpfully on occasion – mainly in responses to *Romeo and Juliet*. Overall, though, responses to the Shakespeare plays were extremely encouraging, with a high level of engagement and, at times, a genuine sense of enjoyment coming through.

Another reassuring message examiners received was how well the Poetry Anthology has worked, with a range of poems being selected by candidates to compare with Barrett-Browning's *Sonnet 43*. This poem and the theme of love seemed to engage the full ability range, with virtually all candidates offering relevant comments, and the vast majority tracking through this poem with at least reasonable success. Responses for Question 7.2 were more varied, with some candidates writing with real enthusiasm and detail on their own selection, while those who had perhaps not revised as assiduously as they might offered more sketchy comment. Although these candidates struggled to build detailed comparisons, they were at least usually able to offer some relevant points. There were examples of candidates becoming fatigued by this point in the paper, but it was encouraging to see that very few candidates had conspicuously run out of time; indeed, there were many very full responses to this final question.

A key issue across the paper was Assessment Objective 3: contexts. This AO is not assessed in the Shakespeare section, but many candidates offered contextual comments. Often such comments didn't go unrewarded, as, for example, discussion of gender roles and the patriarchal society in Shakespeare's time is clearly relevant to the portrayal of Juliet or Lady Macbeth. However, there were examples of less pertinent contextual discussion where valuable time was wasted. A bigger concern was a lack of AO3 coverage in the poetry questions, where a significant minority seemed unaware, despite the prompt in the question, that contextual comments are required for both Question 7.1 and Question 7.2. Although many candidates dealt with this requirement well, weaving details of social, biographical, historical and literary context into their discussion, it was frustrating for examiners to see candidates dealing successfully with AO1 and AO2, but losing marks because of a lack of AO3 comment.

### **Extract questions**

The extracts selected were generally key moments in their respective plays, and examiners noted that in the vast majority of cases candidates could discuss both their content and their significance within the play as a whole. Better responses tracked the extracts carefully, noting reactions of characters, selecting and commenting on language and possible effects on an audience. In the main, candidates managed to comment on the moods and how they were created, for example the mounting tension in the *Romeo and Juliet* scene or the shock and grief in the *Macbeth*.

Weaker responses tended to only cover part of the extract – usually the first half, so they might have missed the impact of Romeo's entrance, or the "pit of ink" image at the end of Leonato's speech. Other less successful responses tended to miss the opportunities to look at specific language choices, therefore not achieving much coverage of AO2.

Some candidates didn't focus explicitly on the "How... an audience might respond" part of the question, but many nevertheless suggested this with discussion of the moods created in the extract, thus gaining reasonable credit.

This audience response element to the questions worked well in most cases, with many candidates offering focused comments on this throughout. It certainly seems to have helped candidates explore Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in several of the extracts. Furthermore, across the texts, candidates discussed how both Shakespearean and modern audiences might react, often contrasting the two to good effect. However, in some cases this led to less focused, increasingly contextual discussion of the behaviour of groundlings and the lively atmosphere of the Elizabethan stage.

## ***Romeo and Juliet***

The selected scene was clearly a key moment in the play, and one with which almost all candidates were familiar and comfortable. Many clearly recognised that this is a pivotal moment in the play, knew the key characters and could comment on their behaviour. Most engaged with the mounting tension in the scene.

Stronger responses grasped the menacing undercurrent and sensed the danger of Mercutio's attitude. While many contrasted Tybalt's unusually calm approach with his previous behaviour, only a few saw his "politeness" as an act. The shift in mood on Romeo's arrival was commented on, often linked to a strong sense of the dramatic irony that informs the audience's reactions at this point. An appreciation of some of Mercutio's wordplay and language choices such as "head"/ "heel", "man" "boy" and "villain" also bore fruit for AO2; a select few managed to comment on the use of verse and prose in the exchange.

Weaker responses tended to track the narrative without much focus on audience reaction or mood, or only managed to cover the first part of the extract, thus missing Romeo's contribution. Some candidates got carried away with the momentum of the scene and talked at length about Mercutio and Tybalt's deaths, even though they take place afterwards. Misunderstandings were relatively rare, although a few candidates were under the impression that Tybalt's hatred of Romeo is driven by knowledge of Romeo's marriage to Juliet.

## ***Macbeth***

Responses to this extract were mostly focused and empathetic, grasping Macduff's shock and anguish and noting Malcolm's push for revenge. Even those who were a little confused about where this scene fits into the narrative could comment on the brutality of the murder, with many selecting apt words and phrases for comment – plenty of AO2 marks were gained with attention to the imagery of violence and innocence, for example "savagely slaughtered" and "pretty little chickens".

Successful responses tended to track Macduff's emotions and detailed the audience's reactions, often empathetically. The other characters elicited various responses: some were outraged by Ross's apparent lack of sympathy, while others saw him as awkward and embarrassed, and felt sympathy for him for having to break such dreadful news. Likewise, Malcolm was a sympathetic comforter to some, and a manipulative opportunist to others, cunningly using Macduff to deliver his own revenge. Candidates who looked carefully at word choice, for example "medicines" and the use of both exclamation marks and question marks, scored well for AO2. Despite not being in the scene, Macbeth was, quite reasonably, the subject of some thoughtful discussion.

Weaker responses tended to be limited in their examination of the audience's reactions – some not getting beyond a basic sympathy for Macduff. They were also characterised by a lack of engagement with the language employed by Shakespeare. A small minority struggled with placing the extract and understanding the events surrounding the scene: it was a warning to Macduff before the murders, or it was Malcolm's family being put to the sword.

## ***Othello***

Most of the answers to this question were solid, showing a sound understanding of the scene and its significance in the play. The tension and Othello's mounting anger were discussed effectively. Some answers tended to consider the change in Othello, while others focused more on the audience's sympathy for Desdemona and their shock at the violence she suffers. Stronger responses noted the importance of dramatic irony in the scene, appreciating the audience's awareness of how Desdemona unwittingly fuels Othello's anger. Othello's sharp questions, exclamations and curses were analysed effectively and contrasted with the polite, more formal language of the other characters.

Weaker responses tended to have a grasp of the dominant mood but lacked development of specific comment and analysis. Others were brief or didn't cover the whole extract, thereby neglecting the "crocodile" tears image, for example. A few were technique led, limiting both AO1 discussion and attention to language choice.

## ***Much Ado About Nothing***

This extract had plenty of potential for language analysis and many candidates took advantage by exploring the main images of Leonato's speech: the "pit of ink" was analysed well, as was "the story that is printed in her blood". Better responses considered the whole idea of shame and honour, and what it meant to an Elizabethan father of high status, although on occasion there was some drifting into further contextual discussion that couldn't get much reward. Many candidates appreciated how the dramatic irony of the scene sharpens the audience's feelings about Leonato's treatment of his daughter.

Weaker responses sometimes betrayed confusion about the events surrounding the scene: some believed Hero was already dead, whereas others were under the impression that Leonato's reaction is part of the subsequent plan to fake Hero's death. Some glossed over much of the content of Leonato's speech and instead wandered into less fertile contextual terrain after reasonable comments noting the likely difference in the reactions of Elizabethan and modern audiences.

## ***Henry V***

Most candidates engaged well with the extract, clearly very familiar with Henry's set-piece speeches in the play. There was a clear focus on audience, with many candidates managing effective comments on the emotive power of Henry's rhetoric. Stronger responses tracked the speech closely, appreciating the mixture of realism and romance in Henry's words and highlighting the effect of language choice on both the audience and his weary, heavily-outnumbered army.

Among weaker responses, there was some confusion about the sequence of events in the play: some thought the battle was already won, and some thought Crispin was a soldier in Henry's army. In a few cases, there was only a generalised sense of the appeal to patriotism and pride in the speech, without the development of specific reference in support.

## ***The Merchant of Venice***

There were many excellent responses to this scene, and on the whole candidates seemed to have plenty to say. The contrast between the situations of Antonio and Shylock was a popular starting point, as was the presentation of Portia. Most candidates tracked the extract carefully and wrote about the tension; stronger responses understood the significance of Portia's "Tarry a little, there is something else", appreciating both her cleverness and how this turning point changes everything for Shylock. Most candidates managed to draw a clear distinction between a typical Elizabethan view of Shylock's treatment and that of a modern audience without lapsing into unnecessary further contextual discussion.

Weaker responses tended to be brief or limited in their coverage of the extract. There were answers that tracked the events of the scene without much focus on the audience's response, but they were rare exceptions.

### **Characteristics of good extract responses:**

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked and on the details in the extract**
- **Selection of short, apt references to support points made**
- **Critical probing of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas**
- **Wide-ranging coverage of the extract**
- **Close examination of how the language/imagery used helps to convey meaning**

### **Ways in which performance could be improved:**

- **More detailed coverage of the extract, managing comment on the beginning, middle and end**
- **More selection of supporting references rather than general impressions**
- **More practice on probing subtext and interpreting what is really going on in the extract**
- **Less reference to contextual factors when AO3 is not addressed in this question**
- **Careful adherence to the rubric requirements of the paper to ensure that candidates are only answering questions on the texts that they have studied**

## **Essay questions**

Examiners felt that the essay questions were clear and straightforward, enabling candidates of all abilities to access them and demonstrate their knowledge of the plays. Weaker candidates were at least able to track the narrative and find some points of focus; encouragingly, many were also able to muster some relevant, direct references from key moments. For higher ability candidates, the challenge was to plan and execute a focused, analytical response within the clear parameters of the question. Many candidates rose admirably to this challenge.

The direction to address "different points of the play" included in several of the questions seemed to prove useful, with examiners noting how successfully most candidates selected key scenes to track their character / relationship / theme. Better responses were characterised by this tracking across the text and the ability to select and comment on key quotations from these scenes. Thus, candidates highlighted moments across the text that tracked Juliet's growing independence, or shifts in the dynamic of the Macbeths' relationship.

Weaker responses tended not to range across the whole play, for example not going beyond Act 3, or struggled to incorporate AO2 elements into discussion. However, examiners were pleased to report that the majority managed to provide quite an impressive array of quotations (or sometimes paraphrases) and comment on them, often making sound points on word choice and imagery. In addition, AO2 was addressed frequently – perhaps more frequently than candidates themselves may realise – by the highlighting of turning points or key contrasts (for example the Macbeths and the Macduffs, Henry and the Dauphin, or Benedick and Claudio).

While some contextual discussion was highly relevant in many responses (e.g. attitudes to Jewish people in *The Merchant of Venice*, ideas of familial honour and shame in *Much Ado About Nothing*), some was not, creating an unnecessary drain on candidates' precious time. In some cases, examiners had the suspicion that candidates were perhaps unclear on where AO3 counts and where it does not.

AO4 marks make a significant difference to totals for the essay questions, and examiners saw the full range of performance, in particular noting that careful proof-reading of essay responses is well-worth the effort. Checking to ensure the use of capital letters to begin character names would certainly be beneficial.

### ***Romeo and Juliet***

This question seemed to enable candidates across the ability range to demonstrate their knowledge, and a majority could explore the changing character of Juliet. Most showed good understanding of Juliet's growing independence and maturity and there was a strong appreciation of the difficulties she faces in the play, but it was interesting to see how many saw her quite negatively, finding her foolish, selfish and immature. Overall, there was a high level of engagement, and the best responses selected and analysed a range of apt textual reference. Key scenes were selected and discussed in detail, although some examiners felt that Juliet's later scenes, for example meeting the Friar in Act 4 Scene 1, her soliloquy in Act 4 Scene 3 and even her suicide in the final scene were perhaps under-used.

Weaker responses tended not to range across the text, often failing to deal with the end of the play, or lacked focus on AO2. Film references cropped up more regularly than with any other text, with lifts and fish tanks featuring quite prominently, although it was thankfully rare to find that the "happy dagger" had become a gun.

### ***Macbeth***

Responses suggested that candidates found this an accessible question, encouraging selection of scenes across whole play. These ranged from the letter, through the murders of Duncan and Banquo, to the couple's growing estrangement, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking and, finally, Macbeth's numbed reaction to her death. There was plenty of sensible tracking of the relationship, highlighting key moments and shifts in the balance of power. Many candidates compared their changing behaviours, and a clear majority were at least able to contrast Macbeth's increasing autonomy with Lady Macbeth's loss of control and sanity. Key lines were utilised effectively for further coverage of AO2. The best responses discussed, in detail, Lady Macbeth's subtle manipulation of Macbeth and tracked the loss of intimacy between the couple once Macbeth becomes king, citing it as a key factor in their mental disintegration.

Weaker responses tended to focus on just one character rather than the relationship between the two of them. There was sometimes an imbalance between the coverage of the events leading up to Duncan's murder and those following it. Time was sometimes wasted with superfluous contextual discussion, and AO2 was sometimes neglected.

### ***Othello***

The standard of response to this question was generally very high: candidates clearly enjoyed writing about Iago and there was a real sense that they were well-prepared for dealing with this fascinating villain. In better responses, candidates showed how his language reflected his racism and bestial imagination, although examiners felt more attention could have been paid to the soliloquies, which might have yielded still more language analysis. Better responses were also characterised by the ability to track Iago over the course of the whole play and explore how he orchestrates Othello's downfall.

Weaker responses tended to lose clear focus on Iago, some shifting their attention onto Othello, or struggled to track him across the whole text, with a tendency to concentrate on the early scenes but neglect key events in the later part of the play. Some were light on AO2 coverage and would have benefitted from looking at Iago's use of language in one or two key scenes.

### ***Much Ado About Nothing***

Candidates responded to this question on the ever-popular Benedick with enthusiasm, most tracking his character across the play and highlighting key moments on his journey to becoming "Benedick the married man". There were very few problems here, and examiners saw some excellent discussion. Better responses considered how and why he changes with good reference to textual detail. The question afforded plenty of scope to write about language; unsurprisingly, the insults traded with Beatrice proved a popular source of material for this. The best responses looked at how Benedick is introduced by Beatrice's questions before his entrance in Act 1 Scene 1 and then tracked the key moments in his development across the play.

Weaker responses tended to neglect the scenes between Benedick's introduction as a deficient bachelor in Act 1 and his declaration of love to Beatrice in Act 4, for example the masked ball and the gulling scene. Some were side-tracked by redundant contextual comment, or neglected attention to AO2 in their discussion.

### ***Henry V***

Responses were mostly purposeful and quite detailed. Candidates noted the ambiguity in Shakespeare's presentation of war, with most looking at how the play shows both the glory of war and its horror and futility. Better responses tended to track the theme across the whole play, from the Bishops' discussion in Act 1 Scene 1 to the Epilogue, making use of a range of events and characters, such as Fluellen, Pistol and the Dauphin to feed into the discussion – not just Henry.

Weaker responses tended to lose specific focus on the theme of war and instead tracked the progress and development of Henry through the text. For some reason, there were quite a lot of responses which began with generic introductions, when it would have been more productive to focus on the question from the start. In a few responses, there was some confusion between minor characters, particularly Pistol, Bardolph and Nym.

## ***The Merchant of Venice***

A clear majority of responses featured Shylock, and were often well-argued. Other characters selected included Antonio, Portia and Jessica. Some candidates chose to discuss the extent of their sympathy for several characters – a perfectly valid approach. Candidates seemed well prepared and examiners noted the impressive textual detail incorporated into responses. Stronger responses evaluated the presentation of their chosen character with apt support, looking at their less laudable qualities and actions, as well as those that might elicit sympathy.

Weaker responses tended to ignore counter arguments and reasons why their chosen character might not be seen in a sympathetic light; for example, Shylock's calculated plan to murder Antonio was almost entirely overlooked by some candidates. On occasion, minor characters were muddled; thus, in some responses, Jessica eloped with Lancelot or Gratiano.

### **Characteristics of good essay responses:**

- **Close tracking of a character / relationship / theme across the whole text**
- **Selection of a range of apt events and specific details to support thoughtful ideas**
- **Some analysis of the writer's intentions when creating characters and plots**
- **Highlighting of important turning points and key contrasts and their effects**
- **Careful spelling and punctuation, with vocabulary and sentence structure used to control meaning effectively**

### **Ways in which performance could be improved:**

- **Tracking a character / relationship / theme across the whole text, with effective coverage of later acts**
- **More focus on developing a personal engagement with the text rather than formulaic answers**
- **Practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked**
- **Practice in selecting detailed textual evidence for ideas**
- **Practice in proof-reading responses to avoid careless technical errors, such as forgetting use of capital letters for character names**

## Poetry questions

### Question 7.1

Candidates clearly engaged with the question of how love is presented in *Sonnet 43*, which seemed to work for the whole ability range. They had ideas and images of varying difficulty to work with, from the straightforward (“after death”) to the more figurative (“sun and candlelight”) to the downright taxing (“ideal Grace”). Successful responses tracked through the poem, aided by its list-like structure, commenting on Barrett-Browning’s use of language. The opening question and the use of repetition and religious language elicited frequent comments. There were plenty of stylistic features for candidates to discuss, and examiners were pleased to note that less technique spotting was in evidence than anticipated – overall, candidates did a good job of commenting on effects of language and structural features. Some candidates noted the sound point that the lack of a name or gender in *Sonnet 43* added to the universality of the message, while also linking the poem effectively to biographical context: at the highest level, contextual comments were woven into the discussion at relevant points, highlighting details and at times helping candidates offer alternative interpretations.

Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the poem rather than engage with the language. There were some unconvincing interpretations of key lines, for example for a few candidates “depth and breadth and height” was a reference to the impressive physical dimensions of Robert Browning. Overall, however, candidates did well working with the poem on the page. The majority of candidates could offer some contextual comment, whether biographical, historical, cultural or literary. Most knew what a sonnet is and that it is often associated with love, and there was plenty of biographical detail in some responses. This was less successful when used as a bolt-on paragraph, but became more valuable when linked to specific details in the poem. However, a lack of contextual comment was the biggest issue here: it was a shame, though, when examiners came across candidates who dealt well with the poem in isolation, covering AO1 and AO2 well, but didn’t achieve their full potential because of a lack of AO3 coverage.

### Question 7.2

Examiners noted that many candidates responded with real enthusiasm, presumably because they could write well about a poem that they had enjoyed studying and been able to choose. It was clear that candidates who had revised effectively were able to offer detailed reference and comparative comments. The accessible theme encouraged a range of poems for comparison. *Valentine* was most popular, followed by *Manhunt* and *Cozy Apologia*. All three served candidates well. *Valentine* enabled candidates to contrast the presentation of love in two different time periods in very different ways. *Manhunt* inspired some sensitive responses, allied to good contextual knowledge; meanwhile, *Cozy Apologia* saw close parallels drawn, with a wife writing about her love for her husband, yet also with a clear contrast in context and tone.

*She Walks in Beauty*, *A Wife in London*, *The Soldier* and even *Afternoons* provided decent choices for candidates in many cases, and it was extremely pleasing to see the range of poems utilised to good effect. Some less obvious choices struggled when there was only a tenuous thematic link to the focus of the question, e.g. *Ozymandias*, *Hawk Roosting*.

There were many different approaches to the comparison itself: confident responses featured integrated comparison, incorporating similarities and differences in style and context as well as themes and ideas. Plenty of solid answers made straightforward points and connections, while also dipping into mood and language choice. Less able candidates still seemed to gain some success by dealing with each poem in turn and then offering some direct comparisons.

Weaker responses selected and discussed a second poem, but neglected the necessary business of comparison. Some candidates missed a trick by not re-using some of the sound points they had made in Question 7.1 in the comparative question. Again, AO3 was an issue in a significant minority of cases, with context not discussed, or only discussed for one of the poems.

**Characteristics of good poetry responses:**

- **Careful tracking of the poem set for Question 7.1, with detailed coverage of the whole poem**
- **Probing of subtext, tentative interpretation rooted in the poems**
- **Strong focus on imagery, language and the effects they create**
- **Interweaving of relevant contextual detail into discussion**
- **Sensible selection of a second poem to suit the theme for comparison in Question 7.2**
- **Detailed, developed comparison of ideas, language and context in Question 7.2**

**Ways in which performance can be improved:**

- **More detailed coverage of the whole poem set in Question 7.1**
- **Practice in supporting ideas with detailed reference to the poems**
- **Selection of an appropriate poem for comparison, with a strong focus on the theme of the question**
- **Effective revision of anthology poems to ensure the ability to recall and make good use of textual detail**
- **Practice a structured approach to comparison, ensuring effective coverage of both poems and detailed comparative comments in Question 7.2**
- **Incorporation of relevant contextual detail to support overall discussion in both Question 7.1 and Question 7.2**

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2017

### COMPONENT 2

#### General Comments

After each section there is a summary of the Principal Examiner's findings under the headings: 'Characteristics of good responses' and 'Ways in which performance could be improved.'

The new source based response essay (or “exploding extract”) was successful in offering apt support for a closed book, un-tiered examination. As expected, the most popular texts were *Lord of the Flies*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Blood Brothers*. A large number of candidates had also studied *The Woman in Black* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Examiners saw all of the texts attempted. One aspect of the newly introduced online marking system this year was the highlighting of the number of candidates who wasted their time by responding to questions on texts which they had not studied. This was more evident at the start of the paper where a number of candidates responded to all of the questions in Section A.

It became very clear as the marking series continued, that lots of candidates had spent significantly longer on the Section A text than their 19<sup>th</sup> Century Prose – which had a knock-on effect for their poetry responses too. This is possibly down to first question enthusiasm, and will be hopefully rectified as teachers and candidates become more familiar with the paper's demands. The inevitable 'technique spotting' continues to be an issue, even quite able candidates sometimes resorted to device spotting with either no conclusions about their function or some assertive claims and interpretations.

#### Section A questions

The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. There was a range of character, relationship, theme and mood & atmosphere questions within Section A. Across the range of abilities, candidates were clearly very familiar with their key characters and most were able to show knowledge of their development (or not in Mr Birling's case) throughout their texts.

The extracts worked well across the whole of Section A, with candidates using them in various ways – as expected. For less able candidates, they provided a helpful scaffold to get them started, and in the majority of cases, enabled these candidates to demonstrate some sensible AO2 skills and also helped them to avoid a very straightforward narrative approach. Others 'tracked through' the key points before moving on to other aspects of the text. Some more able candidates used them as a 'springboard' to broaden out into their wider knowledge, whilst other candidates used the extract as an anchor, to which they returned back and forth during their broader evaluations. It was interesting to see how the style of question allowed for so many different successful approaches. The approaches also varied depending on where the extract was taken from in the text – near the beginning for *Lord of the Flies* and the very final lines of *An Inspector Calls*. This inevitably encouraged the need for a flexible approach. The majority of candidates seemed to have been effectively prepared and well-rehearsed for this new challenge.

The less successful responses overall, relied too heavily on tracking through the extract in excessive detail. While examiners can award marks for sensible comments made from tracking through the extract, the responses are obviously only limited to that section of the text and cannot demonstrate any wider textual knowledge. In extreme cases, unnecessary reference to the effect of every word and unhelpful comments on the impact of punctuation marks, left insufficient time to demonstrate their wider textual knowledge which would develop a more effective response and a higher mark. There was some exceptional AO2 analysis demonstrated across all texts, with many pupils able to strike the right balance of exploring the closer impact of key words and images, where relevant to the question. However, it is not necessary to name every word class. Candidates get into wholly unnecessary muddles trying to label verbs, adverbs and many more. Examples of this were seen across the texts. There were also a large number of pupils forcing techniques and subject terminology into their responses to the extract – either incorrectly or very tenuously: *the use of plosives for 'plump and pretty' highlights Jeanette's forced love for her mother; 'for rainy days and country lanes [...] The use of pathetic fallacy here shows even if the day is awful you can have a good day. Here, Edward's use of enjambment is like the love dripping onto the stage like the raindrops on the rainy day...'*

Contextual details should only really be included in Section A if relevant to the question and the authors or playwrights intentions – for example Mr Birling's presentation as a foolish capitalist is central to Priestley's intentions and this year's task; Mickey's lack of a proper education means he becomes a criminal / Linda becomes pregnant because she is lower class are not particularly helpful, relevant or accurate comments. Such comments will not garner any reward where AO3 is not assessed.

#### **AO4 – Spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structure accuracy**

It did not seem greatly evident that pupils were deliberately tightening or proof reading their AO4 accuracy for Section A when it was assessed. Frequent errors with capitalisation, apostrophe misuse and misspelling of character or author names, could be addressed easily in order to optimise 4-5 marks instead of the more typically awarded 2-3 marks. Informal expression and illegibility also caused problems for some candidates and is self-penalising.

#### ***Lord of the Flies***

The extract selected, in which Piggy is left behind by Ralph, Jack and Simon, gave candidates plenty of opportunity to show their understanding of how the dynamics of the group affect the relationship already briefly established between Ralph and Piggy.

Candidates showed recognition that despite Ralph's unkind behaviour, his 'understanding' of Piggy's 'humiliation' and 'genuine leadership' stood him apart from Jack's attitude. The knowledge of the conch's significance was considered, with many more able candidates using the idea of its representation of civilization, as a springboard to analyse how Golding presents the strengthening of Ralph and Piggy's relationship in the rest of the novel, in contrast to Jack's savagery. Weaker responses were limited to the early parts of the novel, seeing Ralph as simply a show off and a bully. However, most candidates were able to demonstrate an understanding that their relationship builds into a strong friendship throughout the novel.

There was some good discussion of how Golding presents the two so contrastingly in the opening chapter and better response went on to discuss later events in effective detail, to show how Ralph and Piggy's relationship highlights the breakdown of order on the island. Key scenes considered included Ralph sticking up for Piggy against Jack, when he steals his glasses, and later guiding him up the mountain when his glasses are lost. Many wrote sensitively about Piggy's death and Ralph's realisation of the loss of his 'true wise friend'.

### ***Anita and Me***

The extract selected focused on the 'Wenches Brigade' which demonstrates the dynamics of the group, with 'Anita leading and [Meena] at her side'. There was engaged and lively analysis of the extract, with candidates clearly understanding the hierarchy of the group and what it implies about Meena's feelings about her friendship with Anita.

Meena and Anita's friendship was inevitably the key focus for discussing the theme of friendship in most responses. Candidates evaluated both positive and negative aspects of their friendship inspired by the final lines of the extract: 'Anita made me laugh like no-one else; and 'she gave voice to all the wicked things I had thought but kept zipped up inside my good girl's winter coat'.

Many described the friendship as 'one sided' or even 'toxic', starting with how Anita approaches Meena in the first place flicking her legs with the stick, and detailing other episodes in the novel to explore the inevitable breakdown of their friendship when Anita goes out with Sam Lowbridge. Many referred to how Anita never visits Meena when she has broken her leg and how her understanding of true friendship begins with meeting Robert. Broader discussions of the theme included Nanima as Meena's soul mate, and the loving friendships she observes in her parents and within her family and community.

### ***Never Let Me Go***

The extract shows 'two quite separate Ruths' and therefore inspired some very insightful evaluations of how Kathy describes Ruth's complex character here and throughout the whole novel. There were interesting comments on Kathy's role in the relationship as both 'best friend' yet as a potentially unreliable narrator. Candidates demonstrated examples from all three parts of the novel to show how Ruth changes and develops, with most using her 'imaginary horses' and as leader of the 'secret guard' at Hailsham to illustrate Ruth's role in her relationships with Kathy and Tommy.

There was detailed knowledge of other key events including their trip to Norfolk to find Ruth's possible and her emotional outburst 'Modelled from trash' proving effective evidence to her inner vulnerabilities. Sensitive evaluation of her lack of parental love was shown by analysing the 'pencil case incident' and her attempts to impress the veterans. Candidates discussed her attempts to redeem herself with Tommy and Kathy in part three, with reference to her admitting to keeping them apart and providing Madame's address. The fragility of her presentation after her donations was also handled with sensitivity with many considering the abandoned boat as symbolic of her deterioration. There was also thoughtful evaluation of how Ishiguro may use Ruth's situation as a clone, to highlight dystopic themes of humanity and identity.

### ***The Woman in Black***

The extract was taken from Chapter 1, 'Christmas Eve', in which Arthur Kipps is recalling his own ghost story, many years after the events relating to his encounter with the woman in black. The majority of candidates were familiar with the non-chronological sequence of events and seemed confident in the scene's place within the novel's timeline and how it would create fear and tension. Candidates used the extract well to comment on the impact of his language in the extract, with many focusing on the impact of key vocabulary such as 'evil, horror and tragedy' effectively. Others noted the repetition of 'exorcism' and stronger responses included discussions of some of the imagery, with discussion of 'like the outermost ripple on a pool' and 'pain of a wound' demonstrating good understating of Hill's intentions to create intrigue within this scene. There were weaker attempts to explore the language which resulted in simple feature spotting, with some candidates getting lost in 'rules of three' and generalised or unhelpful comments on 'powerful' alliteration or punctuation marks.

Wider knowledge of how Hill creates fear and tension included reference to the journey to Crythin Gifford (many varied spellings of this encountered) and Kipps' interactions with Samuel Daily and the local community's 'conspiracy of silence'. There was a tendency for candidates to muddle the names or roles of Bentley, Daily and Jerome, who at times seemed to be interchangeable. Kipps' first encounter with the woman in black (sometimes confused for Alice Drablow) was a sensible example. His overnight stay at Eel Marsh House (again, some problematic spellings) and experiences in the graveyard, nursery and in the mist were also used as tense moments for the reader. Spider was also a popular 'character' with many using his rescue as a particularly terrifying moment in the story. The final chapter was also well referenced, with great sympathy for Kipps' loss a feature of many responses. Generally, candidates were able to use a wide range of key events from the novel to show their knowledge and understanding of the text. Stronger responses included good evaluation of Hill's characteristic use of pathetic fallacy, especially on his train journey and arrival at Eel Marsh House. The aural imagery of the pony and trap and the rocking chair were also effectively analysed.

Weaker responses were too tied up in language features, and over reliant on the extract, without the supporting content to demonstrate knowledge of the ghost herself. Others were distracted by contextual discussion of Jennet Humpfrye's situation as an unmarried mother, which lacked focus on the task. Film references were also evident, which is clearly problematic, especially if referring to the ending of the film, which is very different to the final chapter of the novel.

### ***Oranges are not the Only Fruit***

The extract describes Mrs Winterson's earlier life, explored by Jeanette when looking through an 'old flames' photograph album. The extract encouraged thoughtful and evaluative discussions of her presentation in the extract and how it differs from her behaviour and relationships elsewhere in the novel. Many candidates focused on her descriptions of meeting Mr Winterson and how converting him from gambling to Christianity is indicative of her domineering personality and obsession with the church. There was also good discussion of the ambiguous nature of her behaviour regarding 'Eddy's sister' and the later removal of the photograph. Some believed it showed that Mrs Winterson had a homosexual relationship with the woman, which illustrates her hypocrisy and extreme attitudes to Jeanette's relationships.

Candidates went on to write extensively on how Mrs Winterson is presented as a powerful and complex character throughout the novel, with recognition that her difficult and unmaternal relationship with Jeanette is central to the story. References to 'my father watched the wrestling / my mother liked to wrestle' was a popular choice to get discussion underway. Her disregard for Jeanette's wellbeing and religious fervor, as illustrated when Jeanette has gone deaf, was considered by most. Her hypocrisy was demonstrated in numerous ways, including her use of a wine glass to listen to her neighbours. The recurring symbol of her gifts of 'oranges' was considered, and some very strong responses included insightful references to Winterson's use of fables to explore her relationship with her mother. Many also recognised that she shows signs of change at the end of the novel, when welcoming Jeanette home, and offered pineapples instead. Sophisticated evaluation of Winterson's narrative structure, and biblical themes were also elements of assured responses.

### ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time***

The extract, taken from the part where Christopher has discovered Judy's letters, produced some thoughtful and engaging discussions of Ed's character. Responses ranged from fairly one sided views of him as a terribly untrustworthy liar, or a very caring sensitive father, to more sensitive evaluations of how he is presented as a father under extreme pressure – emotionally exhausted; his lies were to protect Christopher. Candidates sensibly used the stage directions to evidence Ed's understanding and relationship with Christopher. His sense of panic and stress evidenced by his language, was well considered, as were his final lines in the extract, which highlight the realisation of his own actions. Weaker candidates tended to put too much emphasis on Ed's swearing at times, believing that this was a reflection of his inferior intellectual ability or as 'evidence of Ed's own autism'.

Strong responses contrasted his parenting skills with Judy's, referring to her own admittance of this in her letters. There were good references to Christopher hearing Ed's voice in his head as he makes his way through London, and his argument with Mrs Gasgoyne, to support Ed's powerful bond with his son. There was also effective evaluation of his determination to make amends at the end of the play and the patience this shows as he awaits Christopher's forgiveness. 'Sandy' was, inevitably, a popular example of the lengths Ed went to achieve this.

### ***A Taste of Honey***

The chosen extract was when Peter proposes to Helen, which was invariably viewed by candidates as a marriage based on just sex and money. Peter's misogynistic attitude and domination of Helen and Jo was highlighted by many candidates as central to the play; others discussed the relationship as Helen's very own 'taste of honey'. Candidates engaged well with the verbal sparring in the extract and some effectively commented on its humour and innuendo. Many wrote with great distaste for Peter's arrogance and egocentricity, whilst sympathising with Helen's current situation and desperation. There was much made of Helen being old enough to be Peter's mother, which was effectively linked to his references to Oedipus, later in the play. His presentation as an alcoholic was also considered, linking to the deterioration of their relationship and his increasingly aggressive attitude and language in his final scenes.

Others were more condemnatory of Helen's 'gold-digging' and considered the inevitability of the failed marriage her comeuppance for being a terrible mother to Jo. There was sensible discussion of the relationship's significance in that it meant Jo was left alone to make some very misguided decisions with 'boy'. Some very good responses referred widely to how the dysfunctional relationship between Helen and Peter mirrored Helen and Jo's relationship, and how the cyclical nature of their lives highlights Delaney's commentary on the social deprivation in Salford at the time the play was set. Many also made good reference to how Peter's attitude to Geof and Helen's reaction to Jo's baby, were representative of Delaney's comments on racist and homophobic attitudes.

However, weaker candidates placed far too much emphasis on contextual factors, at the detriment of their wider knowledge of other episodes. Some naive generalisations of the role of women in the 1950s were also prevalent: 'women in the 1950s couldn't work so they would have to turn to prostitution to survive'. This led some to believe that Helen was lucky to have received a proposal from such an 'upper class brash car salesman'.

### ***An Inspector Calls***

Candidates seem to have been aided by the fact that the extract was the climax of the play and were able to write confidently on the presentation of Mr Birling's character. The text was well used to inform a valid and coherent presentation of his pomposity, self-regard and his self-serving ambition. Many spoke feelingly of his disregard for Sheila's feelings on learning of Gerald's behaviour. This served only to demonstrate his hypocrisy and greed. Clearly he is a character easy to dislike. Many candidates chose to write about the extract first, tracking through to show Birling's behaviour and attitude here and highlighting how he is unaffected by the Inspector's visit. All candidates knew that Mr Birling was a businessman (although quite a few of them didn't know how to spell it) and a capitalist. Most understood how the dramatic irony is used to present his attitude. The sinking of the Titanic was a regular feature of many responses; although better candidates saw this as a metaphor for Mr Birling and were able to use other examples from his speech as evidence of his foolishness.

Strong responses contrasted Birling's attitude to Sheila's, picking apart his treatment of her in the extract - and throughout the play - to explore the subtle aspects of his character, and to highlight Priestley's message. A number of candidates also looked at how Eric's reactions differed from his father's and what this reveals about their relationship. Attitudes to women and to the lower classes were explored, with more able candidates noting that Birling reacted badly to being challenged by Eva and also Sheila. There were some impressive responses relating to Birling's objectification of women. Almost all candidates were able to make meaningful comments relating to Mr Birling's selfishness, greed and desire to maintain and increase his status through Sheila's marriage. There was also a clear understanding of the generational differences, almost 'across the board.' Other successful candidates tackled Priestley's contrasting use of Mr Birling and the Inspector as mouthpieces for opposing capitalist and socialist viewpoints. Sheila's extract comment 'Fire and blood and anguish' was related back to the Inspector's speech for discussion and evaluation. There were thoughtful considerations of how Birling's behaviour and attitude were affected by the Inspector and how, despite his best efforts, Birling's 'power' was easily eroded by the Inspector's questioning. Strong candidates also explored how his 'power' returns in the extract, showing his cowardice by how he is only able to challenge the Inspector when he is no longer there.

Less able candidates simply summarised the extract (or the whole play) whilst more able candidates made links between his behaviour/attitude here and at various points throughout the play. Responses could be a little imbalanced, with candidates looking superficially at the extract but probing the character throughout the rest of the play (or vice versa). Many candidates did not appreciate that for most of the extract, Birling believes that not only was the Inspector a hoax but also that there was no evidence to suggest that Eva Smith had actually killed herself. Better responses were able to articulate Mr Birling's response to the phone call and the logic and technique behind the circular narrative.

### ***The History Boys***

The extract from *The History Boys* extract allowed for a range of responses and inspired some very engaging and mature essays on Hector, his relationships with the boys and his educational philosophy. All could place the extract and candidates honed in on the stage directions effectively to comment on Hector's unorthodox classroom management approaches ("hits him on the head with an exercise book"). Many candidates picked up on Hector's views on General Studies lessons and Oxbridge education and this often led to cross references to the wider text. Additionally, the humour in the play and around the character was often discussed perceptively, whilst all could discuss humorous parts of the play (e.g. the French brothel scene) with the best seeing how humour helps the playwright explore less savoury themes. There was thoughtful consideration of the 'trust' mentioned and how this is significant to his behaviour within the classroom and on his motorbike. Effective contrasts between Hector and other staff members, in particular to Irwin and the Headmaster, were made and candidates sometimes wrote sensibly and sensitively on other aspects of Hector's character, though a significant number were not prepared to adequately discuss the character in full, simply labelling him as a homosexual and/or a paedophile. The majority of responses reflected knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment of the play.

### ***Blood Brothers***

This was another very popular text and produced a lot of engaged and emotional responses. The extract was from the part of the play when Eddie announces he is off to university and asks Linda if he can write to her. He goes on to sing her a song indirectly declaring his love by saying what he would do for her if he was in Mickey's shoes. Candidates were asked to discuss Eddie and Linda's relationship and there were some excellent responses which used the extract to focus on the class differences which eventually led to the tragic ending of the play. Close analysis of the language of the song highlighted the differences between the lives of Mickey and Linda, with Eddie. Some even recognised the reference to 'the summer's day' as a line from Shakespeare's sonnet. Less able candidates missed the subtleties of the extract and thought Eddie was betraying Mickey and trying to steal Linda from him through the song.

More confident responses explored the correlation between the deterioration of Mickey and Linda's relationship with Linda's growing confidence towards Edward and what he offers. The extract also allowed them to discuss how Linda didn't really take Edward seriously ('Cos y soft you are' and 'Oh go away...'). Some candidates realised that this may have actually been her covering up her embarrassment at his declaration of love.

For most, there was a good sense of the chronology of the play, with many answers working through from the formation of their friendship as children to their separation at 18 and up to the tragic conclusion. Candidates working at the top end were able to discuss perceptively what was said and what was hinted at in the extract and the significance of the images of what Eddie was 'not saying a word' about in the song.

Few candidates noted that Edward had in fact lost touch with Mickey and Linda and did not know they were married. More sensitive responses were able to evaluate the relationships and explore the connections between the three characters, Mickey, Linda and Edward in terms of their fate and the structure of the play, as well as understanding Linda's attraction to the brothers and how this evolves. There was a good level of whole-text knowledge and ability to refer to the mutual pain of the characters' reciprocal love and seemingly inevitable swing from altruistic self-sacrifice on Eddie's part towards illicit and lamentable gratification as the pair give in to their overwhelming feelings.

Weaker candidates had a lack of knowledge of the plot or actually had a lot of misunderstanding about the timeline of events, such as thinking that Linda got pregnant when Mickey was in prison. Very weak candidates focused only on the extract, with some simply paraphrasing the main events. At times, there was too much emphasis placed on unfocussed or very generalised contextual background, which was often irrelevant to the question.

#### **Characteristics of good Section A responses:**

- **Good answers move swiftly from highlighting key details in the extract into a wider discussion across the text**
- **Use the extract as a springboard for a wider discussion, with a few key words or images explored**
- **Select a range of apt events and specific details to support thoughtful ideas**
- **Choose quotations wisely and analyse them effectively**
- **Show that candidates have been prepared and know the specific characteristics of the writer's techniques and find examples of these within the given extract**
- **Comment on significant relationships and/or themes presented**
- **Sustain focus on the question**
- **Some analysis of the writer's intentions when creating characters and plots**
- **Ensure that contextual details are wholly relevant to the question**

#### **Ways in which performance can be improved:**

- **Encourage candidates to be selective in what they use for the extract to demonstrate their AO2 skills. They are not required to track through the extract and analyse it in exhaustive detail, doing so will significantly affect the AO1 marks**
- **Avoid assertions and general impressions**
- **Avoid feature spotting and the naming of unnecessary parts**
- **Similarly, avoid focus on analysis of sentence length, punctuation features or more non-fiction rhetorical devices, which again, can be an unproductive use of the extract**
- **Give candidates guidance and practice on different ways to use the extract depending on where it is in the text**
- **Avoid unnecessary contextual details as AO3 is not assessed in Section A**
- **Encourage pupils to learn key spellings such as character names and authors and proof read their responses to Section A to eradicate simple errors such as capital letters or apostrophes**
- **Avoid references to film versions of the texts**

## Section B questions

There was a good take up of all of the texts in Section B. The most popular texts were *A Christmas Carol* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, perhaps due to their relative brevity and numerous film adaptations. *War of the Worlds* and *Jane Eyre* were also extremely popular. However, a large number of candidates had studied *Pride and Prejudice* and *Silas Marner*.

As with Section A, the new source-based response (or “exploding extract”) was successful in offering apt support for a closed book, untiered exam. The questions worked across all texts for all abilities. At the lower end, there was a tendency towards unfocused narrative but most attempted to deal with “importance” and many produced well-supported, well-constructed essays. There was clear engagement with the questions and more able candidates were able to demonstrate evaluation skills and discussed the effects of the presentation on the audience.

All the extracts worked well as a starting point for most candidates and they were, quite rightly, used in different ways. Some candidates dealt with the extract at the start of their response; many used it chronologically, depending where it appeared in the novel; and others used it throughout their response, cross referencing it with the wider text. All approaches were valid and all were able to work satisfactorily for the individual candidate concerned. Very few candidates did not use the extract at all and similarly few made no reference at all to the wider text. Some responses were unbalanced with those that did not use the wider text losing marks for AO1 and those who did not use the extract tending to lose marks for AO2, but the majority used the extract sensibly.

One thing that was noted across all of the texts was that a significant number of candidates refer to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century prose text as a 'play'. This was true of all the texts and it was occasionally clear that some candidates were basing their answers on theatrical productions. Whilst film and play versions are undoubtedly of valid use in teaching a text, it is important that candidates study the full novels.

Context, on the whole, was handled well. Inevitably, there were examples where it was practically absent, poorly understood or included as a stand-alone bolt-on, but far more prevalent was relevant, integrated discussion. Context covered a huge range of topics: nineteenth century morality, Victorian expectations of a gentleman, the influence of Darwinian theory, the conflict between science and religion, the British Empire, the effects of Industrialisation, attitudes to women, marriage, poverty/wealth and class, to name but a few.

Timing tended to be an issue and candidates should be reminded to split their time carefully across the questions, using the recommended times on the front of the paper as a guide.

## ***A Christmas Carol***

The question focused on the presentation of the ghosts in the novel which gave candidates of all abilities something to discuss.

The extract prompted candidates to not forget Marley's role as a precursor to the arrival of the other spirits and as it came from the first stave of the novel, most candidates used it as a starting point before discussing each of the other ghosts in turn. The details of Marley's presentation, Scrooge's attitude and initial rejection of Marley and some of the language used to convey these ideas were present in most answers. More confident responses spotted the humour, discussed the structural device of Marley's visitation and were able to go comfortably beyond the extract and offer detailed reference to details not in the extract such as the chains 'forged in life' and indeed, the other spirits shown to Scrooge from the window, including the "guilty governments".

The text was well used to track the presentation of the various ghosts though this inevitably led to some weaker narrative approaches that were thin in terms of detail and a number of candidates got confused in terms of the ghosts' order, appearance and impact. However, most candidates tracked the text well to produce a secure and informed response, with clear engagement and evaluation of the ghosts and their role in Scrooge's change. More able candidates explored the symbolism of each ghost and some subtle links across the novel. One nice example of close language analysis was by a candidate who noted the contrast between the Ghost of Christmas Present's 'open hands' with Scrooge's 'tight-fisted hand at the grindstone.'

Happily, there seemed to be far fewer film references this year but the common misconception that Belle was at Fezziwig's party still persists.

The extract and the text provided lots of opportunities to meet the context requirements of AO3. Most candidates commented on the significance of Christmas and the Ghost of Christmas Present repeating Scrooge's words regarding the 'surplus population', however there was thoughtful discussion of poverty, wealth and social class in a Victorian context. A number of candidates referred to Dickens' intention to 'haunt' the reader with social concerns of the day and many were able to relate the extract to the Victorian love of ghost stories and the Gothic genre.

## ***Silas Marner***

*Silas Marner* works well for every level of ability, with its strong storyline, clearly delineated characters and accessible themes, as well as clear contextual features and the vast majority of responses were excellent. All candidates seemed to be able to relate Eppie to Silas and the change and significance she played in his life.

The extract explored Eppie's growing influence on Silas just after her arrival and worked well in allowing candidates to discuss stylistic features in terms of contrasting Silas' growing love for her with his worship for the gold as well as exploring Eliot's rich evocative descriptions of nature in relation to Eppie. There was plenty here for candidates to explore and most took full advantage.

Many candidates went on to explore the presentation of Eppie in terms of her arrival, (particularly Eppie's hair and the gold of course), but also turning points in the novel and Eliot's use of contrast. Candidates were obviously highly engaged by the characters and few had a sympathetic view of Godfrey Cass, and poor Nancy suffered a bit by association. A few candidates got muddled about Aaron's name, or the Cass sons, but on the whole, candidates impressed by how much detail from the text had been retained, and by the number who included relevant references to Lantern Yard (just occasionally they called Raveloe Lantern Yard, but for a novel so rich in detail, odd slips are understandable.) However, occasionally the slips were more noticeable: in particular the candidate who wrote that Dolly Parton was a key character who helped Silas in raising Eppie.

Most candidates used AO3 sensibly, though some had a distorted view of the Industrial Revolution, particularly the candidate who thought that because of the new technology they would have a gas fire. There were also some less secure attempts to link in biographical details about George Eliot's life which were not particularly relevant. A few were a bit surprised that no background checks were made on Silas, and one who went into some rather depressing detail about how nowadays, Silas would be more likely to be a paedophile. However, the vast majority provided excellent examples of integrated discussion on the historical contexts (some noted that the novel covers a wide time span), the place of religion, town v country, families, fairy tales, Victorian expectations, and so on.

### ***War of the Worlds***

The question asked candidates to consider the presentation of the Martians in the novel. The extract focused on the narrator's first sighting of the tripod and the effects and consequences of the invader's actions. It proved to be an excellent springboard for some, with many candidates making the most of the rich opportunities for AO2 in the extract, including Wells' use of shocking and fearful verbs and adjectives, e.g. 'monstrous', 'smashing', 'violently' as well as the feeling of unstoppable power and strength in the extract through 'striding', 'ropes of steel', and so on. Many took the opportunity to reference the exclamatory and unbelieving tone of the opening lines and most commented on the death of the poor horse. Better candidates commented on Wells' linking of the ordinary (milking-stool) to the extra-ordinary sight of the tripod and also the contrasting natural and mechanical references.

Candidates often then went on to discuss the events and reactions to Martians in the wider novel, most commonly referencing the cylinder and the reactions of those caught up in the invasion Ogilvy, the curate, the Artilleryman, etc. Many mentioned the creatures' eventual demise from the common cold bacteria.

In terms of AO3, there was often an excellent understanding of the period in which the novel is set, in particular in terms of parallels with the British Empire and their use of advanced weapons in relation to the civilizations they conquered. There were considered accounts of science vs. religion and developed commentary on how the curate and the artilleryman represented the role of religion and the military in society.

## ***Pride and Prejudice***

*Pride and Prejudice* proved to be relatively popular, and was studied right across the ability range.

The question called on candidates to consider the presentation of prejudice in the novel. The extract was rich with detail, and allowed many candidates to pick up on the Bingley sisters' prejudice against Jane and Elizabeth and picked up on Elizabeth's courage and contrasting attitude to those at dinner. The use of dialogue, particularly Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley's exaggerated tone and language was often used by candidates to highlight the characters' jealousy and prejudice, with the best appreciating Austen's dry wit. Many then discussed Darcy's early opinions and prejudice towards Elizabeth and the Bennets (and vice-versa) as well as Lady Catherine's prejudice of everyone outside her social class.

The best answers linked this to structural features and turning points in the novel and how this adds to the presentation of prejudice with AO3 seamlessly woven in, often through comments on the economic standing of the characters in the novel such as Charlotte Lucas, Mr. Collins and the Bennets.

## ***Jane Eyre***

The question focused on turning points in Jane Eyre's life and whilst this inevitably led to some examples of narrative retelling (often in some detail) the majority discussed the presentation of these turning points in assured, confident and often original ways. As might be expected, there were some very able candidates studying this text and they clearly relished the opportunities offered by the novel.

The extract came from early in the novel and provided candidates with a springboard into the rest of their essay. Most, quite sensibly, dealt with it first and explored the circumstances in Jane's life that lead to her living with Mrs Reed and her children before discussing Jane's calm and measured tone in confronting Mrs Reed, the use of imperatives and questions in the passage; the stillness and danger of Mrs Reed and Jane's bravery in standing up to her. Many discussed the metaphor of "eye of ice"; (cross-referencing with similar use in other parts of the novel) and her sense of freedom and sense of change that Jane experiences in the final paragraph. AO3, in terms of Victorian expectations of women and children was also explored in relation to the extract. Candidates were very familiar with the novel and often went beyond the extract to reference Jane's other experiences at Gateshead Hall including the red room.

Knowledge of the rest of the book was impressive with regular discussion of Jane's time at Lowood and influence of Helen Burns, her arrival at Thornfield and first meeting with Mr. Rochester, discovery of Bertha, finding her cousins and St. John's proposal, her eventual reunion with the blinded Rochester and, of course, her eventual marriage. This was one occasion when candidates did not leave out the end of the novel ("Reader, I married him!") Most commented on Bronte's use of symbolism in naming her locations and in terms of the pathetic fallacy and there was a real sense of engagement. Occasionally the language analysis went too far, which was something that occurred across the paper.

AO3 was well integrated, with discussion of how the nineteenth century society's attitudes to gender, economic status and social class affect Jane. There were sensitive parallels between Jane's turning points and the real life situation of Charlotte Bronte and her family, including the effect of illness and disease, the treatment of children and the role of the governess in allowing a form of independence for women.

## ***The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

The question focused on the presentation of Mr. Hyde and most candidates were aided by the extract which featured Mr. Utterson's impressions of Mr. Hyde after meeting him for the first time. The extract provided a clear focus on Hyde's presentation and his effect on Utterson. Almost all candidates were able to engage with the character and support comments with direct reference to Hyde's animalistic characteristics such as 'snarled' and 'savage' and to move beyond the extract to Hyde's behaviour. Hyde's 'ape-like fury' and the manner in which he 'trampled calmly' on the little girl were both popular references in more straightforward responses. More confident candidates went on to discuss the fragmentation of the narrative structure, as well as Victorian respectability and the dark side of the duality of man through Utterson's point of view.

Most candidates seemed to have enjoyed this text and it was obvious that most had a secure knowledge of the text. There were many confident discussions of Hyde's character, with relevant and detailed supporting textual references. More able candidates discussed the perspective through which Hyde is viewed; and showed an appreciation of structure and points of view. There was also some consideration of symbolism, for example the two different doors and the contrasts between the areas in which the two characters lived. Sophisticated responses considered Jekyll's relationship with Hyde, how he is a part of Jekyll that has been repressed and included some discussion of the control that Hyde exerts over Jekyll. At the other end, there was occasional confusion between Jekyll and Hyde, particularly regarding who was the instigator of the suicide and the ending of the text. It may be that centres would benefit from a reminder to encourage candidates to cover the whole novel in their answers.

On the whole, the use of context was secure, relevant and accurate and at its best, well developed and sensitively applied. Many candidates seized the opportunity to discuss the expectations and hypocrisy of Victorian gentlemen; Darwin's Theory of Evolution; the conflict between science and religion; the Victorian fascination with physiognomy; and literary links to Gothic novels and 'shilling shockers'. Usually, these were well integrated into responses but there were inevitably lengthy discussions that wasted time that would have been better spent elsewhere. Weaker candidates (some who clearly only saw the stage play) still had some awareness of the social issues of the time through the simpler, more sensational elements of the story.

### **Characteristics of good Section B essay responses:**

- **Clear and sustained focus on the question asked**
- **Wide-ranging coverage of the extract, with relevant selection of short references to support points made**
- **The extract is used sensibly at a relevant point or points of the essay**
- **Reference to a range of relevant points across the wider text**
- **Critical probing of inferences, implicit meanings and subtext as well as more surface ideas**
- **Close analysis of how the language, techniques and imagery in the extract and wider text help to present the focus of the question**
- **Clear appreciation of how contextual factors influence characters and themes**
- **Suitable analytical style of writing**

### Ways in which performance could be improved:

- **Plan where coverage of the extract will be best placed in the essay**
- **More detailed coverage of the extract and wider text, including the beginning, middle and end**
- **More selection of detailed supporting references rather than general impressions**
- **Avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story**
- **More practice on probing subtext and interpretation**
- **Practise creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked**
- **More focused and integrated discussion of how contextual factors influence writers' characters, themes and ideas. Avoid contextual 'bolt ons'**
- **Avoid reference to plays and films when discussing prose texts**
- **Practise and develop an analytical style of essay writing**

### Section C questions

The two linked poems on this untiered paper, *Midwinter* and *Today*, were well received and the pairing was successful. They proved to be accessible for all with plenty of opportunities to stretch all abilities when discussing AO1 and AO2.

It is doubtful whether most candidates had, as advised, devoted an hour to this question, perhaps owing to the timing issues previously discussed in Section A. A number of candidates dealt relatively briefly with *Midwinter* in Question 3.1 in order to fully discuss the comparison in Question 3.2. Again, these are timing issues to be ironed out as teachers become more familiar with the specification. The poetry comparison question was often handled with sensitivity and assurance by candidates and examiners gave very high marks for thoughtful responses which engaged with the ideas, language and imagery in the poems. A grasp of the poets' main ideas and attitudes to the subject matter of the poems was noted by examiners in most responses, although for candidates willing to probe the subtext, particularly through the language and imagery used, the higher bands and marks were made available for examiners to award.

Candidates of all abilities are addressing pathetic fallacy, imagery, irony, dramatic irony, contrast, and so on in a sensible way with clear reference to their effects. However, there were numerous occasions when even quite able candidates sometimes resorted to rhyme counting, device spotting with either no conclusions about their function or some assertive claims and interpretations. A number of candidates seemed to start their analysis by looking for enjambment and counting lines rather than engaging with the ideas and meaning of the poems in terms of content and imagery. Clearly, centres need to train their candidates against this.

Juxtaposition was often used inaccurately and some candidates appear to believe that the two poems were written as a pair, with the poets comparing notes. In addition, a very small number of candidates linked the unseen poetry to the anthology poems of Component 1.

### Question 3.1

*Midwinter* was explored in every way and examiners had responses from candidates with the most basic understanding up to perceptive, sensitive and original responses. There was widespread understanding of the key ideas and themes of the poem with a good sense of the difficulties of winter and the hidden joys of spring. There were mixed reactions to the Davies' account of midwinter with some candidates finding it beautiful, others bleak and depressing and some angry that it didn't mention Christmas or snowmen in its description of December. Better candidates commented on the 'solstice' aspect of the poem and the notion of midwinter as a single day or time.

The repetitions were often picked out and often good points were made about their effects. Most linked the structure and rhyme to the repetitive nature of winter days, others felt that they suggested being trapped or confined within the season. A significant number of weaker candidates just counted out lines, listed rhyme and then moved on. Where candidates tackle structure they need to be strongly encouraged to link it to possible meaning. The repetition of 'No' was considered by candidates of all abilities; although this misled some candidates into believing the poem was entirely negative and there was absolutely 'no' hope. Indeed, many candidates saw only the "negative" tone of the poem but some impressed with their tackling of the "seeds of hope", unpacking that image with assurance before moving on to look at "trusting for the Spring". One candidate did spot that the poem was a villanelle and impressed because he/she went on to comment on how it worked and linked in with the pastoral subject matter.

There was sometimes a tendency to deal rather superficially with the poem in Question 3.1 before going on to concentrate more fully on it in Question 3.2. In terms of marks, this is not a good idea and candidates do need to remember to explore the first poem in detail in Question 3.1 and not leave the majority of discussion for Question 3.2.

There was a determination by some candidates to interpret *Midwinter* metaphorically as a poem about death or loss. This was often argued convincingly, though many of these candidates ignored sections of the poem that did not fit their interpretation, or tried to force them to fit. Less convincing were those who thought it was about a zombie apocalypse or an escape from prison. Obviously, centres should warn candidates against this type of 'over reading'.

Overall, *Midwinter* worked very well, perhaps because its themes and content were so familiar to candidates. Candidates found the poem accessible and were able to track through the poem with insight and relevance.

### **Question 3.2**

The pairing of *Midwinter* with *Today* gave the candidates plenty to discuss in terms of comparison and worked well across the entire ability range.

The poems provided rich and interesting discussions of the imagery, such as “silver hedges” and “the garden bursting” as well as the sense of release inherent in the second poem. The vocabulary and the imagery proved accessible to almost all candidates. A few candidates did misread ‘bursting with peonies’ and wrote with enthusiasm about beautiful ponies ‘bursting’ from their garden and dancing across the blue and white sky, however, this was very much the exception. Most candidates saw the poems as negative and positive, but better candidates were able to discuss the nuances of the “seeds of hope”, and “trusting for the Spring” and link to the sense of freedom of the second poem. Other frequent comparisons focused on the use of birds, senses and colour imagery between the poems. The paperweight inhabitants, along with the “larger dome” proved to be discriminators but even so, many candidates tackled these images to varying extents. Other responses were more detailed and contrasted the tone, structure, timescale, hope and freedom. Those that were most successful realised that *Midwinter* was dealing with one day, ‘the solstice of the year.’ As such, the poems had the same timescale, not a different timescale. Most candidates grasped the contrast between the stillness of *Midwinter* and the active verbs of *Today*, together with the contrast in tone and pace. Many candidates were able to comment meaningfully on how the enjambment aided the flow and excitement voiced in *Today* and the majority mentioned the significance of *Today*’s free style as opposed to the more organised form of *Midwinter*.

It is worth noting that the vast majority of responses took the integrated approach when answering Question 3.2. This is a valid approach that gives a good sense of overview and constant focus on comparison and linking, but for some candidates it led to a superficial treatment of *Today* and an imbalance of direct references that might have been avoided if the candidate had dealt with the second poem discretely.

#### **Characteristics of good poetry responses:**

- **A thorough examination of the first poem in Question 3.1**
- **A thorough examination of the second poem in Question 3.2, either as a discrete element or as part of the comparison**
- **Clear comparison of ideas, mood and some reference to how the poets use language**
- **Detailed selection from each poem and comments on these selections**
- **Candidates had adhered to the timing suggestions given in the paper and spent twice as long on the comparison element as on the initial question**

#### **Ways in which performance can be improved:**

- **Ensure that the first poem is adequately analysed in Question 3.1**
- **Ensure that the second poem is adequately analysed in depth in Question 3.2**
- **Practise linking a range of poems and poetic techniques, including imagery and figurative language, to meaning**
- **Avoid spotting techniques and patterns with no reference to meaning**
- **Develop the use of supporting references to support understanding of subtext**
- **Avoid ‘over reading’ of hidden meanings in the poems**
- **Experience in reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets**
- **Practise timings across the exam to ensure sufficient time is given to the poetry**



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