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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE English Language and Literature 6EL04

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6EL04: Presenting the World

Introduction

Unit 4 provides the opportunity for centres to choose their own topic and core text in any genre (fiction or non-fiction) to be supported by independent research and wide reading. The majority of centres chose to use as their starting point a traditional literary fiction text but some interesting non-fiction titles did appear in the wide reading lists.

The very best folders showed tremendous flair and originality, with stimulus texts used precisely as that. In some cases there was a thematic connection, in others there was an interesting generic connection. These were often supported by genuinely evaluative commentaries. Some candidates explored connections between their two tasks, perhaps writing a journalistic text in response to a specific situation in their fiction piece.

A number of themes were suggested in the Specification and a very popular option was 'The Impact of War on the Individual', which stimulated an immense variety of approaches and responses. 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' by Khaled Hosseini often featured as a core text here: some centres had taken up the challenge of offering diversity by using this text to give candidates the opportunity to choose their own individual theme e.g. war, the position of women, cross-cultural differences, the collision of cultures, family relationships.

A number of centres had given candidates carefully monitored free rein and did not specify an overall theme whereas others kept very firm control by giving all candidates centre set tasks.

The latter approach was, in general, less successful as candidates were not always able to follow their own interests or to write in the genres in which they felt most comfortable.

As far as possible the A2 coursework should allow candidates independence and they should be encouraged to study and research independently and make autonomous choices.

'The Kite Runner' was also a very popular core text and there was some heartfelt work on various forms of oppression, especially the treatment of women in the modern world. Many candidates had written from personal experiences and used family situations as the starting point for their writing, but the best were able to maintain an objective critical stance.

It is not the intention that centres should replicate topics and texts prescribed for Unit 2, even if they are not ones chosen by the centre originally, as the A2 coursework does need to show progression.

Choice of core texts

The initial choice of core texts and texts as style models is crucial in ensuring that candidates are provided with rich material and opportunities to develop their own writing. The very best candidates studied the texts in detail and then responded with creative tasks in their own personal voice.

Carefully chosen core texts allowed candidates to achieve at the highest level. Some could have been advised to use more sophisticated texts and others should have been cautioned against texts which were actually unsuitable e.g. ghost written biographies of celebrity sports stars, memoirs based on child abuse. Texts of this nature lack the multi-layered, literary qualities needed to inspire a variety of outcomes, and inevitably resulted in candidates producing two texts that were very similar in style and content.

Choice of tasks

All centres followed the Specification requirement to produce two creative texts supported by a commentary (although a few did produce two separate commentaries rather than the one integrated commentary required at A2).

Centres do need to be clear about the distinction between literary and non-fiction tasks. Many of the non-fiction submissions were effectively fiction e.g. fictionalised diaries, letters and autobiographies, newspaper articles written from a historical perspective, speeches designed to be delivered by historical figures. This confusion of genres did, in some cases, limit the achievement of candidates when they produced two very similar texts e.g. a first person narrative about WW1 plus fictionalised letters or diaries from the same period. The reading and research, which was usually very valuable, should be used to stimulate two very different outcomes on the same topic.

Exemplar 1

The following extract from a commentary explores the links between two tasks on the theme of 'The Impact of War on the Individual'.

My article is intended for a newspaper such as 'The Guardian', because this topic is ideal for a well educated readership with an interest in history and current issues. The main purpose is to make the reader question the reasons why we feel the way we do about war, leading to a deeper understanding of the effect of war on the individual.

The core text, Faulks' 'Birdsong' allowed me to explore how war effects different types of people in different ways, and the amount of loss experienced by Stephen influenced my decision to focus on the grief of losing someone you love in a war. Furthermore, the impact of war on the female characters in the novel such as Stephen's grand daughter Elizabeth, and the sweethearts of the soldiers (whose feelings we see through their letters) along with a 1916 war poem by Anna Gordon Keown, which looks at the feelings of a mother of a lost soldier, inspired me to look at war from a woman's perspective.

I wrote my fiction as a short story for a woman's magazine, because a female reader could connect and empathise with the female protagonist, and, unlike in 'Birdsong', I use the first person perspective to create a greater connection between protagonist and reader.

I feel that there is a strong link between the two pieces because the story allows us to look at one specific view of war and gives a greater understanding of ideas on the article.

Creative Tasks

It was a delight to read so many imaginative, innovative and well executed tasks. What characterised many of the folders was a real sense of energy and enthusiasm. Those candidates who had researched their topics in depth and had studied a number of different genres produced some rich, multi-layered writing and were at ease writing in distinctly different styles.

There was much evidence of expertise with generic conventions e.g. scripts with appropriate and convincing layout, but newspaper/magazine articles tended to have elaborate graphics and layout which candidates then spent time describing in the commentary, instead of concentrating on shaping these texts lexically and syntactically. In a real life situation journalists would present their copy without any editorial features. Candidates should be advised to avoid wasting time on complicated graphics as if they were producing media texts. Layout conventions for drama texts are appropriate and should be used as an integral part of the task.

A few candidates did submit poetry which was usually interesting and well executed but it was disappointing that commentaries did not explore specific qualities and techniques of the writing instead of noting general poetic literary features like metaphor.

Where text adaptations and transformations have been created the commentary should show how the recreative process highlights new or different interpretations of the text. The best discussions showed understanding of the relationship between genres e.g. how a dramatic text could offer a different perspective on aspects of a narrative.

Audience

All tasks do need a clearly specified audience and candidates should be aware of who they are writing for and the circumstances in which the audiences will receive their texts e.g. articles should have a type of publication in mind and fiction should have a defined readership rather than being written for the candidate's own pleasure.

Exemplar 2

*After reading *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, I became fascinated by the concept of exclusion from society. For my fiction I decided to focus on exclusion from the point of view of a teenager afflicted with Asperger's syndrome. In order to form this short story, I read *A Curious Case of a Dog in the Night* by Mark Haddon. I intended this short story to appear in a psychological magazine, raising awareness for people who are interested in the condition.*

Exemplar 3

Taking into consideration my involvement in the Debating Society, I made use of my experience of speech writing to devise my non-fiction piece. The speech has a possible audience of 16 and over created a dual purpose within the speech, creating its informative as well as its persuasive roles.

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Examiner Comments

Both of these commentaries have a clearly defined audience.

Exemplar 4

I recreated a first person narrative account in the form of a short story for my literary task. The target audience for this task is generally young, focusing on students in the majority. The lack of female presence within the short story may suggest scope for a wider male audience; however, my initial intention was to make a widely accessible, articulate recreation of war.

My non-fiction text is presented as a newspaper article, which I would envisage would be featured within 'The Times' or 'The Guardian'. The target audience for such an extract would be significantly older, with a strong focus on those pursuing a greater educative understanding of the topic.

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Examiner Comments

The candidate is discriminating in identifying the two different audiences.

Exemplar 5

My target audience for this piece is very wide, as anyone could read a newspaper article. However, if I was to narrow it down it would be for people who have an interest in the subject of war and evacuation and are literate but do not need to be highly intelligent.



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Examiner Comments

Some attempt to define audience but the candidate does seem to be vague about who exactly she/he is writing for.

The best commentaries showed evidence of a wide range of research and reflected on the process and most candidates coped well with the integration and comparison of two texts, showing a definite progression from AS. Although virtually every commentary was interesting and provided some insight into the rationale behind the choices, some did not focus sufficiently on specific literary and linguistic analysis: both the candidate's own creative tasks and the stimulus texts need to be analysed. Some candidates made no reference at all to the stylistic qualities of the stimulus texts and style models: the most efficient way to do this is to include some brief critical comment on the effectiveness of characteristic techniques in the stimulus texts while explaining how they had inspired the candidate's own writing.

Exemplar 6

*I chose to write my fiction piece in the first person because it is the most effective way of entering the mind set of someone completely. Plath's style of writing in *The Bell Jar* is very descriptive and sensually aware. I adopted this technique in my own writing and created a web of senses and feeling connected to everything that my protagonist experiences (e.g. 'It stung like fire' 'Face pressed against cold porcelain'). The style of writing I have used in my short story is poetic and uses literary devices such as alliteration 'a million moments', and similes and metaphors 'popped like a hot air balloon', 'lying with black holes for eyes'. There are many short sentences to demonstrate the constricting nature of the person's mind and the confusing way that it works. For example, 'Head is spinning. Eyes blurring. Tears falling' to show how quickly they will swap from one idea to the next and portray a confusing whirlwind of emotions and senses.*

The commentary does need to be evaluative in the sense of selecting and exploring the intention and effectiveness of certain interesting features of both the stimulus texts and the candidate's own writing, but is not intended to be *self*-evaluative with candidates adding a final paragraph assessing how well they feel they have performed and/or making observations about the difficulty of the tasks and hypothesising about what they might have achieved given more time.

Exemplar 7

*After reading *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, I became fascinated by the concept of exclusion from society. For my fiction I decided to focus on exclusion from the point of view of a teenager afflicted with Asperger's syndrome. In order to form this short story, I read *A Curious Case of a Dog in the Night* by Mark Haddon. I intended this short story to appear in a psychological magazine, raising awareness for people who are interested in the condition. For my non-fiction task I looked at the mass social exclusion and stigmatisation of an ethnic group, namely people of Muslim faith in Britain.....In my fiction piece, the protagonist of Mark Haddon's book inspired the creation of my character, Will. My analytical, detached style emulated the style in which Camus' novel is written. I have used the recurring motif of 'I wasn't sure what to say. So I didn't say anything', throughout the story, reminiscent of the recurring motif of 'I didn't say anything' in Alan Bennett's *A Chip in the Sugar*. This illustrated the oppression Will feels, being abnormal in a society where normality is key to being integrated and accepted by those around you. Will's handicap renders him incapable of lying, shown in that he considers the most common of idioms a lie 'Cats and dogs do not 'rain''. This is reminiscent of Meursault, the protagonist of *The Stranger*. It is Meursault's limited emotional capacity and his refusal to lie that result in the most extreme form of social exclusion: persecution and execution....I have deliberately employed very little emotive language in my story to reflect the world of the sufferer, which has its foundation rooted in logic and fact. I use many facts in my non-fiction piece to appeal to the rationality and logic of the reader. In my story I use many verbs from the semantic field of thought and logic: in the last paragraph, every sentence begins with 'I thought of...'highlighting the increasing sense of desperation and loneliness as the story unfolds.*

*Although the topic remains the same between the two pieces of coursework, there is a contrast in style, context and register. Where the fiction is a personal response to social exclusion the article focuses on the issue of integration of Muslims in the western world. The story is an insight into the thought processes of an Asperger's sufferer, whereas the non-fiction is a magazine article raising awareness about the prevalence of Islamophobia in modern society. A source of inspiration for my article was *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras, which is the portrayal of a young French girl growing up in Vietnam. The culture clash presented in this book inspired me to highlight the difficulties for young foreign nationals growing up in Britain.*



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Examiner Comments

The commentary selects significant features and is precise in analysing their effects and the influence of the stimulus texts. There is a real sense of engagement with the topic and the stimulus texts have been well assimilated and critically appreciated.

Exemplar 8

This piece is based on a monologue, a tragic state of mind. After reading 'Regeneration' and discussing war poetry such as 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and the glory of war. I found solace and honesty in the voices in the poems and tried to convey this in my own poem in italics. The protagonist is a hospitalised patient because of shell shock although he could be perceived as going through a loss of hope or a heavy depression; these traits were all common of soldiers in hospitals.

At first when I began writing the poem, I found the link to religion helpful so I used Latin in my poem 'Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt' meaning 'these are the tears of things, and our mortality cuts us to the heart'. This shows a lot of vulnerability in mind, how a man's emotions can effect everything in life. I related this to me, as being a fragile state of mind seems to draw on true emotion. Linking back to Bible references I liked the idea of the god and the devil 'have you noticed how the devil never speaks?' Reading up on Wilfred Owen I found this 'My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the pity' that is the inscription on his grave where all the great war poets diary, maybe writing down your thoughts is good therapy.



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Examiner Comments

Although the commentary is sensitive and thoughtful it tends to be self-reflective and anecdotal, lacking specific analysis of poetic techniques.



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Examiner Tip

The commentary should not be divided into sub-headings as this restricts the candidate's ability to produce a smoothly integrated discussion.

The best commentaries were concise, critical and very well written. Quotations were brief but supported by precise analysis and there was real evaluation of the extent to which they had been influenced by their wide reading.

Exemplar 9

Through my core text 'Birdsong', I became deeply engaged in Stephen Wraysford's experiences in World War One. In my fiction I adopt the persona of a young soldier writing in the first person, enabling the reader to empathise readily with a personal plight. Faulks's novel 'Charlotte Gray' influenced my fiction as I wanted to capture the struggle of an individual who plays a part when fighting an enemy in adverse circumstances. Although I did not choose to write in the form of a diary, I was aiming to replicate the effect of naturally engaging the reader in the narrator's thought processes.

Exemplar 10

When reading Louis De Berniere's 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' it was interesting how he managed to interchange between an emotional narrative and a consistent commentary of political events. This inspired me to give the reader factual information in a very emotive way. For example, I used the triadic structure of 'guns are fired, soldiers are killed and death looms' to describe the conditions faced. This links in with the metaphor 'retreating again in a deadly tango with the fiercest of partners' as the superlative 'fiercest' once again highlights the theme of unpredictability and the use of the 'tango' shows how war is a sequence of attacks upon the enemy.

Many centres had obviously expected a very high standard of presentation and the work was clearly signposted in terms of task, genre, audience and purpose. Citing the topic and core text and clearly labelling the creative tasks is immensely helpful to moderators and is an excellent practice to adopt.

Internal Moderation

Internal moderation was in general thorough and accurate, carefully referencing the Assessment Objectives, although there was a tendency to over-reward the highest achieving folders. This over generosity was far less noticeable in middle and lower band folders where the mark scheme was usually applied more rigorously. When AO1 was over-rewarded it was for scripts that had been carelessly proof-read. Generally AO4 was more accurately awarded by centres although some fancy layouts for articles did receive high marks for the attractive pictures rather than the quality of the writing.

Some commentaries which were purely observational had been highly rewarded and a number of folders received maximum AO1 marks despite a complete absence of paragraphing. Font sizes in a few cases were far too small. Candidates should be encouraged to pay attention to the final presentation and readability of their work.

Annotation

Moderators welcomed folders which provided succinct focused comments on each task and gave a profile of the achievement of the individual candidate and a clear allocation of marks across the three tasks. It is acceptable to make marginal annotations on the work itself to draw attention to particular aspects but ticking and correcting the actual work of the candidate must be avoided as in some cases the plethora of ticks and comments rendered the original work almost unreadable.

The best centre marking was not limited to reduplicating extracts from the band descriptors but also acknowledged the strengths and areas for improvement in the candidate's work.

Bibliographies

Bibliographies are a requirement and an essential feature of this unit as they provide documentary evidence of the research undertaken as well as adopting a professional approach in accurately citing sources. Many bibliographies were outstanding and their influence was evident in the written work.

However, it was disappointing when candidates included brief, carelessly presented reading lists which in many cases did not do justice to the careful preparation, or, in the case of some low achieving folders, indicated that almost no preparatory reading had been involved.

Some candidates seemed only to have read their examination texts and listed these in the bibliography. A passing reference to 'All My Sons' is appropriate for War topics as long as there are plenty of other stimulus texts.

Guidance on producing a scholarly bibliography is provided in the 'Getting Started' booklet which is issued to all centres.

Some centres had encouraged candidates to extend the discussion of the influence of the stimulus texts into the bibliography to avoid limitations on the word count in the commentary. This is not, of course, the purpose of the bibliography which is there for reference purposes and not to be assessed.

Example of an exemplary bibliography on the topic of War:

Bibliography

Novels

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 - <http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/gettkidz/letters.htm>

List of Wars and Disasters by Death Toll - <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/>
 - <http://fact-archive.com/encyclopedia/>

Medieval War - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8160081.stm>
 - <http://www.medieval-castle-siege-weapons.com/>
 - <http://historymedren.about.com/od/battlesandwars/>

War Diaries - <http://www.culpitt-war-diary.org.uk/>
 - <http://www.schoolshistory.org.uk/worldwartwo/documents/>

Women's battle for the vote - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/53819.stm>

WW2 memories, written by the public - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar>

Word count

Candidates should provide a word count at the foot of each page with a cumulative word count at the end of each task. The total word count must be recorded on the cover sheet.

A number of candidates did exceed the word count with no reference to this in either the annotations or the awarding of marks. As stated in the specification, moderators are required to discontinue marking once the prescribed word limit has been reached. The candidate is therefore disadvantaged if they exceed the word limit as the extra words will not be considered in the assessment.

It was, however, pleasing that the majority of centres did understand the need for careful editing and revising, thus providing candidates with specific skills rather than allowing self indulgent flouting of word limits.

Administration Issues

Some coursework samples arrived later than the official deadline of May 15th 2010.

Too many cover sheets were incomplete e.g., no candidate numbers, word counts, signatures or even any indication of marks.

There were also discrepancies between the marks on individual cover sheets and those on the Optems.

Some packaging was careless or awkward. It would be very helpful if folders could be presented with treasury tags and not placed in plastic wallets. Working notebooks, drafts and lengthy appendices should not be included with the coursework sample. The working notebook is intended to be a private document for candidates to use in their preparation and is not to be assessed.

Conclusion

This first submission of A2 coursework has been very successful. The majority of work was a pleasure to read, with much that was of a professional standard. Many of the creative texts were engaging, thoughtful, moving and inspirational. Teachers should be congratulated on their careful preparation and commitment to the ethos of the unit and candidates for their enthusiasm, their ability to execute challenging tasks with maturity, and for the energetic and vibrant nature of much of their writing.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	a*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw boundary mark	80	75	70	62	54	47	40	33	0
Uniform boundary mark	80	72	64	56	48	40	32	24	0

a* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade.

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