

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE
in English Language and Literature
Unit 4 (6EL04/01)

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Overview

There were many examples of creative, confident and ambitious work, especially in literary writing, some of which was professional in quality.

The most productive methods of approach for centres are either to give students the freedom to make their own choices of subject and genre with advice and careful direction, or to select a theme and core text which offer a wide range of diverse opportunities for both literary and non-fiction writing e.g., 'The Dilemma of Duty', 'Crossing Boundaries', or themes relating to War.

The majority of folders showed evidence of the influence of wide reading and there were many interesting and impressive bibliographies, although there were some submissions where the choices for wide reading seemed quite random with little evidence that the student knew many of the texts cited. A few relied almost entirely on film and internet searches.

The choice of a suitable core text is crucial in giving students sufficient opportunity to display their talents.

Themes and core texts

The most popular text was 'The Kite Runner', often paired with 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'. The use of these texts as a starting point was generally successful and inspired students to focus on a variety of topics, e.g.: the dilemma of duty, aspects of war, arranged marriages and gender issues.

'The Motorcycle Diaries' and 'The Great Gatsby' were both successful in prompting effective writing around the themes of Image and identity and, in the case of 'The Great Gatsby', the failure of the American Dream and obsession with status and acquisition of material wealth.

Students who chose the text of 'The Great Gatsby' and 'The Road' often displayed excellent assimilation of the writer's style.

Exemplar 1

Conclusion of a short story inspired by 'The Great Gatsby' with the theme of the failure of the American Dream.

December 3rd 1929

John Walters Jr. met his father for the first time when he was already forty-seven minutes old; the patriarchal absentee in question, John Walters Sr., was a cantankerous banker with little time for his wife of six years and, having become engrossed in his work on the dismal and pallid eighteenth day of February, 1906, he had found himself overstaying his welcome at work by a more than usual thirty-one minutes. His son weighed in at a healthy six pound and eight ounces though, as with anything achieved by a member of that small and soulless family, nothing impressed him, regardless of its striving.

Aged five years and seven months, John Walters Jr. developed a flair for mathematics, finishing second in a national competition, the prize-giving for which John Walters Sr. was absent.

Twelve years later, at Princeton, John Walters Jr. struggled, not for the first time (but most certainly with a superlative agony, measurable on the Hamilton scale), to embrace the lyrical and emotional concepts of love and affection; he doted to no avail on a plucky young fox named Eliza, whose innovative aesthetic constructs predated the Abstract Expressionist phase of modern fine art by three and a half decades. Needless to say, his loneliness was frankly permanent and he wished, often for three consecutive hours, that the adjective best suited to his supposed passions was 'torrid', save for the fact that he was incapable of mustering anything that's basis was not strictly formulaic.

After forging a lone and laborious course to the lifeless numerical minefield of the stock market, John Walters Jr. is now employed by the New York stock exchange where he has witnessed, in recent months, a mammoth manifestation of his integral disappointments and daemons, befalling as they do, not just himself, but a rather more significant range of statistical entities.

Where most despair at the disintegration of their life's work and savings, it is in a final bid for feeling that one-hundred and fifty-seven pound John Walters Jr. swings twenty and a half inches from the floorboards, a fourteen inch rope length around his throat, moments from his Dante denouement with his efflux seeping into the floorboards.

Moderator's Comment:

An ambitious approach which demonstrates a secure knowledge of genre conventions.

Dystopia is an ever popular theme, with previous Moderator's Reports indicating the need to show progression from AS. This year demonstrated an increase in more mature, well crafted and inspirational work on this theme.

Effective core texts were 'Never Let Me Go', 'The Road', 'The Handmaid's Tale', 'Oryx and Crake' and '1984'. This theme lead to some wonderful writing which clearly appealed to students' imagination and provided an accessible structure with familiar conventions that allowed for some powerful literary crafting.

'One hundred and one Poems Against War' was an excellent starting point for war-related themes covering a variety of periods and areas of the world.

Other topics included Outsiders, PTSD, Secrets and Lies, The Human Experience and Celebration, as well as a growing number of topics relating to depression, domestic violence, mental illness and alienation.

Exemplar 2:

Extract from a short story exploring the photographic memories and isolation of a captive war photographer.

In the early days I remembered the hell-holes I had been to, the war worn people my camera had shot. June 1994, Rwanda. Sweat crept through my pores, itching my ever-growing beard. 1995, Sierra Leone. Embedded with the US marines, I could remember every photo. Every frame. 2004, Iraq. I could still hear the gunfire click of my camera's semi-automatic shutter speed. Over time my photo reel began to blur. I wasn't sure if it was the constant dehydration or malnutrition. Maybe that was when I started to lose it-I blocked out the pain of my past photos.

But I never forgot my camera. I hadn't held my CanonEOS-1D X digital for two years. With my past work fading, I found solace in my mental snapshots. During my time in captivity I took hundreds of visual snapshots. A delicate spider would form a beautifully intricate web. I would still hear the warm fizzing of my imaginary flash getting ready. The elaborate shuffle of the shutter. And the gentle click as I saved another snapshot to my mental scrapbook. These snapshots were all I had left. I had no one back home. If I had had a family fighting for my release, I wouldn't have been there. My scrapbook was littered with snippets of knowledge from my time as a their hostage but to be honest if you'd been watching the news back home, you'd probably have known more about me than I did. They put the BBC World Service on occasionally. The story was always the same.

'The freelance war photographer, Stephen Marlow, has been missing for two years. It is believed that he was kidnapped while photographing Syrian refugees, who were under fire from insurgents. The revived appeal for Stephen's release comes after videos of the beheadings of the journalists, James Foley and Steven Sotloff and the aid worker Alan Henning have appeared on the internet. These executions were carried out by Jihadi John, a member of the terrorist cell, nicknamed the Beatles by the prisoners due to their British accents. All the videos show their victims in orange jump suits....'

Light....dazzling brightness. The door's slider must have been opened. Nothing was in focus. My lens frantically adjusted, but a patchy white glare obscured my view. Too much exposure.

A familiar voice cut through the air. Ringo. A voice that I craved. A voice that meant food. A voice that meant company.

'It's beans. Make sure you catch them this time'.

Moderator's comment:

A very sensitive and imaginative handling of the situation. The story shows evidence of research and the candidate has adopted an original approach which genuinely engages the reader.

Exemplar 3:

Extract from the commentary to accompany the war photographer's story.

My literary piece focuses on a contemporary and desperate form of isolation-that of an IS captive. As in my non-fiction my aim was to evoke sympathy from the reader and to illustrate the desperation of my protagonist.

My fiction piece, however, was set in an environment which readers know far less about, meaning I employed a more surreal writing style. As in my article, I used the theme of hostile surroundings, with personification of the war photographer's surroundings (Tentacles of slithering light), echoing his hostile environment and isolation. The piece was written in the first person to enhance the sense of isolation. The frequent use of first person possessive pronoun 'my' furthered this and underlined the protagonist's attempts to be protective over whatever he can control (my floor, my cell).

There is juxtaposition between this harsh description of his cell and the kindness of the 'Ringo' captor. Ringo's limited dialogue, generic dialect and the lack of description of his appearance created an enigmatic character. For example in 'It's beans. Make sure you catch them this time', the temporal phrase suggesting a mysterious history between prisoner and captor. I took this decision, having read numerous accounts of ex-captives, many of whom experienced 'Stockholm Syndrome'.

The construction of the war photographer's history was developed through the semantic field of photography such as 'darkroom' and 'lens', which foreshadowed his mental struggles caused by the loss of his camera. To illustrate the protagonist's painful past, I took inspiration from Carol Ann Duffy's 'War Photographer' where the fragmented sentences 'June 1994, Rwanda', highlighted the snapshot-like nature of the protagonist's mind and voice, while also echoing a gun- shot like rhythm. His memory of this is highlighted by the sibilant 'semi-automatic shutter speed' with 'semi-automatic' being from the semantic field of guns, further aligning the photographer with war. However the character's current situation is far more surreal, with the descriptions of his 'mental camera' and sensory images (elaborate shuffle of the shutter), foreshadowing the protagonist's inability to distinguish reality from the imaginary. These figurative descriptions underline how the protagonist uses his imaginary camera to escape the cruel reality of his entrapment, therefore furthering his sense of desolation and loneliness.

Ultimately the protagonist is left isolated, with his gradually more questionable sanity similar to Marlow (the protagonist's namesake) in 'Heart of Darkness'.

Moderator's comment:

Clear and analytical with a sustained focus on the language used to create the environment of the narrative. Confident and controlled. Evidence of careful research.

Tasks

Literary tasks: these were predominantly short stories, openings of novels, alternative scenes and chapters from a stimulus text, short plays and blogs. (Blogs could actually feature as either fiction or non-fiction depending on whether it was a personal blog or using a fictionalised persona).

Exemplar 4

Edited extract from a short story with the theme of Incarceration, inspired by 'The Book Thief'.

A Sea-green Pagoda Parasol

I don't particularly enjoy going against convention, but I am not one for drama and climax. It's simply in my nature to keep certain things clear, especially related to life.

And death, of course.

Rustom Dalal was cycling to the shop to purchase Kwaliti Family Pack ice cream for his nephews in celebration for the third wedding anniversary. He managed to get the last strawberry one. Whilst he was cycling back home, a lorry hit him, like they do And he died.

I sat in the corner, next to Xerxes, a little awkwardly positioned for an anniversary dinner (I was a little ahead of schedule so thought I should have a small break before my next appointment). I found the six year old rather inconsiderate; he didn't offer me any misri, in fact he displayed the cube on his red tongue, 'Zarir, dekh!'

To take the exhibit a notch higher, the boy rolled it from one side of his tongue to the other, whilst his brother mirrored the motion.

'I want one also Aunty! Please?'

Dina picked another sugar crystal from the ceremonial tray and popped it into her younger nephew's mouth; the smoky flavour of incense had diffused into the misty box that Zarir sucked.

I asked for one too, but Dina didn't hear me. It's funny really, when I try to play the nice guy, no one is interested.....

The child's brain is infinite but adults, well, they can only hold the string of conversation for so long before it begins to unwind. When the string began to unwind on that anniversary dinner, Rustom was quick to wind it up again, with the Kwaliti Family Pack.

'In case they don't have strawberry, which one-chocolate or vanilla?' I don't like ice cream but the boys were shouting their choices with much enthusiasm.

Xerxes-Chocolate

Zarir-Lanilla

The joke was exhausted within thirty-nine seconds.

Like all the excess dye is squeezed from a fabric.

He'd been waiting for this chance, so Nusswan licked his index finger clean of the excess pulao-dal, and began. 'But what about you two, Rustom? Time to start a family, I think. Three years is long enough for a holiday'.

I saw a short exchange of expression between Dina and Rustom. I am yet to decipher how exactly humans do that –say so much without saying anything at all. And, of course, put up with annoying relatives.

There was a measured silence, followed by a 'full-stop' smile put on by Rustom, and as he opened the door to leave, his brother-in-law tried one more time.

'Shall I give you company?'

Rustom, now irked by Nusswan's attempts to offer family planning advice, denied the offer. I saw hurt in Nusswan for a change, his face looked like a paper crumpled for disposal.

But Rustom straightened the creases. 'Alone I can go on my cycle, return in ten minutes'.

We know it will take him longer.

Moderator's comment: Good creation of voice and characterisation. Realistic dialogue and mature in handling of familial themes. Use of dialect lexis adds verisimilitude.

Non-fiction tasks: the most popular were articles and here there was often a problem as many students referred to 'editorials' without any real concept of what constituted an editorial. Some cited a specific publication (often 'The Guardian') although the style did not reflect that of the named publication and many students simply produced an all-purpose article, often demonstrating range and depth of research but lacking a clear audience. It is important that students know who they are writing for and what the context will be.

There were some articles based on investigative reporting which were very well crafted and effective but tended to include invented interviews (e.g., an interview with a soldier in Afghanistan). Students no doubt think this will aid credibility but in fact means that part of the article is effectively fictionalised. One of the most effective articles was intended for the 'New Musical Express' where the student had a very clear sense of audience and purpose and was familiar with the stylistic features and subject specific lexis.

Exemplar 5

Extract from an article for New Musical Express with the theme of the failure of the American Dream.

Today, music is an art form that's pitched not against the injustice of war and the failure of capitalist democracy but a rather more lethal over-indulgence of ideology-patriotism has become anthemic and sentiment is all but a trapping of aged contemplation to the predominantly US teenage music receivership. On top of these horrendous backward steps for the musical mainstream, American stars seek now to defile their nation with inappropriate actions on the world stage. Miley Cyrus made headlines earlier this year for soft-pornographic live shows that were totally inappropriate for her juvenile demographic and at insane odds with her cultured choice of cover performances (The Smiths, Bob Dylan, Fleetwood Mac). Similarly, Taylor Swift has, with the release of 1989 this autumn, well and truly betrayed her innocent country roots and taken up the corrupt mantle of provocative pelvic performance and high thigh exposure. And as for Ms Gomez? Well, her synth-pop integrity's doing better since the grotesquely glitzy days of Hannah Montana, but lest we forget the prepubescent darling star's sneaking sheepishly in and out of Justin Bieber's trailer a few years back....mmmmm-Not that any of this is very new of course: Britney Spears transformed from cutesy to anything-but in an incredibly short period of time from the release of hit single One More Time at the turn of the century to a total head-shave episode in 2007.

It's an ugly mess. But it's also an opportunity for the stark realisation-that America's beloved dream continues to die today-just not in the same way.

Moderator's comment:

An original choice of theme. Article is well suited to the designated publication. Writer naturally assumes audience prior knowledge and makes clever use of satire.

Other non-fiction tasks included eulogies, blogs, biographies, reviews, the rise of social media, artificial intelligence, global warming and obituaries. It is advised that students avoid obituaries of celebrities or long-dead politicians as they are unlikely to discover any new angles of investigation.

Eulogy was also not a particularly helpful genre with most being under-researched, short, and doubtful as to audience. There was a surprising increase in speeches written for a specific occasion in the student's own life such as a wedding speech or for a family anniversary. These speeches were presented as non-fiction but there are obvious disadvantages in terms of limited opportunities to carry out research and to forge strong links with a core text.

'Once in a house on Fire' was another popular text choice this year (like 'The Kite Runner' it is a suggested text in the specification) but, despite the opportunities offered by the connected theme of 'A Personal Moment', it unfortunately led to some rather unconvincing writing and confusion between literary and non-fiction genres.

Difficulties relating to assessment

In some centres there is still some confusion between literary and non-fiction tasks with the tendency to assume that if the material is factual then the task must be non-fiction but this is not the case if the task is effectively fictionalised e.g., an account of life in Syria from the perspective of a British soldier. The research had clearly been carried but the task itself would have been suitable for a fiction submission.

Some students produced tv scripts or documentaries and spent time on details of camera angles, visuals and even commercial breaks, thereby reducing time spent on the actual voice-over. These are obvious conventions of the media but their nature as 'language' in terms of the spoken or written word make them difficult to assess.

Commentaries

Certain aspects of commentary writing have shown a definite improvement i.e., sustained efforts to integrate valid references to wide reading, clear explanations of rationale for choices made and effective exploration of structural features. Less apparent is the ability to include a sound, sustained and meaningful analysis of linguistic and literary features. Some very powerful, well crafted and inspirational writing was often not supported by a commentary of the same calibre.

Exemplar 5:

Extract from a commentary with the theme of conflict

In my non-fiction piece I use present tense active verbs such as 'exploiting' and 'fighting'. This was inspired by Fergal Keane's 'The Cult of Death' where he used 'gasping' and 'staggering' to convey to the reader that the actions are current and on-going, thereby intensifying the description. At the end of my non-fiction piece I use the future tense 'the lengths that IS will go to' and future temporal deixis, 'by 2017', to suggest that Islamic State will continue to act in this way. My use of detail and facts, inspired by John Pilger's article 'Video Nasties', adds credibility and context for the reader. Use of past dates as in 'Tension can be traced back to 1918', provides historical background and a wider perspective to today's terrorism. As it is also a piece about social media I have assumed a certain amount of prior knowledge by the reader, enabling the inclusion of terminology such as 'instagram' and 'tweets'.

A variety of devices are used to captivate the reader such as power of threes. I also use antithetic parallelism to emphasise the main point of my article 'America certainly has the physical strength but if you win people's minds you don't need to use bombs'. The adverb 'certainly' adds emphasis.

My fiction piece illustrates how terrorists attract people to their ideology through exploitation of human vulnerability. For example, I appeal directly to pathos when speaking of their father's death, 'your eyes are glistening with tears'. This relates to later in the story when the protagonist meets the manipulative Anjem Choudray, who becomes a father figure. This is shown through symbolism of security, 'you'll be eternally safe with us and Allah'.

The use of the pronoun 'us' gives the protagonist a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the term of endearment, 'my son', conveys a father-like sentiment. The use of the verb 'confronted' in the phrase 'Clicking on our Facebook page I was confronted with a video', conveys the all-pervading and almost inescapable nature of modern social media. The two brothers are deliberately unnamed, implying that a gradual belief in extremism could happen to anyone.

Moderator's Comment:

A thoughtful commentary which synthesises the analysis of both pieces of original writing. There is substantial evidence of wider reading and research and discriminating selection of linguistic and literary features for comment.

Exemplar 6:

Extract from a commentary on two pieces connected by the theme of the American Dream.

For my non-fiction task I chose an article written for NME magazine, an institutional British music publication. My short story is aimed at an educated readership, acquainted with modernist literary techniques and with the concept

of the American Dream, which I was inspired to explore after reading Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby'. My article is intended to be rhetorical and persuasive, like reviews and features from NME that I studied previously. Studying 20th century contemporary music provided an opportunity for discussing the effect of the American Dream on pop culture.....

My fiction piece is a non-linear narrative whose post-modern style gave my writing a contemporary context. The various narratives each conveyed themes of disappointment, failure and misjudgement through manipulation of language. I was influenced by Joyce's modernist short story collection 'The Dubliners' and 'Cloud Atlas' by David Mitchell, whose numerous episodes are set in multiple time frames.....

The primary parallel between my fiction and non-fiction pieces is the concept of 'the chagrin epidemic' (a metaphor in one piece, the title of the other). The word epidemic has connotations of disease and sickness. I have personified the abstract concept of the dying American Dream.

I have used features of spoken and written language that present the Dream's death as a slow-burning inevitability that is integral to, or deeply ingrained in, people. One such example is the use of internal rhyme, which connotes to music (in the case of my article, figuratively as well as literally)-'Cobain, in pain and ashamed'. This is rhythmic phonetically and has a 'singsong' quality whose naive childish sound is juxtaposed with the topic; a consistently disappointing American lifestyle. Repetition of sounds is also symbolic of this disappointment as persistent: in my story 'the swinging picks make him sick' demonstrates the negative effect on characters of this discontentedness. This rhythmic element was informed by my study of music for the article, specifically the lyrics of Springsteen and Dylan which concern blue-collar individuals experiencing downturn.

Moderator's comment: The commentary has a very strong sense of audience and purpose. Style models have been carefully studied and used with discrimination. Connections between the literary and non-fiction tasks are well integrated.

Exemplar 7:

Extract from a commentary with the theme of Conflict

Conflict is a central theme in both of my pieces. In my fiction piece 'Brothers' the narrator experiences inner conflict between his new, radical beliefs and the realisation that he may have been brainwashed. I was also inspired to include sibling conflict. Anne Frank's Diary presents real-life sibling conflict and 'Much Ado About Nothing' shows how sibling rivalry can be used to entertain. This relationship is portrayed in my opening by the semantic field of childhood 'we grew up in the same house, with the same parents, in the same way'....

Inspired by my core text, Mohsin Hamid's novel 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist', I use a domestic setting to describe a character's journey into terrorism. In my non-fiction piece I chose to put this into a global and political context, illustrating how terrorists recruit people through the use of social media...

I have tried to emulate the structure of 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' in my fiction piece. The novel begins in medias res and present tense which makes the reader feel they are watching the story unfold in real time. Similarly I chose to open with a rhetorical question to involve the reader. My core text also inspired the dramatic monologue and frame narrative structure as it adds depth and intrigue. Like Hamid, I have used 'Well, the answer to that question requires a story' to introduce a new section of the narrative. It creates a smooth, effective transition, drawing the reader in.

The structure of my non-fiction piece was inspired by Peter Beaumont's Guardian article 'Should we bring our troops home?' It is logical and less personal than many other articles. I attempted to be factual and objective through the inclusion of counter-argument.

My fiction piece conveys how an individual can be drawn into terrorism. This is shown through the lexical choices of 'inadequacy', 'out-of-placeness' and 'vulnerability' to represent individual weakness. The metaphor of people being 'prey' is continued in my non-fiction piece. My article explores how people can be manipulated en masse via use of social media. This is emphasised by the concept of 'psychological warfare' as a simile for the dramatic impact terrorist mass manipulation has on the world.

Moderator's comment:

A clear statement of rationale and succinct exploration of the influence of the core text. Methodology is explained and there is substantial evidence of research and use of style models.

Internal moderation

Marking was generally consistent and accurate with excellent use of annotation and summative comments. There was much evidence of rigorous internal moderation and comments which gave careful focus to each Assessment Objective in the summative comments for each piece were particularly helpful for external moderators.

Internal moderators seem reluctant to identify potential flaws or weaknesses in a student's submission, with some making statements that do not accurately describe the work in question. Some moderators do in fact acknowledge technical inaccuracies, loss of coherence and misuse of terminology while awarding full marks.

As this is coursework at A2 level it is expected that students spend appropriate time on revising and proof-reading if they aspire to the highest marks.

Despite the repetition of this point every year there are still centres where students are allowed to spend time on elaborate graphics for their non-fiction tasks eg, layout features, writing in columns, graphs and coloured pictures which are then explored in the commentaries as 'conventions' of that genre.

Unfortunately these are not legitimate aspects for comment as they are superficial elements and demonstrate the ability to use technology rather than to write creatively and accurately.

There were, however, some impressive commentaries which were consistently well informed, used terminology accurately and with discrimination and integrated analysis of both tasks.

Conclusion

Much of the work this year was well crafted, absorbing and, at times, genuinely exciting or persuasive. Moderators reported that the majority of submissions were a pleasure to read.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

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

