

# English Language & Literature

Advanced GCE A2 7829

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3829

## Report on the Units

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**January 2009**

**3829/7829/MS/R/09J**

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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## **2714 Linking Language and Literature**

### **General Comments**

Candidates produced some solid and focused work supported by, in general, apposite use of brief embedded quotations. There was proficient addressing of the Assessment Objectives at the top of the range but perhaps less engagement with AO5 in particular at the lower end of the range. There was little rubric infringement and time management was satisfactory. Occasionally, there was some imbalance in the amount of time and space dedicated to one of the two passages, creating a rather uneven outcome in some instances. The question seemed to offer a clear range of differentiation amongst the candidates.

### **Comments on Individual Questions**

Answers at the top of the range explored the first passage adroitly, synthesising relevant linguistic and literary terminology with precise comments on their effects. The differing attitudes of Sandy and Miss Brodie, combined with the variance in their registers, were analysed with skill; the issue of agenda control was commented on with insight and awareness. Similarly, the use and significance of the authorial voice and the employment of paralanguage were carefully noted. The sense of desperation and the indifference of the former student were traced effectively. Less secure answers tended to use the passage as a springboard for a more generalised approach; they tended to identify features without quite engaging with the actual material itself in more specific terms. Issues such as punctuation and graphology were described in detail but matters of attitudes and values seemed to be relegated to minimal comment; hence the actual nature and approaches of the protagonists were not fully assessed in depth.

The second passage was commented on with different levels of success. Answers at the lower end of the range again tended to use the material as a way of identifying fairly predictable features such as fillers and stress, pauses and prosodics, offering little analysis of their effects. AO5 tended to be missed too. More successful answers wove such terminology into satisfactory assessments of the possible interpretations of the interviewee's attitudes and values, exploring a possible sense of pride, and even arrogance as suggested by some candidates. The apparent hesitation of the interviewer was explored with insight. Such answers also drew focused parallels between the two passages, comparing the tactics and methods employed by the different speakers, the attitudes and values they seemed to display.

## 2715 Language in Literature: Poetry and Prose

### General Comments

Although this was the last January session of the old specification, some responses managed to display encouraging signs of freshness and originality. Examiners found no evidence of rubric infringement or poor time management. However, the standards of organisation and clarity of communication (AO1) in a number of answers were very weak: candidates with an insecure understanding of text and task were struggling to express even the most basic points.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Q 1 CHAUCER: The Nun's Priest's Tale

The question focus was ways in which story-telling is made more dramatic. This was often by-passed, and a more general-purpose (prepared) answer substituted, one which touched on the diction / sentence structure / spoken language elements of the bullet-prompt wording but missed good material in the passage. The mark-scheme details some aspects which are worthy of exploration.

#### Q 2 CHAUCER: The Miller's Tale

A typical answer picked up Absolon's changing emotions (the second bullet-prompt) and traced their development throughout the text (AO4) and in the passage (AO3i and AO5). This proved to be a largely successful method of answering the question about future developments, but only the more sophisticated responses made genuinely helpful choices of comparative (AO4) passage.

#### Q 3 ROBERT FROST: Selected Poems

As has been the case in a number of sessions, candidates seemed much more comfortable in their AO4 comparisons than in dealing with the poem on the paper. The question-focus, work and rural life, should have presented few problems, and candidates had clearly considered this aspect of Frost's writing. Encouragingly, there was less recourse to biographical speculation than in some previous sessions; but still candidates struggled to adapt what they had been taught about Mowing to the specific demands of the question set.

#### Q 4 WENDY COPE: Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis

There were some unconvincing and erroneous readings of the set poems. Better answers commented on the impact of aspects of structure, such as the single-line sentences *There he is, happy, and I am unborn and Books lie open on the carpet.* However, candidates failed to read carefully, and asserted (for example) that *At 3am* was about domestic violence, or that Cope's father in the first poem was an agricultural worker harvesting apples into bags.

#### Q 5 EMILY BRONTE: Wuthering Heights

Candidates generally engage with the relationship between Heathcliff and Cathy. Here they were invited to explore how Bronte suggested distinctive personalities, starting with the exchange in which Heathcliff confronts Cathy with the crosses he has recorded on the almanac for evenings she has spent with the Lintons.

The larger movements of the exchanges were generally understood, but candidates struggle accurately to discern and articulate subtler shades of meaning (AO3i and AO5). such as what Bronte suggests by having Cathy say: "Oh, but Joseph will tell ... you'd better go!"

AO4 comparative passages were selected from many places in the novel, better candidates seeing that the distinctive personalities need not necessarily be those of the two central characters..

**Q 6** MARY SHELLEY: Frankenstein

Candidates were on familiar territory with Shelley's presentation of the Creature's feelings. Some tended to re-visit the terms of questions from earlier sessions, and to focus on how the reader's sympathies are evoked. Comments on diction have tended to be over-general, with candidates identifying broad trends of positive or negative lexis. The formulation "Shelley uses words such as ... " usually signals at best a Band 4 level of response.

Better candidates homed in on syntactical or lexical patterns characteristic of the Creature's utterance, noticing for example how the Creature is acted upon by both the natural and the man-made: "somewhat surprised me ... engaged my admiration ... allured my appetite ... ".

**Q 7** RODDY DOYLE: Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

The opening words of the passage led most candidates into a relevant response. As always, extravagant claims were made for the effects of pronoun use, but better answers revealed an appreciation that Paddy's view of himself as an individual and as a member of a group depended on more than just whether he said I or we. Some shrewd readers saw that his family was a group too, and that fruitful AO4 comparison could be made between how Paddy functioned with his friends and how he was with Ma, Da and Sinbad.

**Q 8** IAN McEWAN: The Child in Time

The second bullet-prompt – irony – provided a key for many candidates in discussing McEwan's methods in presenting the world of politics. However, although most could identify examples of diction and sentence structure which functioned ironically, very few had the AO1/AO3i skills necessary to explore how McEwan's language worked to this effect. The mark-scheme suggests possible avenues of exploration.

## **2716 Styles of Writing**

### **General Comments**

As might be expected with a legacy specification, there were only a very small number of entries in this session.

Centres are very familiar with the requirements of the unit, so there were few problems with appropriate assignments, though some were not quite challenging enough for candidates hoping for high grades. Even in the dying moments of the specification, however, some candidates tried to pass off an imagined transcript as a non-literary piece, despite remarks that this is not acceptable in previous reports to centres. Most candidates demonstrated that they could write competently in a variety of forms, and that they were capable of reflecting upon what they had done by using terminology gained from their study of language and literature. Much of the work was a pleasure to read.

The marking was usually exemplary. Work was annotated with close reference to the Assessment Objectives, and summary comments often reflected the band descriptors in the specification. This, of course, led to a high degree of accuracy in the marking, though some centres were pushing at the edges of tolerance.

## 2717 Language in Literature: Drama

### General Comments

In overall terms the standard of work was comparable with that of other January sessions. Candidates generally demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of their chosen texts and were comfortable directing their responses toward the specific requirements of the questions. More candidates this session opted to base their answers on the analysis of two specific passages, aiming for analytical depth and detail more than breadth and scope. Many produced well-focused, carefully developed arguments that were not only anchored in thoughtful consideration of appropriate textual detail, but which engaged with the wider demands of the question. The quality of written expression was also comparable with that of most previous January sessions, although more candidates adopted limiting strategies: copying out the questions and passages in full; setting out extended, overly-formulaic proposals as to how they were going to tackle the task; writing excessively lengthy plans. Candidates continued to show skill in their use of linguistic terminology, however, with the best analysing specific *effects* beyond simply spotting/ identifying language features.

### Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) This question was very popular, and elicited some dexterously constructed arguments. There were many interesting angles of exploration, which demonstrated a good understanding of varied and well-chosen passages. Weaker answers presented sketches of Cleopatra's character or straightforward/reductive impressions of Egypt and Rome. At the top end however, there were some very perceptive studies of aspects of change and transformation and some sharply made comparisons/contrasts with other characters in the play: Antony, Caesar and Octavia in particular. Enobarbus' 'The barge she sat in...' speech was used with varying degrees of relevance and success.
- (b) Another very popular choice, this question was answered with sensitivity and discernment in many cases. Basic answers tended to focus on how love and war 'interrupt' each other in the play, or reduced Rome and Egypt to warring and loving zones respectively. The best answers explored ambiguities and complexities: emotional/psychological, cultural and political.
- 2 (a) A less popular choice, this question was, however, answered quite well in the main. Relatively few candidates produced really well developed answers, but most got to grips with the central demands of the question. 'Brotherhood' tended to provide the main focus, with the majority of candidates concentrating on the Oliver/Orlando Rosalind/Celia relationships by way of exemplification. Fewer candidates gave 'freedom' serious consideration; the best, however, explored Rosalind's freedom as Ganymede, delightfully drawing attention to her 'freer' language and its gender implications. The freedom of the forest (holiday humour) was also considered in relation to the constraints (rules, etiquette and spiritual impoverishment) of the court. The best answers invariably rooted their discussions in close analysis of relevant linguistic detail and dramatic effects.
- (b) This question was answered well but infrequently. Candidates tended to channel their discussions through examinations of central relationships and specific actions. This enabled them to construct relevant, coherent and confident arguments. Analyses of the language and actions of Celia, Orlando, Adam and (less frequently) Silvius, provided interesting avenues for deepening arguments.



- 3 (a)** This was a popular choice and candidates generally chose apposite materials for analysis, engaging very rewardingly with these. There were some excellent answers from candidates of a 'philosophical' persuasion, and many also included reference to the language of magic and illusion. The nature, significance and effects of Miranda's sleep, Gonzalo's, that of the ship's crew, how Ariel creates sleep and Prospero's /Caliban's 'dreams' all provided very fruitful points of focus. There were relatively few weak responses to this question.
- (b)** Particularly popular, this question, popular prompted responses of more varied quality. Basic answers presented one-dimensional character sketches, treating both characters as 'real people' (more than linguistic/dramatic constructs) to be judged by modern standards, paraphrasing the text in sometimes sentimental ways: 'guy meets girl', 'teenage love' etc. Most candidates rightly included reference to Prospero's agency and interventions, though some took his harshness very literally indeed. The best answers explored both the directness of Miranda's speech and levels of stylisation/use of convention, along with the language of fairytales, myth and divinity.
- 4 (a)** This question was frequently chosen and was generally answered well. Candidates engaged directly with the prompt quotation and wrote intelligently about language use/features that might constitute 'blather'. There was some helpful discussion too, of contextual aspects: existentialism, the theatre of the absurd and the importance of the minimalist set/stage properties. Candidates were well prepared for this question and some approached it in an overly rehearsed fashion: Grice's maxims and Halliday's taxonomy, for example were sometimes applied without a sensitised accommodation of the specific requirements of the question.
- (b)** This question was chosen less frequently than 4(a) and tended to be tackled less impressively. Weaker candidates struggled to adapt their knowledge and understanding, offering one-dimensional accounts of a fixed set of relationships or of 'given' friendships, and their answers lacked critical depth. Some of the better responses took account of the vicissitudes and seemingly random cruelties of Beckett's world, the emotional/psychological complexities of the characters, the 'double-act' quality of the dialogue, and the importance of language itself in expressing experiences of cohesion/belonging and fragmentation/alienation. Interesting symbolic dimensions (body/soul and parent/child relationships, for example) were also considered.
- 5 (a)** This was less popular than 5(b) but some good answers were produced. These examined ways in which the audience is offered a range of perspectives, attitudes, judgements and sympathies. The best responses to this question were set up by judicious initial choice of passages and were characterised by a good understanding of contexts. Many candidates tackled the question's proposition with reference to the presentation of Lancey, focusing on what they felt to be unsympathetic character traits. Yolland's attitudes, values and actions, conversely, were seen to have been constructed by Friel to elicit audience doubts/suspicious about radical nationalism. Weaker answers tended to express opinions and judgements that were largely disconnected from an appreciation of the playwright's methods.
- (b)** This question was quite popular and prompted generally competent responses. The best answers offered sophisticated explorations not only of the attitudes of individual characters, but of underlying political, historical, cultural and economic complexities. Maire's position and aspirations were, almost invariably, the focus of candidates' consideration. The best answers (although this was by no means a requirement) tended to offer balanced assessments, also bringing the views of Hugh, Jimmy Jack or the role of Sarah to the fore. The implications of changing place names and Owen's ambiguous position as translator were also considered. Choosing passages that conveyed different perspectives tended to result in better-developed answers.

- 6 (a)** A very popular choice, this question was usually answered well. Candidates were well-equipped to examine Stanley's use of language and its dramatic effects. They were able to discuss relevant textual materials and were comfortable with the terms of the question. 'Unrefined' was interpreted fruitfully and candidates discussed utterance types, grammatical features, register, lexical choices, allusions, use of slang and idiolect. The New Orleans setting provided rich material for discussion of economic and cultural contexts. Weaker answers tended to focus solely on Stanley's 'aggressive' use of language; the best analysed both his agenda and his rhetoric. These tended also to make helpful contrapositions with Blanche's use of language.
- (b)** Another very popular choice, this question was also handled well. The majority of candidates referred confidently to varied and appropriate passages. Very few (quite weak answers) offered simple endorsements of the validity of Blanche's claim. Better responses offered balanced evaluations, focusing on complexities, contradictions and perceived discrepancies between Blanche's 'values' and her conduct. Many candidates chose to consider the presentation of Blanche's relationship with Mitch as a helpful indicator; her past experiences were brought sharply into focus, as was her behaviour toward Stanley. The best answers were probing, subtle explorations of Blanche's deceit, self-deception, and moments of confession/self-revelation.

## **2718 Issues in Language and Literature**

The entry for this unit was small and from a very limited number of centres, so it would be wrong to draw too many general conclusions from the work presented.

It is clear that candidates who choose a topic that is clearly linked to one of the topic areas are likely to do better than those who simply find an area of interest and then try to bring it round to the topic later. One of the perennial problems with this unit centres on spoken language. It is clear from the specification that there one of the texts must be of spoken language, and although that can be widely interpreted, it is not enough simply to choose a speech and then discuss it without reference to features of spoken language that might make it work as a speech act. All too often candidates nod towards speech without ever going into it in depth. Similarly, many candidates could make much more of how speech is represented in written texts. Another common problem centres on the range or challenge of the texts. Although it is appropriate to limit texts in order to provide focus, some candidates do so in ways that are outside the spirit of the specification: the lyrics of a song are not really appropriate as a literary text, and they are certainly not appropriate as non-literary or a spoken texts unless a very particular case is argued within the essay itself.

As with previous sessions, candidates needed to demonstrate that they were weaving a coherent argument over the whole range of the piece, rather than loosely linking together three different texts consecutively. The specification is very clear that for top band answers, candidates must make sure that they take advantage of opportunities for comparison and contrast throughout. Unfortunately, some candidates only get round to such discussions as they start to run out of words. One way of avoiding this is to encourage candidates to get straight on with detailed analysis of the passages under consideration. Many waste significant amounts of time through writing lengthy justifications of their approach or simply contextualising the extracts.

Although there was a limited entry, there were many projects that showed real originality and flair, with few that made little of the opportunity provided to demonstrate insights gained from the study of both literature and language.

As the specification is well-established, centres showed that they were clearly aware of the Band Descriptors and Assessment Objectives. This meant that assessments were largely accurate, though one or two centres were certainly pushing at the boundaries of tolerance for the unit. Most of the work was fully annotated, so it was easy to see how decisions had been made

For the most part, administration of the work (deadlines met, all the correct forms included) was exemplary.

## 2719 Experience into Words

### General Comments

There were some satisfactory answers in the main but also some rather more generalised approaches which tended to take a rather narrow response to the passages at times. Candidates showed a solid awareness of relevant terminology but some tended to use it in a rather unfocused manner, not commenting on the effects of the features they identified. The first section was probably handled more adroitly than the second section where commentaries were not always as fully developed as they could have been. There was little rubric infringement and time management was, on the whole, successful.

### Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Passage A was dealt with satisfactorily in the main, with most candidates sensing in different ways the tone of irony and mockery in the material. Some, however, tended to miss this aspect of the passage and thought the extract was written in praise of the suburbs; such answers seemed to take a more distant attitude towards the extract, looking for linguistic and literary features to identify. Some candidates, though, noticed the use of specific features well and used such awareness to comment on the values and attitudes they created. The second passage was met with similar varied success. Successful analyses explored the interviewee's attitudes, such as his possible sense of nostalgia and disapproval, with clarity and clear focus. His dialect and register were compared successfully with the more elevated nature of the language in Passage A. The sense of change was commented on well in contrast to the sense of stasis evoked by the first passage. Less secure responses tended to approach the transcription with a generalised methodology, looking for learned features to identify.
- 2 The second question was dealt with satisfactorily. Sometimes there were some very creative and effective directed writing responses which communicated an appropriate tone and sense of audience; yet, disappointingly, the accompanying commentaries seemed to be less focused and developed, tending to be either brief or centred on the creative writing only at the expense of commenting in detail on the original extract. Those who did comment on the Atwood passage sensed the sense of isolation and repression well on the whole and how the protagonist's life was contained by her surroundings and possessions. Some managed to convey the authoritarian nature of the state well in their own creative response. Less secure writing seemed to miss the impersonal nature of the authority's character and wrote in a very personal and too obvious style.

# Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Language & Literature (3829/7829)  
January 2009 Examination Series

## Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2714	Raw	60	44	39	34	29	25	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2715	Raw	60	44	38	33	28	24	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2716	Raw	60	49	43	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2717	Raw	60	50	44	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2718	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2719	Raw	60	44	39	34	30	26	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

## Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3829	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7829	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3829	2.9	24.6	55.1	88.4	98.6	100	72
7829	5.0	45.0	95.0	95.0	100	100	22

## 94 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums\\_results.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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